

Leadership ISD MASBAhablemos COVID-19 Conversation

April 4, 2020

MASBA Board President Jacinto Ramos, Jr., Chair

Leadership ISD and the Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA) co-hosted a statewide conversation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic on Monday, April 6, 2020, at 12:00 p.m. CDT.

The 54 attendees, in order by school district, then by company, included:

- Austin ISD Trustee Jayme Mathias
- Buena Vista ISD Superintendent Mark Dominguez
- Canutillo ISD Trustee Armando Rodriguez
- Canutillo ISD Trustee Blanca Trout
- Cedar Hill ISD Trustee Dawn Miller
- Clear Creek ISD Trustee Laura DuPont
- Crowley ISD Trustee Nedra Robinson
- Denton ISD Trustee Charles Stafford
- Dilley ISD Trustee Rene Alvarez
- Dilley ISD Trustee J.D. Rodriguez, III
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Anne Darr
- Fort Worth ISD Chief of Staff Karen Molinar
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Jacinto Ramos, Jr.
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Norman Robbins
- Garland ISD Trustee Linda Griffin
- Grapevine-Colleyville ISD Trustee Jesse Rodriguez
- Hays CISD Trustee Willie Tenorio, Jr.
- Houston ISD Trustee Judith Cruz
- Houston ISD Trustee Sue Deigaard
- Houston ISD Trustee Holly Maria Flynn Vilaseca
- Houston ISD Trustee Dani Hernández
- Houston ISD Trustee Anne Sung
- Leander ISD Trustee Trish Bode
- Marathon ISD Superintendent Guadalupe Singh
- Natalia ISD Trustee Eric Smith
- Palacios ISD Trustee Fabian Marroquin
- Richardson ISD Trustee Karen Clardy
- Richardson ISD Trustee Kristin Kuhne
- Santa Rosa ISD Chief Financial Officer Heriberto Villarreal
- Southside ISD Deputy Superintendent Fred Hayes
- Teague ISD Superintendent Chris Skinner
- Valley View ISD (Cooke County) Trustee Corrine French
- Waco ISD Assistant Superintendent Israel Carrera
- Accelify – David Thomas
- Always Be Learning Schools – Adam Pisoni
- Claycomb Architects – Richard Crump
- Claycomb Architects – Bo Ledoux
- Claycomb Architects – Francis Zordilla
- Equal Opportunity Schools – John Gatica
- FBS Benefits – Richard Peace
- JG Consulting – James Guerra
- Leadership ISD – John Oberly
- MASBA – Vincent Tovar
- Mpowerment Works – Marisa Rivera
- NALEO – Karina Hernandez
- NALEO – Cindia Velasco
- Page Southerland Page Architects – Jim Brady
- Performance Services – Ira Nicodemus
- Schneider Electric – Aaron Garcia
- State Board of Education Member Ruben Cortez
- TASB Board Development Services – Kay Douglas
- TASB Board Development Services – Phil Gore
- Texas Education Agency – Drew Howard
- UMB Bank – Rick Menchaca
- Bryan Parra, Grand Prairie ISD Board Candidate

Welcome

MASBA Executive Director Dr. Jayme Mathias welcomed all, introduced them to the features of GoToWebinar, shared a preliminary poll, and introduced President Ramos. The poll asked, “How would you rate your district's response to this pandemic?” 22 of 37 attendees (online at that time) responded.

- Five attendees (22.73%) responded “Excellent”
- Twelve attendees (54.55%) responded “Good”
- Five attendees (22.73%) responded “Average”
- No attendees responded “Poor”

Remarks

MASBA Board President Jacinto Ramos, Jr. shared the background for this conversation, including an overview of four previous statewide conversations that he hosted, and various questions raised during those encounters. He noted the essential question: How might school board members govern in the midst of crisis and model good governance during challenging times? He then introduced Dr. Drew Howard, Senior Director of School Governance & Leadership Support for the Texas Education Agency.

