



April 5, 2021

**The Honorable Harold Dutton, Chair, House Public Education Committee
Members, House Public Education Committee
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768-2910**

Re: HB 4465 Relating to grants available to school districts and open-enrollment charter schools to provide services to students after a disaster in the state of Texas.

Dear Chairman Dutton and Members of the House Public Education Committee:

The membership of the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) appreciates the opportunity to provide input on HB 4465 as filed (Dutton). TASA supports providing school districts with the necessary tools to assist with the ongoing issues caused by COVID-19. Major disruptions in instruction have occurred throughout the state and educators have worked tirelessly for the past 12 months to minimize the loss. Unfortunately, the impact on learning loss will continue to present itself over several years and school districts will need ample resources to ensure this pandemic does not create an educational crisis for our students.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) will receive more than \$1.2 billion dollars from the most recent federal stimulus package as its portion of the federal allocation for Texas. TEA is required to set aside a minimum of 7 percent of its total allocation as follows: 5 percent for interventions to address learning loss; 1 percent for summer enrichment programs; and 1 percent for comprehensive after school programs. Additionally, TEA may use up to \$62 million for administration costs.

Any grant funding tied with the provisions of HB 4465 should come from TEA's portion of the funds mentioned above and not supplant federal funds that are targeted to assist Texas school districts in finding innovative ways to serve students during this unprecedented time. TASA respectfully opposes HB 4465 because it gives the commissioner broad authority over stimulus funds that are intended to flow to school districts and not to TEA.

TASA is urging the state to flow the federal stimulus money not dedicated to TEA to districts with maximum flexibility since learning loss and other services will vary from district to district and from campus to campus. TASA understands the need for the Legislature to establish general guidelines and parameters to ensure money is spent in the most efficient manner, but such decisions should be made by the full legislative body, and not only by the commissioner of education.

Examples of how stimulus funds will be used by school districts to address learning loss:



- 1) Summer School – many districts are looking at expanding summer school opportunities to include more students and more days of instruction. As an example, one TASA district will quadruple student services this summer. In order to extend summer learning opportunities, funds will be needed to attract and pay the best of teachers their normal daily rate for the additional instructional days, provide expanded bus service, pay for professional development and preparation days, and provide food services.
- 2) Before/After School and Saturdays – Much as above, districts need funds to pay teachers for working overtime to tutor individuals and small groups before and after school and on Saturdays. This is quite common in normal circumstances but the need will be far greater due to the learning loss that occurred with the pandemic. These programs often require additional food and bus services.
- 3) Intensive Intervention and Remediation – Additional teachers will need to be hired to work with struggling students in small-groups with focused instruction and in some cases individually during the day. Reading and math instruction, in particular, require much more intensive support from additional, highly trained staff. Response to Intervention (RTI) efforts, a federal program for interventions, needs to be expanded.
- 4) Professional Development – there is a high need for school districts to provide quality professional development to teachers and teaching assistants on accelerated instruction and differentiated instruction. The students they will instruct will have different needs that in past school years, and the training needs to reflect these new instructional needs.
- 5) Planning Time – Teachers are exhausted. They will need additional time to plan lessons, analyze student data, and differentiate lesson plans.
- 6) Instructional Coaches – More than ever, teachers need support from master instructional coaches who can observe, plan together and provide training and support. Coaches make a huge difference and will be very important.

Wrap-Around Services

In addition to a learning crisis, our students have experienced a human crisis. More than ever, children are under enormous stress, isolation, emotional turmoil and quite likely physical abuse that is going unreported. Providing support for them will be instrumental if we want to get out of this crisis. Here are areas for consideration:

- 1) Counselors – More counselors will be needed to address emotional issues for students, including before and after school counseling.
 - 2) Social Workers – More social workers will be need to connect children and families to other community resources. Programs like Communities in Schools should be strongly considered.
 - 3) Professional Development on SEL – our teachers will need support in learning how to provide Social Emotional Learning programs in their classrooms. There are numerous programs that exist that districts could choose.
 - 4) Nutrition – child nutrition has suffered in this past year. Schools will need to expand existing programs like Snak-Pak for Kids (which sends food home over the weekend) and Common Threads, which teaches families how to cook nutritious meals. Schools will need to serve food before and after school, on Saturdays and in summer school. These expanded programs are necessary and expensive.
-

- 5) Bus Services – In order to get kids to attend school outside the normal hours, bus transportation services will need to be expanded considerably. Running multiple routes over increased mileage will be imperative.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure expenses are usually one-time expenditures that are a great way to utilize stimulus funds without incurring recurring expenses. While these are important, they are not as important as the issues addressed above. Here are items for consideration:

- 1) HVAC Systems – we have learned in the pandemic about the importance of air quality, not only to reduce disease but also how it significantly impacts student learning. Funds should be set aside to bring all campuses up to MERV 13.
- 2) Buses – many districts will need to purchase additional buses to cover the extra routes needed to bring children to school for after-hours programs.
- 3) Construction costs – we are seeing significant inflationary costs with building materials. Consider allowing some stimulus funds to be used to address this issue.
- 4) Other – Testing and remediation for lead in water; PPE and disinfectants; additional technology for students; etc.

TASA appreciates the opportunity to provide input on HB 4465 and we look forward to continuing conversations on how to address the ongoing issues caused by this global pandemic. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely

Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators, abeneski@tasanet.org
