

GOVERNOR:

Expanding Broadband Access – On March 29th, Governor Greg Abbott held a press conference at Hamshire-Fannett Elementary School in Beaumont on expanding broadband access across Texas. The governor was joined by Speaker Dade Phelan, Representative Trent Ashby, and Hamshire-Fannett ISD Superintendent Dwaine Augustine to discuss the importance of reliable broadband for education, business, and health care. Representative Ashby is the author of broadband legislation in the House that would create a state broadband office and a comprehensive broadband plan for Texas. Earlier this year, the governor named broadband access as an emergency item for the 87th legislative session. Governor Abbott said, “Broadband access is no longer a luxury, it is an essential tool for all Texans. Schools need broadband to connect with students, businesses need it to remain competitive, and our doctors and nurses and their patients need it for telemedicine purposes. The importance of closing the digital divide has never been more clear, and I look forward to working with Speaker Phelan, Representative Ashby, and the rest of the Legislature to expand broadband access to all Texans.”

BUDGET:

House Appropriations Committee – The House Appropriations Committee met Monday through Thursday acting on recommendations from the subcommittees for the agencies in all articles of the budget.

Senate Finance Committee – On Tuesday, the Senate Finance Committee took up:

SB 1336 by Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) would limit the **growth in general revenue** to population growth plus inflation. *It was reported favorably. It is on the Senate Intent Calendar for Tuesday, April 6, 2021 (first placement).*

Senate Finance Committee Adopts Budget – Also on Tuesday, the Senate Finance Committee approved the committee substitute to **SB 1** by Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound), the Senate's version of the **appropriations bill**. Senator Nelson, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee said, "This budget maintains the historic commitment we made last session to education, protects our most vulnerable citizens, keeps our communities safe and invests in our economic recovery. Because of our commitment to fiscal discipline over the years, Texas is better equipped than other states to meet the challenges ahead. This budget will keep Texans safe, healthy and prosperous." CSSB 1 appropriates \$250.7 billion in All Funds and \$117.9 billion in General Revenue for the FY 2022-23 biennium. This represents 2.6 percent growth in General Revenue and is well within population and inflation. Highlights of CSSB 1 include:

- Funding for the full Foundation School Program entitlement, reflecting changes made last session to the school finance formula, including:
 - \$3.1 billion to fund enrollment growth for public education; and
 - \$1 billion in additional state aid related to property tax compression in the 2022-23 biennium;
- Continues reforms to the Teacher Retirement System passed last session through SB 12;
- \$8.1 billion to maintain higher education institution formulas;
- An additional \$57 million to maintain financial aid programs at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board;
- \$199 million for Graduate Medical Education to meet the 1.1 to 1 ratio of first-year residency positions for each Texas medical school graduate;
- Combined projected funding of \$8 billion for mental health across 24 state agencies, including:
 - an increase of \$19.5 million to maintain operations for the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium;
 - over \$85 million to bring additional state hospital beds online;
 - \$30 million for new rural and urban community mental health beds; and
 - over \$1 million in new funding for Senator Nelson's SB 64, to create a peer-to-peer counseling network and increase access to licensed mental health providers for Texas Law Enforcement Officers;
- \$352.6 million, an increase of \$10.2 million, for women's health programs, including the continuation of the Healthy Texas Women program's enhanced post-partum care services implemented by the Legislature last session;
- Lower target caseloads for conservatorship workers at Child Protective Services;
- \$44.5 million to expand Community Based Foster Care beyond catchment areas and stages approved last session;
- An additional \$8 million for Children's Advocacy Centers and \$7.5 million for family violence shelters that have been significantly impacted by COVID-19;
- \$34.4 million to support Rape Crisis Centers, an increase of \$4.7 million from the budget as filed, to provide mental health counseling and to address waitlists;
- \$128.5 million to fund Department of Public Safety Crime Lab services, including maintaining prioritization and timely testing of sexual assault kits;
- \$33.6 million to preserve and protect the Capitol, including replacing the Capitol roof and waterproofing the Capitol Extension;
- \$34 million to provide a 3 percent pay increase to Department of Criminal Justice correctional officers working in maximum security units;
- Maintains heightened security on the Southern border;
- \$39 million to fortify security at the Texas Capitol, including additional troopers and enhanced safety measures;

- Fully restores state funding to Texas food banks and home-delivered meal programs;
- 100 percent appropriation of estimated available Sporting Goods Sales Tax, totaling over \$400 million, to support state parks and historical sites;
- Additional staff resources to enhance the Public Utility Commission's oversight of ERCOT activities; and
- Over \$30 billion to address the state's transportation needs, including \$26 billion dedicated for highway planning, design, construction, and maintenance.

Next Week:

Thursday, April 8, 2021:

7:30 a.m. House Appropriations Committee will meet in E1.030 of the capitol extension to take up:

HB 2 by Greg Bonnen (R- Friendswood) is the **supplemental appropriations bill**.

HB 2021 by Greg Bonnen (R-Friendswood) would establish the **Board on Administration of Federal Funds** and authorize them to propose the acceptance or rejection of federal funds made available to the state after the effective date of the general appropriations bill and the allocation of accepted federal funds; and would allow them to ratify their recommendations after publication and a public hearing.

PUBLIC EDUCATION:

House Juvenile Justice & Family Issues Committee – On Monday, the House Juvenile Justice & Family Issues Committee took up:

HB 822 by DeWayne Burns (R-Cleburne) would require **expulsion** of a public school student engages in conduct containing the elements of the offense of **terroristic threat**. *It was left pending.*

HB 3165 by Morgan Meyer (R-Dallas) would make it an affirmative defense to an allegation of **truant conduct** that one or more absences were due to the child's voluntary absence from the child's home because of abuse. *It was voted out favorably.*

House Public Education Committee – On Tuesday, the House Public Education Committee took up:

HB 256 by Philip Cortez (D-San Antonio) would require school district employment policies to include anti-bullying measures to address bullying in the workplace, including provisions to address the **bullying of a teacher by a parent**. *It was left pending.*

HB 332 by James Talarico (D-Round Rock) would allow compensatory education allotment funding to be used to pay costs associated with implementing **social and emotional learning** programs. *It was left pending.*

HB 538 by Jared Patterson (R-Frisco) would allow students to enroll in a **full-time online educational program** (by removing the language that only allows

full-time enrollment for students enrolled before January 1, 2013). *It was left pending.*

HB 1068 by Alma Allen (D-Houston) would entitle school district employees that have available **personal leave** to use the leave for compensation for a day designated as a school holiday for which the employee would not otherwise receive compensation. *It was left pending.*

HB 1133 by Travis Clardy (R-Nacogdoches) would allow a county for which a **county equalization tax** was adopted to order an election on revoking the tax. *It was left pending.*

HB 1468 by Keith Bell (R-Forney) would authorize school districts to develop procedures and curriculum to provide instruction through **virtual courses** or programs **for students in the district** and that are not provided as part of the state virtual school network. *It was left pending.*

HB 1496 by Gary VanDeaver (R-New Boston) would require **school districts** that enter into a **purchasing contract** valued at \$25,000 or more including a cooperative purchasing program to document any **contract-related fee**, including any management fee paid by or to the district. *It was left pending.*

HB 2230 by John Bucy (D-Austin) would require the Commissioner of Education to establish a task force to study the utility, efficacy and feasibility of **incorporating fine arts into the foundation curriculum**. *It was left pending.*

HB 2344 by Erin Zwiener (D-Driftwood) would require the **writing performance portion of an assessment instrument** to be scored by a classroom teacher assigned to the same campus as the student to whom the assessment instrument is administered. *It was left pending.*

HB 2605 by Jon Rosenathal (D-Houston) would require Texas Education Agency to develop guidelines and materials to educate students, parents, and coaches regarding **sudden cardiac arrest**; and would require students participating in an interscholastic athletic activity and the student's parent to sign a form that acknowledges receiving and reading the information. It would require a student to be removed from a practice or competition immediately if the student has exhibited a warning sign or symptom of sudden cardiac arrest. *It was left pending.*

