



# TEXAS HOUSE *of* REPRESENTATIVES

## Diego M. Bernal

State Representative, District 123

November 18, 2020

The Honorable Mike Morath  
Commissioner, Texas Education Agency  
1701 N. Congress Avenue  
Austin, TX 78701

*[Delivered Electronically]*

Commissioner Morath:

We are writing to request that, for the 2020-2021 school year, the Texas Education Agency seek the waivers necessary from the United States Department of Education for federal testing and accountability requirements to cancel the administration of the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam. At most, any administration of the STAAR exam during the 2020-2021 school year should only serve as a diagnostic instrument to see where our students stand academically as opposed to an assessment instrument to determine district and campus sanctions under the current A-F accountability system.

As the Commissioner of the Texas Education Agency, you and your staff have witnessed firsthand the difficulties COVID-19 has presented to our educators, our students, and their families; in every aspect of life, nothing has been left untouched or unaffected by this pandemic. Given the agency's understanding of the anticipated impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on public education in this State, we appreciate the agency's foresight by waiving the Student Success Initiative promotion requirements for the 2020-2021 school year<sup>1</sup>, however, we believe that the agency should also recognize that the effects of this ongoing pandemic extend beyond concerns regarding promotion and retention of students and will also impact an accountability system that heavily weighs campus and district performance on student achievement and growth.

The *COVID Slide*<sup>2</sup>, an academic deficit that the agency has widely recognized, has resulted in students, across the state, being behind grade-level in nearly every subject. Instead of proceeding with the administration of the STAAR exam as planned, the agency, along with our districts and campuses, should be focused on providing high-quality public education with an emphasis on ensuring the health and safety of students and educators. While data from the STAAR exam may be a good indicator of where our students are currently, the data should be used in a manner to chart a path forward as opposed to being used to sanction our districts and campuses.

We appreciate your time regarding this issue. Our offices stand ready to assist you and the agency in any manner you deem necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> *To the Administrator Addressed (Subject: Waiver of the Student Success Initiative (SSI) Promotion Requirements)*, Texas Education Agency, retrieved from: <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Waiver-of-the-Student-Success-Initiative-SSI-Promotion-Requirements.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *TEA Strong Start 20-21: Preparing for Remote Instruction (Slide 3)*, Texas Education Agency, retrieved from [https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/covid/overview\\_of\\_remote\\_instruction\\_guidance\\_for\\_sy\\_20-21.pdf](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/covid/overview_of_remote_instruction_guidance_for_sy_20-21.pdf)



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## Diego M. Bernal

State Representative, District 123

Sincerely,

Representative Diego M. Bernal  
House District 123

Representative Alma A. Allen  
House District 131

Representative Rafael Anchía  
House District 103

Representative Trent Ashby  
House District 57

Representative Ernest Bailes  
House District 18

Representative Michelle Beckley  
House District 65

Representative Lorraine Birabil  
House District 100

Representative César Blanco  
House District 76

Representative Rhetta Andrews Bowers  
House District 113

Representative Brad Buckley, DVM  
House District 54

Representative John Bucy III  
House District 136

Representative DeWayne Burns  
House District 58

Representative Briscoe Cain  
House District 128

Representative Gina Calanni  
House District 132

Representative Travis Clardy  
House District 11

Representative Garnet Coleman  
House District 147

Representative Nicole Collier  
House District 95

Representative Philip Cortez, Ph.D.  
House District 117

Representative Drew Darby  
House District 72



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House District 7

Representative Joe Deshotel  
House District 22

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House District 79

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House District 120

Representative Jessica González  
House District 104

Representative Mary González, Ph.D.  
House District 75

Representative Vikki Goodwin  
House District 47

Representative R. D. "Bobby" Guerra  
House District 41

Representative Roland Gutierrez  
House District 119

Representative Cody Harris  
House District 8

Representative Ana Hernandez  
House District 143

Representative Abel Herrero  
House District 34

Representative Gina Hinojosa  
House District 49

Representative Justin Holland  
House District 33

Representative Donna Howard  
House District 48

Representative Celia Israel  
House District 50

Representative Julie Johnson  
House District 115

Representative Kyle Kacal  
House District 12

Representative Tracy O. King  
House District 80

Representative Matt Krause  
House District 93

Representative Stan Lambert  
House District 71



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House District 81

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House District 125

Representative Armando "Mando" Martinez  
House District 39

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House District 116

Representative Terry Meza  
House District 105

Representative Ina Minjarez  
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House District 144

Representative Ana-Maria Ramos  
House District 102

Representative Richard Peña Raymond  
House District 42

Representative Ron Reynolds  
House District 27

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House District 90

Representative Toni Rose  
House District 110

Representative Jon Rosenthal  
House District 135

Representative J.D. Sheffield, DO  
House District 59

Representative Carl Sherman  
House District 109

Representative Lynn Stucky, DVM  
House District 64



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State Representative, District 123

Handwritten signature of James Talarico in black ink.

Representative James Talarico  
House District 52

Handwritten signature of Shawn Thierry in black ink.

Representative Shawn Thierry  
House District 146

Handwritten signature of Ed Thompson in black ink.

Representative Ed Thompson  
House District 29

Handwritten signature of Senfronia Thompson in black ink.

Representative Senfronia Thompson  
House District 141

Handwritten signature of Chris Turner in black ink.

Representative Chris Turner  
House District 101

Handwritten signature of Gene Wu in black ink.

Representative Gene Wu  
House District 137

Handwritten signature of Erin Zwiener in black ink.

Representative Erin Zwiener  
House District 45