



Sara M. Bonser  
Superintendent of Schools

September 30, 2020

The Honorable Dan Huberty  
Texas House of Representatives  
Committee on Public Education  
*Submitted by email to education@house.texas.gov*

Dear Chairman Huberty:

Plano ISD provides a high-quality public education to more than 50,000 North Texas students. New residents routinely cite our schools as the number one reason for moving to Plano. We welcome our community's high expectations; they fuel our efforts toward continuous improvement.

To be sure, we are proud of all that our students and staff have accomplished since our familiar educational framework was overturned last spring. Throughout the pandemic, Plano ISD has maintained instructional continuity. Despite our successes, barriers still exist, and they challenge our ability to provide a world class digital learning environment for all our children.

With this letter, we are providing input on the Public Education Committee's [Interim Charge 2](#) as it relates to our experience with virtual learning and our perceived barriers.

**Barrier 1: We are precluded from offering a comprehensive virtual school due to current funding restrictions.**

As families and students have been introduced to quality remote learning across Plano schools, it is not unreasonable to think a growing number of them may want to continue with that model. Unfortunately, we are unable to offer a comprehensive virtual program to our constituents unless and until we can receive funding beyond the currently cost prohibitive "three electronic courses during any school year" limitation. We do not want to lose our families to private schools or charter schools, both of which are able to provide a full-time virtual learning experience without having to contend with the funding restrictions and limitations imposed on traditional public school districts like Plano ISD. We believe the online educational setting will become an increasingly attractive option to some of our Plano ISD families and we should be afforded the flexibility and funding to support and serve them with the instructional environment they choose for their children.

**Barrier 2: Digital inequities present ongoing challenges.**

Operation Connectivity holds great promise as a program to close technology access and opportunity gaps within our district. Plano ISD was able to leverage the opportunity to great benefit, securing much-needed WiFi hotspots and learning devices at significant discounts. If not disadvantaged by timing and

pre-existing refreshment cycles, we would have realized a much greater benefit. Having already spent \$15M over the previous 36 months on low-cost student devices, we were not able to allocate additional budget to this new opportunity. As our fleet of underpowered devices continues to age and operate in a diminished capacity, a critical juncture is quickly approaching. We will need to replace 50,000 devices over a two-year period. Without the competitive pricing and matching funds afforded through Operation Connectivity, the prospect of being able to sustain adequate learning devices and high-speed Internet connections for all our students is bleak. The students of Plano ISD and every other district in the state will be well served by the expansion and extension of the competitive and subsidized device and hotspot procurement program to make bulk purchases viable long term. While the flexibility afforded by the Technology and Instructional Materials Allotment is helpful, categorical funding through a technology line item for device, hotspot and infrastructure procurement would be markedly better.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on our experiences and barriers in providing virtual learning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Sara M. Bonser". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Sara Bonser  
Superintendent of Schools  
Plano ISD