

April 14, 2021

Dear Governor Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Patrick, and Speaker Phelan,

As chambers of commerce and business associations throughout Texas, we can attest that the present and future economic viability of our state is dependent on our education systems and their ability to prepare students for college and the workforce. We are grateful for the Legislature's continued investments to enhance and strengthen our education and workforce pipeline from pre-school to post-secondary.

The educational impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic threaten our ability to maintain the significant momentum we have built to leverage talent as a strategic asset for Texas. Early data from Texas' public schools indicates that students of all ages throughout the state have suffered significant learning loss amid the crisis, most severely among our economically-disadvantaged population. Texas' higher education institutions are facing troubling trends, as community college enrollment, university applications, and FAFSA completions have declined alarmingly, particularly among high-poverty and minority students. Without swift and targeted intervention, the college and career readiness of our future workforce will suffer considerably.

Fortunately, Congress has made available significant relief funding to aid state education institutions in mitigating further learning loss and supporting academic recovery. From the December 2020 and March 2021 federal stimulus packages, Texas received a combined \$17.9 billion in dedicated aid for public elementary and secondary schools and \$4.8 billion for institutions of higher education. If invested wisely, these funds will ensure the pandemic does not result in a generational educational crisis for Texas students.

As soon as possible, we ask leadership and the legislature to clarify when and how much federal funding will be made available to Texas' education institutions. In doing so, state leaders should also outline allowable uses for these federal dollars. While the Texas Education Agency has provided school districts with a framework of strategies to mitigate learning loss, federal funds should provide for adequate local flexibility to enable communities to address their unique needs.

We also encourage the legislature to leverage federal relief to supplement existing public education budgets and funding for Texas' higher education institutions.

Urgently, educational institutions need support recouping unexpected expenses incurred over the course of the pandemic, including costs associated with migrating to remote learning and providing necessary PPE to students and staff. Many have only been reimbursed for a small fraction of expenses needed to keep students/staff safe and to support continuity of learning. In addition, many school districts are exploring targeted summer programs to accelerate academic recovery and support college readiness ahead of the 2021-22 school year.

As federal funding begins to flow to state and local education systems, we urge the legislature to prioritize reimbursing outstanding costs related to the pandemic and providing supplemental resources for summer programming.

Public education leaders statewide further intend to leverage federal aid to prepare and implement interventions to address learning loss this fall, extend instructional time, innovate curricula/learning materials, and hire additional teachers to reduce class sizes.

Much like our members' business operations, our education institutions need guidance on the availability of financial resources to effectively budget and plan for the upcoming summer and fall semesters. Moreover, communities need sufficient time to understand and provide feedback on schools' plans to address learning loss. Our member companies must also work with their working parent employees to plan and accommodate revised school schedules and programming as offices reopen. Time is of the essence.

State leaders must take advantage of this opportunity to build on our momentum in education from last legislative session, meaningfully invest in our future workforce, and ensure the resiliency of the Texas economy for a generation to come.

Sincerely,

Allen Fairview Chamber of Commerce
Austin Chamber of Commerce
Dallas Citizens Council
Dallas Regional Chamber
Downtown Dallas, Inc.
El Paso Chamber of Commerce
Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce
Frisco Chamber of Commerce
Grapevine Chamber of Commerce
Greater Arlington Chamber of Commerce
Greenville Chamber of Commerce
Hurst Euleless Bedford Chamber of Commerce
Irving-Las Colinas Chamber of Commerce
Longview Chamber of Commerce

Lubbock Chamber of Commerce
Lufkin / Angelina County Chamber of Commerce
Mansfield Area Chamber of Commerce
McKinney Chamber of Commerce
Nacogdoches County Chamber of Commerce
North Dallas Chamber of Commerce
North Texas Commission
Plano Chamber of Commerce
Richardson Chamber of Commerce
San Antonio Chamber of Commerce
Texas Business Leadership Council
Tyler Area Chamber of Commerce
United Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce