



TEXAS SCHOOL COALITION

Committed to sustainable, meaningful investments in all Texas students!

Input for the House Public Education Committee Interim Charge 2

September 30, 2020

Thank you for the request for information regarding the Committee's interim charges. This submission is specifically in response to Interim Charge 2, pertaining to digital learning.

None of us could have ever envisioned just how vital digital learning has become. Digital learning has provided a lifeline for students and schools so that learning continues, even with campus buildings closed. However, not all students have access to digital learning when they need it. As schools have struggled to purchase and secure necessary devices, far too many students have been unable to connect because they lack access. Both in remote rural areas of the state and the urban centers, students and teachers struggle with the lack of connectivity. In some districts, broadband access simply isn't available, which puts those schools and students at a disadvantage. In this day and age, that is equivalent to the absence of electricity.

The State of Texas needs a plan to allow for access in every corner of the state. Remote learning has put a spotlight on areas where greater access is most needed, but even when all students are back on campus, this need will persist. Students who attend in-person classes still head home at the end of the day with work to complete. Texas cannot fully meet its obligation to educate all public school students without broader access to online learning tools.

Schools need help in providing access for students. From 1997 through 2015, telecommunications providers in Texas were required to reduce the cost of their services for public schools, colleges, hospitals, and libraries. During the pandemic, the need for these services, and therefore a discount, has increased substantially. And while many sectors of our economy have struggled during the recession, Comptroller Glenn Hegar reports that the telecommunications industry has experienced no such decline. We recommend that the Legislature re-establish the telecommunications discount once found in the Texas Utilities Code for schools (and other entities as well) until, at the very least, we are through the current crisis and the heightened demand for telecom services it has produced.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues in the Texas Legislature during the upcoming 87th Regular Session to make decisions in the best interests of students in the Texas public schools.