



The Senate of The State of Texas

Senator José Menéndez

District 26

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

Commissioner Morath
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

January 26, 2022

Dear Governor Abbott and Commissioner Morath,

Our schools are facing a crisis during this COVID-19 omicron surge as it continues to drive record number of infections around our state. This surge is worsening the already unprecedented staffing issues in our schools, as we are seeing school districts close due to staffing shortages and in some cases, students to keep them open. To make matters worse, we have many teachers and students dealing with mental health emergencies. As this catastrophe continues, these students are still expected to take the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test over the next few months, with scores that could potentially harm both the student and the school. Given the dire circumstances currently facing our education system, I am requesting you take all necessary action to cancel the administration of the STAAR test for the current academic year.

Our office has continued to advocate for the cancellation of this inequitable exam, including the filing of bills over the past two sessions. The STAAR test has long been proven to be an unnecessary and poorly designed means of assessment. Studies repeatedly show that it is out of sync with the student learning standards, which only sets them up for failure and places more stress on students and teachers. As unfair as the test is in normal times, it is beyond understanding how this test can be seen as fair assessment while our students, teachers and schools are experiencing the COVID-19 surge. Our office conducted a survey last year that received over 13,000 responses with 97% of Texans opposing taking the STAAR test in-person. Given this recent COVID-19 surge, administering the STAAR test as it is normally conducted would not only put lives at risk but would also produce inaccurate data that would not take into account the disproportionate challenges all Texans have faced not only the past 3 months but through the entirety pandemic.

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In January of last year, the state signed a four-year agreement with two companies to administer the STAAR test totaling \$388 million dollars. Using this money to administer a high-stakes test at a time where we are experiencing a teacher shortage, a substitute teacher shortage, mental health challenges for both teachers and students and burnout among everyone in our education system is unacceptable. This money needs to be used to provide our schools and teachers the resources they need to help our children grow academically, not a test. As if the stress of taking the assessment were not difficult enough, placing the weight of accountability on the shoulders of eight-and-nine-year-old children, coupled with the stress of being concerned about whether they will be promoted to the next grade level during a global pandemic is unfathomable. It would be irresponsible to place our students and education communities in harm's way during this pandemic using a system that has repeatedly only set our children and schools up for failure.

For these reasons above, I am urging you to cancel the administration of the STAAR test for the upcoming academic year. The last thing our education system needs right now is to take a high-stakes test. Please reach out to our office for any further information. I appreciate your consideration of these concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "José Menéndez".

José Menéndez
Texas Senate District 26

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