

# LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

## ADVICE FOR PK-12 SCHOOLS FROM SUMMER 2020

COVID-19 has placed unprecedented strain on our education systems. Early closures and emergency shifts to online learning have no doubt resulted in learning losses and widening achievement gaps. If or when students return in the fall, the NWEA (2020) estimates the average student will start the year 30% behind in reading, and 50% behind in math from where they would have started traditionally.

We know these learning losses and inequities will only get worse if schools do not resume in-person instruction this fall. What is not as clear, is if it will be safe for many Texas schools to return to the concrete classroom. Upon reopening, Texas has seen a precipitous rise in COVID-19 cases. Approximately 16 percent of Texas COVID 19 test-takers are positive as of mid-July 2020.

Schools across the country, not just in Texas, are grappling with the conflicting push and pull between learning and safety. We recognize this is an extremely difficult time for schools, teachers, and parents to be making tough decisions amid such chaotic uncertainty. When schools closed, hundreds of child-serving organizations kept their doors open. From providing quality child care to essential workers, to serving meals, and keeping kids learning, many Texas Family Leadership Council organizations have been on the frontlines of this pandemic. In many cases these organizations were the first to adapt and innovate to continue to serve children, while also keeping their staff safe. Below are just a few of their insights as schools plan to re-open.



### Safety First

All staff, from bus drivers to teachers to nurses, should know that their safety is one key consideration. All students and their families should know that students and school employees alike are being protected, and schools will be responsive.



### It Will Cost More

To ensure that staff and students feel safe, funding must be made available at the state and federal level to purchase needed materials such as masks, cleaners, etc. If this funding is left to the school or districts to find, inequitable results are certain.

*“We all have budgets we must follow, but we need to understand that the models and budgets we have will change. We are learning to consistently be forecasting out what the budget will look like.” -- Kevin Hattery, President & CEO, Boys and Girls Club of Greater Houston*



### Don't Forget Families

A healthy school ecosystem is essential to the TX 2030 vision, and this includes out-of-school time programs and other resources that support working families. It is a consistent finding of the statewide parent advocacy group, Families Empowered, that half of the parents they serve are unsure if they will allow their children to return to school.



### **Be Flexible**

We encourage law makers to allow schools the local flexibility to meet the needs of their communities.



### **Transparent & Timely Data Is Critical**

We encourage data transparency so that families, school leaders, and policy makers can be adequately informed when making decisions about each child's future.

*"There are 62% (of child care providers) open compared to prior to COVID....They are having to deal with unclear standards, versus guidelines – and, they are not collecting data to know what works and what does not." – Kim Kofron, M.Ed., Executive Director, TXAEYC*

*"We need this information.... Every parent in Texas is going to have to make some tough decisions this week." -- Colleen Dippel, Founder & CEO, Families Empowered*



### **There Is No Economy Without Educators**

The TXFLC community values the needs of children first, but in consideration of child healthfulness and development we would be remiss not to consider the caregivers that support our children. It is a very serious reality that teachers who don't feel supported and protected by the education systems will not be prepared to support children.

*"Economic recovery depends on child care, and it depends on public and private schooling. Children going to school and having a place to be cared for ... is critical. It is going to require financial support from our state and from our federal government." – Sylvia Acosta, Ph.D., CEO, YWCA El Paso Del Norte Region*



### **You Have Allies**

We encourage school districts and state leaders to learn from the child care providers and summer programs that have been serving children over the past several months. We encourage public-private partnerships, like those for Pre-K, to maximize dollars and provide more supports for families. We recommend including safe and quality out-of-school time programs in these Opening School conversations, as they are a critical support to our working families.

*"Everyone's a partner in this. We are trying to do what's right for families and what's right for kids. That's always going to be the first priority." – Avice Chambers, Vice President of Youth Development, YMCA of Greater Houston*

### **About the Texas Family Leadership Council**

Powered by CHILDREN AT RISK, the **Texas Family Leadership Council** (TXFLC) is a coalition of child-focused organizations, community leaders, and influencers from across the state. Together, we work to ensure Texas policies that support families are effective and equitable for our most vulnerable children.