Speaker

Dr. Drew Howard began his remarks on a positive note: We are learning and growing through the experience of this pandemic. Less positively, this situation presents the challenge of providing education despite isolation and is revealing inequities among students. Many of the decisions during times of crisis have less to do with governance and more to do with operations—which is why we hired our superintendents. We trust our superintendents with the operation of our districts, and we need to support them and hold them accountable. We often talk about being a “Team of Eight”; crises are moments to show we truly are a team and are supportive of one another. Goals and progress monitoring often go “out the window” during times of crisis. Data is more difficult to gather and is less accurate. Emergency priorities—including the safety, security and well-being of our students—become the focus, and we’re challenged to continue our educational services outside normal school operations. Situations currently vary from district to district, but we need to focus on the safety and security of our students, and the continued provision of educational services with equity. During times of crisis, accountability looks more like a conversation, than a report. Trustees need to ask about student safety and security, the continuation of educational services, and equity with respect to such factors as internet access. Equity is especially important with respect to special education students and English Language Learners. Districts throughout Texas are mobilizing to meet student needs. Some schools are opening as daycare centers for essential employees. Teaching is being delivered online and through packets. Trustees should maintain open dialog with their superintendents, while their districts strive to meet emergency priorities. Communications likely become more sporadic. The Board can assist in communicating out the district’s message in a way that shows they are indeed a Team of Eight (or a Team of Ten).

Remarks & Questions

Ruben Cortez: Most boards have called emergency meetings, likely through virtual means. Our kids are adapting to the “new normal” of online instruction during a state shelter-in-place order. District are scrambling to provide technology. Gaps are evident. Many food staffs are receiving time-and-a-half. Commissioner Morath hosts a daily call for superintendents; he has been proactive in modifying and waiving state guidelines and in seeking the same for federal guidelines. Proms and graduations are being interrupted. Special education accommodations are necessary. Many boards are approving raised spending caps for superintendents. I’m in favor of providing latitude to districts and teachers as we adjust to this “new normal.”

Drew Howard: Commissioner Morath shares a daily one-way call with all superintendents on his listserv. Trustees have access to the Commissioner's regular updates on the TEA coronavirus webpage. All resources discussed during the Commissioner's daily calls are posted there. Special thanks to the State Board of Education for relaxing board training requirements during this pandemic.

Linda Griffin: Policy revisions are top-of-mind for many trustees. How might we best communicate to our colleagues that it's not "business as usual" during a pandemic, and that many things of lesser importance should not fill our board agendas and distract from issues related to this pandemic?

Drew Howard: Boards should act to suspend goal monitoring, then focus on priorities and on providing for the needs identified by their superintendents. Boards should change policies, to allow the superintendent easier access to funds, to purchase equipment, provide internet service, etc. Conversations on goal monitoring can resume after this pandemic. Focus now on formulating and monitoring emergency priorities. We should take our direction from our superintendents re. challenges, our response, and necessary board action.

Trish Bode: Ruben talked about time-and-a-half for food service. Are there more details on this?

Ruben Cortez: I've seen local school boards approving this, not only for food service, but also for security personnel and those maintaining IT systems. Most districts are paying their employees during this pandemic, even though they are sheltering in place, so those reporting for duty outside the home are receiving time-and-a-half or some other form of supplemental pay. These are local decisions.

Anne Sung: The Houston ISD Board will meet on Thursday to consider emergency authorities. How long should emergency priorities be in place, and how might they evolve over the coming months? This pandemic will likely stretch into the summer, perhaps even to SY20/21.

Drew Howard: Plan to set and evaluate emergency priorities for at least the next three months. This is a fluid situation, and each board will need to decide when to migrate back to "business as usual." Because so much of student performance is assessed through the STAAR and through beginning- and middle-of-year assessments, think about how to mitigate gaps as much as possible when testing resumes. We're optimistic that districts can finish out this year, and that classes will resume in August. Districts do well to anticipate a time of reflection on their response to this epidemic and to reevaluate goals and progress measures in light of this, so that they remain realistic and achievable vis-à-vis the time that our students spend away from their teachers.

Kay Douglas: Linda Griffin's question had to do with board dynamics. Though board training requirements are waived through September 30, teambuilding is ongoing. We're all finding our way as we go—in addition to all we have going on at home and work—so trustees need avenues for sharing their fears and concerns about student safety, staff well-being, etc. Trustees do well during times like this to reach out to one another—not to talk about district business, but to ask how they're doing. Let's show empathy and reach out to our colleagues during or outside of formal meetings.

Cinto: Thanks for drawing attention to the human face of this crisis. Checking in with one another is absolutely a great idea.

Armando Rodriguez: Other states are allowing graduations to proceed without penalties, by looking at students' work during previous semesters. Is TEA addressing this?

Drew Howard: Commissioner Morath has discussed GPA and graduation. The TEA coronavirus website has resources for boards to navigate such issues. The situation is fluid and ever-evolving, and each district will need to craft its own response.

Jesse Rodriguez: Grapevine-Colleyville ISD is taking advantage of the offers by publishers and educational partners who are offering free access to online instructional resources. More districts are embracing remote/distance learning.

