



# TSTA NEWS

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## **Pflugerville, Del Valle teachers demand remote learning for start of school year**

For the sake of student and educator health, the Pflugerville Educators Association and the Del Valle Education Association today demanded that their school districts provide only remote instruction for the first nine weeks of the new school year and that the state not penalize the districts with funding cuts.

“We are in the middle of a deadly COVID-19 pandemic that shows no signs of abating. If anything, it is getting worse,” said Michelle Cardenas, a pre-K dual language teacher in Del Valle and vice president of membership for the Del Valle Education Association. “It is not reasonable to require teachers and other school employees to endanger their health and even their lives by returning to campuses when, in all likelihood, the pandemic will still be very dangerous.”

Pflugerville ISD is scheduled to begin the fall semester on Aug. 13, and Del Valle ISD is expected to begin on Aug. 17, pending board approval. The Texas Education Agency is allowing school districts to limit the first three weeks of the semester to remote learning but is requiring school districts to provide on-campus instruction for any student who wants it during that period. After the first three weeks, districts will be required to offer on-campus classes, with an option for remote learning, or lose state funding.

“Teachers love to teach, and we want to get back to doing that. But we didn’t sign up – and neither did our support staff – to put our lives at risk when that can be avoided by common-sense precautions, such as an extended period of virtual learning. It is the decent thing to do,” Cardenas said.

“Districts are being blackmailed by the state – the loss of funding – into reopening before it is safe for students and school employees to do so,” added August Plock, a high school social studies teacher in Pflugerville and president of the Pflugerville Educators Association. “We call on the state to fully fund all school districts, including those that choose to emphasize safety and provide only remote learning for the first nine weeks of the semester.”

Plock noted that the Texas Education Agency has given parents the option of keeping their children at home for remote learning.

“But the agency didn’t extend the same consideration to teachers and other school employees. Our health and our lives are important too. Some of us have underlying health conditions that put us at higher risk of COVID, and many of us have children and families at home who also need to be protected. We don’t want to come home with the virus and also put their lives at risk,” Plock said.

Katrina Van Houten, a high school math teacher and president of the Del Valle Education Association, added: “Some of our best, most experienced teachers are considering early retirement rather than be forced to return to their campuses

when it is not safe to be there. Years of experience will be walking out the door and will be a huge loss to students. The governor and the Texas Education Agency are putting them in a dangerous position and forcing them out.”

Franchesca Mejia, a high school orchestra director and vice president of the Pflugerville Educators Association, said: “Getting our economy back to normal is important for our state’s future. But you can’t artificially jumpstart the economy by reopening school campuses too early and recklessly jeopardizing the lives of students and school employees. It will backfire, more people will get sick, some will die and nothing will be accomplished.”

The Pflugerville Educators Association and the Del Valle Education Association are local affiliates of the Texas State Teachers Association.

Here are TSTA’s standards for safe students, schools and communities:

<https://tsta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/TSTASTandardsForSafeSchools.pdf>