Dear Superintendent and School Board Members:

We understand that we are all facing trying times with the recent Omicron surge. Amidst all the chaos and uncertainty, we need your leadership to keep us safe and show us the respect we deserve as school employees for the incredible hardships we are confronting daily.

We also need your leadership to begin laying a foundation for the future that can better withstand a public-health crisis. In short, that means higher pay for school employees and measures that are lasting to keep us safe.

Please address each of these urgent needs by responding that you have directed staff to accomplish these policy changes. Our district is equipped with federal aid and reserves to achieve all of the below. Please also use your ability for emergency School Board meetings if needed. We deserve the respect of a detailed answer to each and every request.

**Compensation And Leave Time**

We ask that you submit to the school board a change in policy allowing for 10 additional days of paid leave for employees that need to isolate/quarantine for COVID-19, or to care for a family member that is positive for COVID-19. The change should cover the entire 2021-2022 school year. Numerous Texas districts have taken this step, which ensures that school employees can take the time needed to recover from COVID-19 events and still have time off needed for other illnesses. This is in the interest of the employee’s health as well as the school community to prevent the spread of the virus.

We ask that you include in policy a rule that if a campus or the district sends a school employee home because of COVID-19-related concerns, and the employee ends up testing negative, the employee will not be docked any pay or leave days for the period they isolate and test.

We ask that you enact an immediate award of $500 to every school employee as a show of respect for the monumental work we have done in educating our students and as assistance to the added costs many of us are facing in the pandemic.

We ask that you plan for substantial raises for all employees in the upcoming budget process, in addition to consideration of retention bonuses.

We ask that you also pay (at the standard rate for the teacher) for teachers needing to work on Reading Academies outside of any professional development days slotted for the work—in particular days scheduled in the summer that are optional and paid-for academy work.

We ask that you ensure the substitute daily payment rate is at least $225/day for certified teachers, with graduated lower rates for uncertified and less experienced substitutes. Bonuses above those amounts also should be given in areas in the highest stage of risk for COVID-19 infection as determined by local health authorities.

We ask that you provide additional compensation to teachers or other educational staff that cover classes when no substitute can be found. The compensation should be at least $25/hour. Such payments also should be made to teachers taking in additional students to their classes.

We remind you that you cannot legally require a teacher to use planning/prep time to cover classes unless that time is above the 450-minutes required by state law. Additionally, the district should consider additional planning/prep time in its budget process—above the state minimum, such as an additional class period at some levels—to enhance teachers’ ability to prepare for meaningful instruction and fulfill the myriad duties for monitoring and tracking student achievement.

**Workload / Testing / Staff**

We ask that you immediately review the requirements for teachers reporting data, attending meetings, and other time-consuming tasks to see where we can free up more time for what’s crucial at this point—providing instruction to students.

We ask that you prioritize a goal of having a nurse on every campus, or nurse staffing levels that will sufficiently manage public health needs, now in the Omicron surge, and in the future.

We ask that you write Education Commissioner Mike Morath asking him to cancel all STAAR testing this spring. STAAR test administration would worsen an already challenging workload—and the test will again have no value for assessing the needs of students.

**Safety**

We ask that you ensure the district’s COVID-19 plans are up to date, followed, and communicated to administrators, employees, and the community. Included should be metrics used for school closure and/or remote learning, along with clear guidance for mask use, social distancing, and other protocols to keep us safe.

The plans should include measures needed for remote instruction and work—both on a large scale (entire campuses or the district) and small scale (assuring absent students can still receive instruction).

We ask that you implement district or campus-level safety committees responsible for fielding school employee concerns and working toward solutions with your administration. These safety committees should include all relevant stakeholders, not just administration.

We ask that you institute immediate mask requirements for all indoor school activities. Inconclusive court cases or a politicized environment should not be a reason to shy away from mask requirements.

We ask that you recognize that we need to implement and enforce many of the safety protocols that were in place at the beginning of the pandemic, including:

* Ensure that every school employee has access to KN-95 masks for use each day.
* Strict adherence to CDC guidance for employees returning to work, with consideration of even more stringent requirements for a return—e.g., additional days beyond five with requirements for negative test results and minimal-to-none levels of symptoms.
* Resources that make PCR testing for returning staff members free, accessible, and timely.
* Free COVID-19 testing available at a sufficient number of campuses that make testing accessible to students, staff, and the community.
* A return to social distancing and keeping class sizes small. (Class size should be used as a metric for decisions on whether to close campuses or go remote. Doubling a class size due to lack of staff will only make the problem worse.)
* Accommodations for teachers and students (e.g., remote instruction/learning) at risk for significant health impacts, even if fully vaccinated.
* Continuing education campaigns on vaccinations and support for vaccination clinics.

Thank you for your consideration of these needs, and we ask that you take immediate action to address them.