HB 3204 by Harold Dutton (D-Houston) would define **career readiness** for purposes of the College, Career and Military Readiness bonus as a graduate that both achieves college readiness standards used for accountability purposes on the ACT, SAT or assessment designated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and either earns an industry-accepted certification or during a time period established by commissioner rule, is employed at or above a minimum salary level established by commissioner rule. *It was left pending.*

HB 3270 by Harold Dutton (D-Houston) would make several changes to public **school organization and fiscal management**. *It was left pending.*

HB 3346 by Terry Meza (D-Irving) would add for elementary and middle school campuses an **indicator** that accounts for **improving student preparedness** for success in subsequent grade levels that is measured by standards, adopted by the Commissioner of Education, not including performance on assessment instruments. *It was left pending.*

HB 3557 by Ken King (R-Canadian) would authorize a **parent** or guardian to **elect for a student to repeat** or delay prekindergarten and kindergarten, to repeat grades one through eight, or to repeat a high school course. *It was left pending.*

HB 3591 by Jacey Jetton (R-Sugar Land) would require the Texas Education Agency to establish a **high-speed internet access grant program** to provide grants to school districts and charters to provide high-speed internet to facilitate instruction and learning for students enrolled in the district or school. *It was left pending.*

HB 3643 by Ken King (R-Canadian) would establish the **Texas Commission on Virtual Education** to develop and make recommendations regarding the delivery of virtual education in the public school system and state funding for virtual education under the Foundation School Program. *It was left pending.*

House Corrections Committee – On Wednesday, the House Corrections Committee took up:

HB 30 by James Talarico (D-Round Rock) would require the **Windham School District** to provide a course of instruction that includes the required **curriculum leading to a standard high school diploma** to each incarcerated student younger than 18 years of age (22 years of age if receiving special education services). *It was left pending.*

HB 3457 by James White (R-Hillister) would clarify that provisions relating to teacher contracts and confidentiality of teacher evaluations apply to teachers in the **Windham School District**. *It was left pending.*

Reported/Voted From Committee:

HB 353 by Harold Dutton (D-Houston) would require the closing the gaps domain **indicators for effectiveness** in promoting student learning to include the use of disaggregated data to demonstrate the differentials among students from different racial and ethnic groups, including African American and Hispanic students considered as a whole and disaggregated by sex. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Public Education Committee.*

HB 363 by Gary VanDeaver (R-New Boston) would require operators that possess any **private student data** to use the unique identifier established by the Texas Student Data System for any account creation, data upload, data transmission, analysis, or reporting to mask all personally identifiable student information; and would require operators to adhere to a state-required student data sharing agreement. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Public Education Committee.*

HB 618 by Harold Dutton (D-Houston) would allow open-enrollment charter schools to participate in the **Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) Grant Program**. *It was voted favorably from the House International Relations & Economic Development Committee.*

HB 999 by Diego Bernal (R-San Antonio) would extend **individual graduation committees** to 2023. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Public Education Committee.*

HB 1525 by Dan Huberty (R-Humble) is the **HB 3 clean-up** bill. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Public Education Committee.*

HB 1585 by Stan Lambert (R-Abilene) is the sunset bill for the **Teacher Retirement System of Texas**. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Pensions, Investments & Financial Services Committee.*

HB 1788 by Cole Hefner (R-Mount Pleasant) would grant **immunity** to school districts, charters, and private schools from liability for **damages** resulting from any reasonable action taken by **security personnel** or any other employee who has written permission by the governing board to carry a firearm on campus to maintain the safety of the school campus. *It was voted favorably from the House Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence Committee.*

HB 2120 by Keith Bell (R-Forney) would require the **complaints process of school districts** to include an initial administrative hearing and an opportunity to appeal the administrative decision following the initial hearing; and unless otherwise agreed to by the parties, provide for a resolution of the complaint no later than 120 calendar days after the date on which the complaint was filed. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Public Education Committee.*

