



TSTA SUPPORTS SB 437

The following are the Texas State Teachers Association's comments in support of Senate Bill 437.

The Texas State Teachers Association is in full support of Senator Blanco's Senate Bill (SB) 437. When schools were forced to close without warning in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Texas educators performed heroically in response to an unknown, unprecedented circumstance. There are so many moving accounts of teachers turning on a dime, driving to students' homes and sitting outside their windows with whiteboards, reading bedtime stories on camera and calling families on the phone.

As video conferencing platforms became the more commonplace medium for remote learning during the pandemic, educators have been able to reach more students with marginally more efficacious methods. Still, given the real impacts of the digital divide and the inferior nature of virtual instruction, students have suffered considerable learning loss and emotional trauma as a result of school disruptions.

While no legislation can fully remove the threat of natural disaster or global pandemic, this bill would create a blueprint for emergency response preparedness and would dramatically mitigate the impact on communities, including school communities. In defining essential personnel to include employees in primary and secondary schools and in requiring that a reserve of personal protective equipment to be maintained for essential personnel, schools would be better able to continue the critical work of educating students with minimal disruptions.

No teacher is comfortable with the ask that he or she stop teaching or implement practices that are not in the best interest of students, such as virtual learning. In order to save lives during a deadly pandemic, this response is the only option available to educators. SB 437 recognizes education as an essential service and its passage would better prepare school systems and enable educators to assess health risk in the face of disaster and return to public service more expediently.