



5515 Ohio Drive  
Frisco, Texas 75035  
469.633.6000  
469.633.6050 (fax)  
[www.friscoisd.org](http://www.friscoisd.org)

June 30, 2021

Governor Greg Abbott  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick  
Office of the Lieutenant Governor  
P.O. Box 12068  
Austin, Texas 78711

The Honorable Dade Phelan  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, Texas 78768

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

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

On Monday, the Texas Education Agency issued a press release regarding STAAR results, including statements implying that the performance of students who learned virtually lagged behind the performance of students who learned in person. Given the ongoing conversation about virtual learning in public education, I am reaching out to provide some additional, important context that was not included in the TEA's statements.

First, the TEA's comparisons between the 2020-2021 school year and the 2018-2019 school year fail to account for any learning loss that occurred during the 2019-2020 school year when schools were suddenly closed and short-term solutions were implemented for the final three months of the school year. As the TEA pointed out in its review of the optional end-of-year and beginning-of-year assessments administered in 2020, many students began the 2020-2021 school year behind as a result of the pandemic. Yet the TEA's statements regarding the impact of virtual learning in the 2020-2021 school year, a drastically different experience for most students than what was provided at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, fail to consider the fact that many students likely started the year further behind than usual.

Second, the data provided by STAAR is extremely limited in its ability to determine the specific impact of virtual instruction on students as it did not compare students' learning environment to their performance. While the TEA draws a cause and effect inference between virtual learning and lower performance on STAAR, the reality is that the data merely shows a correlation between a school district with a high percentage of virtual students and lower performance on STAAR. There are a number of factors that could be causing this correlation. One is certainly that with more students learning virtually, there are likely more students who are in an environment that is not best for them. However, districts

with high percentages of virtual students also have some other characteristics in common, such as higher populations of students with low socioeconomic status and higher minority populations. These two groups have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and may have also faced more obstacles that hindered their ability to fully engage in learning. As a result, these districts likely experienced lower performance among all students, regardless of learning environment.

Third, to the extent virtual learning during the 2020-2021 school year is responsible for decreased performance on STAAR, TEA's guidance has played a contributing part in the quality of virtual programs this year. When TEA provided school districts the flexibility to offer virtual learning to students, it also required school districts to allow parents to switch learning environments every grading period (six weeks in many districts and nine weeks in others). This presented an incredible logistical and staffing challenge that most districts solved by engaging in a practice known as "coseating." This practice is when a teacher teaches both in-person and virtual students at the same time. It allows for maximum flexibility for students who want to switch back and forth between learning environments, but comes at a cost to the instructional quality. However, House Bill 1468 would have prohibited this practice, a provision many districts interested in virtual learning supported because the practice was only ever utilized as a response to a logistical challenge created by a TEA policy.

Fourth, most online learning programs were developed and implemented in the span of a single summer. In many districts, the limited time and resources meant that curriculum designed for in-person learning was being used in an online setting. These challenges were unique to a situation in which schools had very little time to prepare and respond to a global pandemic that also necessitated extreme changes to the in-person learning environment.

In Frisco ISD, as a result of the incredible efforts of our staff, we were able to rewrite much of our curriculum specifically for a virtual setting while also avoiding coseating. These efforts certainly paid off, and our STAAR results show that our virtual students performed better on the STAAR overall than our in-person students. In fact, on every test, except for Algebra I, virtual students performed better. I have attached this analysis for your information.

That said, Frisco ISD's in-person students did see a small decline in STAAR performance compared to 2019. This is additional evidence that at least some of the decline in STAAR performance statewide is attributable to the performance of in-person students who also faced a year of incredibly difficult challenges.

Virtual learning is not the answer for all students. But it is also not necessarily the cause of all our woes. School districts, when not constrained by limited time, logistically challenging state policy, and a lack of resources, can and will create high-quality online programs that are designed to serve the students who need them. In education, we should always strive to tailor instruction to meet the needs of individual students, just as we do with Gifted & Talented programs and special education services. Virtual learning is simply another tool for districts to utilize to best serve students who should not be ignored merely because they learn differently.

As this discussion continues, Frisco ISD stands ready to provide meaningful, fact-based information to the legislature to help identify best practices for virtual learning and how we can best move past a

narrative that does nothing to help students, but merely prevents students who need online learning from receiving high-quality instruction from their home districts. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mike Waldrip  
Superintendent  
Frisco ISD

Enclosures

cc: Chairman Larry Taylor  
Chairman Harold Dutton  
Chairwoman Jane Nelson  
Senator Angela Paxton  
Representative Justin Holland  
Representative Matt Shaheen  
Representative Jared Patterson  
Representative Scott Sanford