HB 2261 by Gene Wu (D-Houston) would allow **municipal management districts** to provide public education facilities and **public education services**. *It was voted favorably from the House Public Education Committee.*

HB 2519 by Drew Darby (R-San Angelo) would make several changes regarding the authority of **State Board of Educator Certification**. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Public Education Committee.*

HB 2557 by Glenn Rogers (R-Graford) would allow the governing body of school districts or charters to approve a program under which the district or school provides authorization for eligible persons to serve as **school security volunteers**. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Public Education Committee.*

SB 28 by Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) would make several changes regarding **open-enrollment charter schools**. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the Senate Education Committee.*

SB 29 by Charles Perry (R-Lubbock) would require students participating in interscholastic **athletic activities** to participate based on the **student's biological sex**. *It was reported favorably as substituted from the Senate State Affairs Committee.*

SB 89 by Jose Menendez (D-San Antonio) would require school districts to prepare a supplement to the written statement of the **individualized education program** developed for **special education students** indicating whether the written report of the child's full individual and initial evaluation was completed by the date required. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the Senate Education Committee.*

SB 203 by Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown) would require the **University Interscholastic League** to select **locations** for statewide competitions in extracurricular activities using a statewide request for proposals process. *It was reported favorably from the Senate Education Committee and recommended for the Local & Uncontested Calendar.*

SB 226 by Angela Paxton (R-McKinney) would add **virtual learning** and virtual instruction to the required minimum academic qualifications for **teacher certification**. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the Senate Education Committee.*

SB 289 by Kel Seliger (R-Amarillo) would allow school districts to excuse a **student** who is 15 years of age or older from attending school to **visit a driver's license office** to obtain a driver's license or learner license of no more than one day for each license. *It was reported favorably from the Senate Education Committee and recommended for the Local & Uncontested Calendar.*

SB 346 by Angela Paxton (R-McKinney) would allow open-enrollment charter schools to participate in the **Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) Grant Program**. *It was voted favorably from the Senate Higher Education Committee.*

SB 481 by Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) would allow a **student** enrolled in a school district that offers only virtual instruction for any part of a school year to **transfer** for that school year to another **school district that offers in-person instruction**. *It was reported favorably as substituted from the Senate Education Committee and recommended for the Local & Uncontested Calendar.*

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired – On March 26th, Governor Greg Abbott appointed Maghan Gautney and Ernest Worthington and reappointed Benda W. Lee to governing board of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) for terms set to expire on January 31, 2027. Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired serves as a special public school in which students who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, are eligible for consideration for services. It is also a statewide resource to parents of these children and the professionals who serve them.

Maghan Gautney of Anna is a Digital Product Manager at Capital One. She is certified in Business Process Management and Six Sigma Lean. Additionally, she is a member of the American Goat Society and the Nigerian Dairy Goat Association. Gautney received a Bachelor of Science in Economics and Business Administration from The University of Texas at Arlington.

Ernest Worthington of Lancaster is a retired Internal Revenue Service Tax Law Specialist. He is a former student of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and attended North Texas State University.

Brenda W. Lee of Brownwood is an educational consultant for vision teachers at the Education Service Center, Region 14 in Abilene. She is past president and conference chair of the Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired and former committee co-chair for the International Association for Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Additionally, she is a member of the West Texas Cluster for Blind and Visually Impaired which provides services for all of West Texas through six education service centers. Lee received a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Howard Payne University in Brownwood and a Master of Arts in Special Education from Stephen F. Austin State University.

Education Commission of the States – On March 30th, Governor Greg Abbott appointed Keven Ellis, D.C. to the Education Commission of the States for a term at the pleasure of the Governor.

Keven Ellis, D.C. of Lufkin is the District 9 Representative on the State Board of Education (SBOE), and has served as Chairman of the SBOE since September 2019. He was elected to a four-year term of office in November 2016, and represents 31 Northeast Texas counties. Prior to being elected to SBOE, he served on the Lufkin ISD Board of Trustees and as board president in 2015-2016. Additionally, he served as Vice-Chair of the Texas Commission on Public School Finance that led to the historic School Finance Bill in the 86th Legislative Session, HB 3. Ellis is owner of Ellis Chiropractic in Lufkin. He is a member of the Texas Chiropractic Association and the American Chiropractic Association. Ellis attended Western Washington University and received a Doctor of Chiropractic degree from the Texas Chiropractic College.

