



Department of Public Health

October 7, 2020

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Texas Education Agency
Office of the Commissioner
Attn: Hon. Mike Morath
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas, 78701

Commissioner Morath:

The City of El Paso Department of Public Health (DPH) works in close partnership with Region 19 schools by providing them guidance, recommendations and support necessary to effectively respond to COVID-19 pandemic.

Our region is currently experiencing a concerning upward trend of COVID-19 infection as demonstrated by the current El Paso County data for positivity rate, cases per capita, and hospitalizations due to COVID-19.

We fully support Region 19 school districts' commitment to provide a safe environment for students, teachers, and staff, and firmly support their request for a waiver to assist them in preserving their funding and continued operations.

We understand there are many benefits of in-person instruction to all students, however, the risks associated with in-person instruction outweigh the benefits at this time due to the current pandemic in our region. Therefore, as the Health Authority of the El Paso City-County, I strongly recommended pausing the return of students to school for in-person instruction, and scaling-back the number of students currently receiving in-person instruction if the situation continues to worsen.

I thank you for your attention and consideration to these recommendations and trust we will receive a favorable response to our school districts' application for a COVID-19-related waiver.

Respectfully,

Hector I. Ocaranza, M.D., MPH, FAAP
Local Health Authority City/County of El Paso, TX

Angela Mora – Interim Public Health Director

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