Next Week:

Tuesday, April 6, 2021:

8:00 a.m. House Public Education Committee will meet in E1.004 of the capitol extension to take up:

HB 81 by Eddie Rodriguez (D-Austin) would allow a **campus turnaround plan** to operate as a **community school** that provides strategies and programs to coordinate academic, social, and health services that reduce barriers to learning.

HB 220 by Diego Bernal (D-San Antonio) would allow a campus to apply to the Commissioner of Education to be designated as a **resource campus** that provides quality education and enrichment for students at the campus.

HB 244 by Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) would establish the **Computer Science and Technology Applications Professional Development Grant Program** to encourage teachers to obtain computer science certification and continue professional development in coding, computational thinking and computer science education.

HB 450 by Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) would require charter holders to provide written notice of the establishment of a new **open-enrollment charter school campus** at least 18 months before the date on which the campus is anticipated to open.

HB 572 by Harold Dutton (D-Houston) would authorize the commissioner to establish the **Dropout Recovery Competency-Based Educational Pilot Program** as a charter serving students in grades 9 through 12, with an enrollment of which at least 50 percent of the students are 17 years of age or older and the students are between 14 and 26 years of age who have dropped out of school.

HB 622 by Barbara Gervin-Hawkins (D-San Antonio) would require the State Board for Educator Certification to create abbreviated **educator preparation programs** for a person seeking a certification to teach courses in **marketing** and a certification to teach courses in **health science technology**.

HB 998 by Harold Dutton (D-Houston) would require the Commissioner of Education to evaluate a **dropout recovery school** under **alternative education**

accountability procedures; and would require the commissioner to adopt performance targets for the student achievement domain and the school progress domain that are based on the average performance of school districts and campuses registered under the alternative education accountability procedures for the preceding school year for those respective domains.

HB 1942 by Gary Van Deaver (R-New Boston) would authorize up to two charters each year to be granted under the **Adult High School Diploma and Industry Certification Charter School Program**; would establish an advisory committee to make recommendations regarding the implementation of the program and the issuance of charters to operate under the program; and would require the Commissioner of Education to revoke a charter if the charter's adult education program fails to meet the minimum performance standards established by the commissioner.

HB 2554 by Gary Gates (R-Rosenberg) would require the State Board of Education to, upon petition of the board of directors of two or more school districts, establish a **joint vocational school district** to provide vocational education and training to eligible high school students whose educational needs are better served by focused vocational education and training.

HB 2802 by Jay Dean (R-Longview) would require the Commissioner of Education to apply for a **federal waiver to suspend assessments** in a school year where a disaster declaration significantly disrupts school district operations, including in-person attendance, in a majority of school districts in the state.

HB 3261 by Dan Huberty (R-Humble) would make several changes related to **electronic administration of assessment instruments**.

HB 3298 by Steve Allison (R-San Antonio) would require the Commissioner of Education to establish a **competitive professional development grant program** to encourage teachers to obtain **computer science certification** and continue **professional development in coding**, computational thinking, and computer science education.

HB 3445 by Dan Huberty (R-Humble) would require school districts and charters to annually review their **fund balances** to determine the amount of **excess funds** are held by the district or school; and would require districts and charters to use the amount of funds in excess of 110 days of operating expenses for school districts and 80 days of operating expenses for charters to pay down debt obligations, lower the district's maintenance and operations tax rate, provide employee compensation, or pay costs of deferred maintenance.

HB 3528 by Scott Sanford (R-McKinney) would expand eligibility for courses offered through the state **virtual school network** to kindergarten or above (instead of grade three and above).

HB 3804 by J.M. Lozano (R-Kingsville) would make several changes regarding **continuing education** and training requirements for educators.

HB 3846 by Matt Krause (R-Fort Worth) would exempt **districts of innovation** from school start date requirements; and would allow school districts to schedule the last day of school for students for a school year after the Friday preceding Memorial Day if the district operates a **year-round school** system.

HB 3932 by Diego Bernal (D-San Antonio) would establish the **State Advisory Council on Educational Opportunity for Military Children** to provide for coordination among state agencies, school districts, and military installations concerning the state's participation in and compliance with the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.

HB 4465 by Harold Dutton (D-Houston) would require the Commissioner of Education to establish a **grant program overcoming the educational impact of disasters** including extending instructional time, broadband grants to ensure student access to remote instruction, innovation in curriculum and instruction, improvement of the air and water quality at school facilities, and accelerated learning.

HB 4545 by Harold Dutton (D-Houston) would require school districts to establish an **accelerated learning committee** for each student who does not perform satisfactorily on a third grade math or reading assessment, the fifth grade math assessment, or the eighth grade math or reading assessment.

Thursday, April 8, 2021

9:00 a.m. Senate Education Committee will meet in E1.012 of the capitol extension to take up:

SB 369 by Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) would allow parents to opt their student out of the requirement to submit a **financial aid application** as a condition of high school graduation.

SB 1267 by Royce West (D-Dallas) would make several changes regarding **continuing education** and training requirements for educators.

SB 1522 by Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood) would authorize the Commissioner of Education to adjust the **average daily attendance** of a school district for the amount of instructional days during the **semester in which a calamity first occurs**, and could only be provided based on a particular calamity for an additional amount of instructional days equivalent to one school year.

SB 1536 by Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood) is the **HB 3 clean-up** bill.

SB 1615 by Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) would make several changes regarding the **adult high school charter school program**.

STATEWIDE – COVID-19 RESPONSE:

DSHS Weekly Vaccine Distribution Update – On March 26th the Department of State Health Services issued its weekly update on Vaccine distribution in Texas for the week of March 28th. More than 1 million first doses of COVID-19 vaccine will be shipped to providers across Texas next week. The Texas Department of State Health Services is allocating 818,410 doses (compared to 685,470 first doses last week) to 779 providers (compared to 481 providers last week) in 202 counties (compared to 183 counties last week). More than 200,000 additional first doses are expected to be available to pharmacy locations and federally-qualified health centers directly from the federal government. Here is some information provided:

- Texas has now administered more than 10 million doses, an increase of 1.2 million in the last week.

- More than 6.8 million people have received at least one dose, and almost 3.5 million are fully vaccinated.
- Among Texas seniors, more than six in 10 have received at least one dose, and four in 10 are now fully vaccinated. More than 30 percent of all Texans at least 16 years old have gotten at least one dose.

Beginning Monday, all Texans ages 16 and older will be eligible to receive a vaccine. Vaccination has helped drive down the number of new cases and people hospitalized with COVID-19 to their lowest level since October. However, with hundreds of variant cases identified in Texas that have the potential to spread more quickly and cause more serious disease, vaccination remains critically important. The available vaccines have proven effective against the variant strains, so the more people vaccinated, the easier it will be to keep the variants under control and prevent new ones from emerging. In addition to the first doses mentioned above, the state is ordering 587,950 doses (compared to 674,580 second doses last week) intended as the second dose for people first vaccinated a few weeks ago. DSHS automatically orders second doses to arrive at providers in the week they can begin to be administered, so they will be available when needed. People should be able to return to the same provider to receive their second dose within six weeks of getting the first.

Federally Supported Community Vaccination Centers – On March 26th, Governor Greg Abbott and the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) requested an extension of the Federally Supported Community Vaccination Centers in Arlington, Dallas, and Houston. Originally launched in February, these federal pilot sites are based at E Sports Stadium, Fair Park, and NRG Stadium, and are part of a joint effort to support vaccination efforts in underserved areas. The sites are operated by FEMA in partnership with the state of Texas through TDEM and local officials. TDEM submitted the request on March 22nd, for an extension of supplies, personnel, and vaccine. A request was also made on March 19th to establish a similar community vaccination site at the Alamodome in San Antonio. FEMA denied this request. Governor Abbott said, "The mass community vaccination sites in Arlington, Dallas, and Houston have been crucial to expanding vaccine access in underserved communities, and I urge FEMA to approve our request for an extension to these sites. Continuing operations at these vaccination sites will ensure that even more Texans can get vaccinated and will help keep our communities safe."

Ten Million Vaccines Administered – On March 26th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that ten million COVID-19 vaccines have been administered to Texans across the state, with over 30 percent of eligible Texans having received a vaccine. This significant milestone is a result of dedicated work by the Texas Division of Emergency Management, the Texas Department of State Health Services, the Texas National Guard, and the healthcare workers and volunteers across the state who have helped administer these vaccines. Governor Abbott said, "Hitting ten million vaccines is a major accomplishment in our state's continued fight against COVID-19. I want to thank all the healthcare workers and

volunteers that made this milestone possible. However, the fight is not over. Vaccines are the most effective tool to combat COVID-19 in our communities, and we will continue to expand vaccine access for those who choose to get vaccinated. As more vaccines become available and eligibility opens to all Texans, I urge Texans who wish to get the COVID-19 vaccine to sign up to help us keep our communities safe. Here in Texas, COVID-19 vaccines will always be strongly encouraged and always voluntary.” The State of Texas has steadily expanded vaccine access since doses first became available late last year. Texas was the first state to administer one million vaccines and continues to vaccinate thousands of Texans every day. DSHS has directed vaccine providers to prioritize people 80 years old or older when scheduling appointments and accommodate anyone in that age group who presents for vaccination, whether or not they have an appointment, by immediately moving them to the front of the line.

Texas Public Health Vaccine Scheduler – On March 29th, as Texas opens COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to everyone age 16 and older, the Texas Department of State Health Services is launching the Texas Public Health Vaccine Scheduler. The scheduler gives people one place to sign up for a COVID-19 shot through multiple public health departments, including the eight DSHS public health regions, which provide public health services in nearly 200 Texas counties and more than a dozen local health entities across the state. Texas residents can visit the website to create a profile that includes their contact information, demographic details, and preferred time of day and days of the week for an appointment. Within a day, people eligible to be vaccinated will be matched with the next available appointment within their home county and preferred times. If none are available, the scheduler will continue to search for appointments as new clinics are scheduled and contact individuals when they have an appointment. While most people will sign up online, a toll-free number is available to assist special populations that have difficulty using the online registration tool, including older adults over age 65, people with disabilities, and those with limited Internet access or other barriers to using technology. People in those groups can call 1-833-832-7067 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week to enroll in the scheduler and get help making an appointment. If there is no a participating health department in their area, they will be referred to local providers conducting vaccination near them. The Texas Public Health Vaccine Scheduler will not replace all COVID-19 vaccine registration in the state. Many entities – including pharmacies, medical practices and some public health departments – are operating their own registration systems and will continue to do so. People who want to be vaccinated should continue to look for available vaccine at those providers, as well.

[Here](#) is a link to the Texas Public Health Vaccine Scheduler.

COVID-19 Rapid Testing Program for Youth Summer Camps – On March 30th, Governor Greg Abbott and the Texas Division of Emergency Management

(TDEM) announced the creation of a COVID-19 Rapid Testing Program for Texas youth summer camps. The program will help summer camps that are licensed by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to conduct rapid tests of staff and campers during the summer months. Through this program, TDEM will provide participating summer camps with COVID-19 rapid antigen tests that will be administered to staff and campers who volunteer to participate. Governor Abbott said, "As normalcy returns to Texas, we must remain vigilant against the spread of COVID-19 by identifying positive cases and mitigating any potential outbreaks throughout the state. The COVID-19 Testing Program for Texas Youth Summer Camps will help camps safely operate throughout the summer by quickly identifying positive COVID-19 cases among campers and staff. I encourage qualifying summer camps to apply for this program so that we can continue to keep Texans safe from this virus."