Dawn Miller: We're doing what we can from our side; are there conversations with the colleges and universities that will be receiving affected students in the fall? Some parents of seniors are panicking about their children not qualifying now for acceptance. How are we collaborating with higher ed? Also, does this pandemic provide any advantages for charter schools, and, if so, how can we mitigate that? Most charters are not as adept on technology as public schools.

Drew Howard: I've posted a link to the TEA coronavirus website FAQ on graduation (updated on March 30). College Board, NCAA and UIL are all having conversations on COVID-19 issues, including the effect of pass/fail grading on GPA and college eligibility. There are many nuances we didn't need to previously consider: I'm not aware of any higher ed decisions on these matters yet, but everyone is communicating about how to bridge this issues.

Corrine French: I'm from a very small, rural, unprepared district, but our administrators and teachers are doing a great job. We shared a technology survey that included cell phones as learning devices. Is there a resource for us to know how many students in Texas have access to online learning?

Drew Howard: It'll take time to gather these data. Every district is challenged to discover which students don't have access to technology and how to provide these students a quality education. Equality and equity are key issues. Superintendents throughout the state are doing a remarkable job of creatively responding to this pandemic. Some are parking buses with hotspots in communities. Nothing will replace a teacher leading instruction; how do we do the next-best-thing and assess the effectiveness of our efforts? First we need to concern ourselves with access to technology and curriculum, then we can worry about effectiveness. All of this will be a tremendous learning opportunity for our districts in the future.

Concluding Words

President Ramos thanked Dr. Howard and all on the call, reminding all of the need to model adaptive leadership in our districts. We're feeding students and providing instruction. Let's also be mindful of mental health: Domestic violence has increased since the start of this pandemic, so we need to pay attention to the mental health needs of our students, our families, and our community. We also need to take care of ourselves and ensure that our overinvolvement doesn't distract district administrators from their job.

Announcements

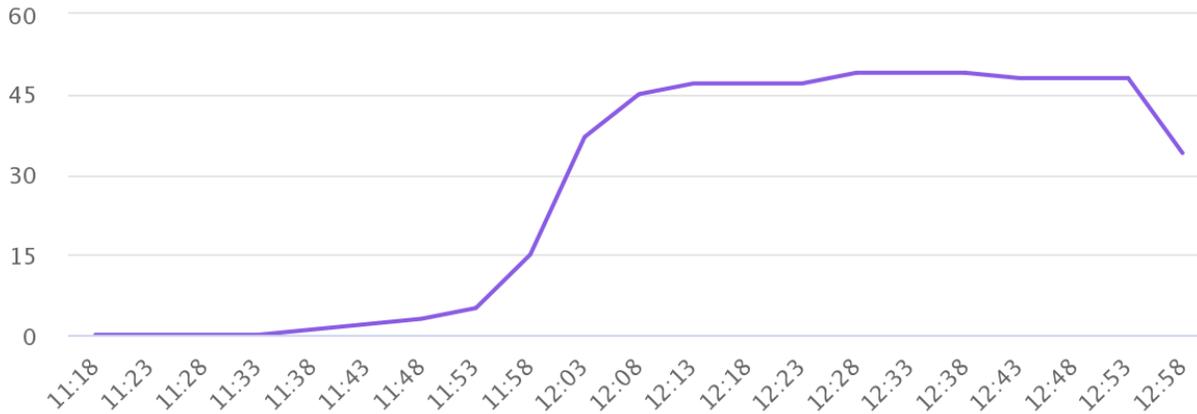
President Ramos announced the next COVID-19 conversation, which will take place at noon on Monday, April 13, 2020 through GoToWebinar. Dr. Phil Gore, TASB Director of Board Development Services and co-editor of *Improving School Board Effectiveness*, will join us for the conversation. President Ramos asked all to participate in a post-call survey.

Adjournment

The conversation concluded at 12:58 p.m.

Meeting Data

This conversation was advertised in two MASBA eblasts to over 6,200 recipients each. President Ramos also spread word of this opportunity. 201 people clicked into our registration site. 75 registered. 53 (71% of registrants) attended. The meeting attendance, as tracked every five minutes, follows. Dr. Mathias logged into GoToWebinar at 11:18 a.m. and concluded the meeting at 12:58 p.m. More than 45 attendees were present for the conversation from 12:08 to 12:53 p.m.



59% of attendees had GoToWebinar on top of other applications; 41% had GoToWebinar in the background during the session.

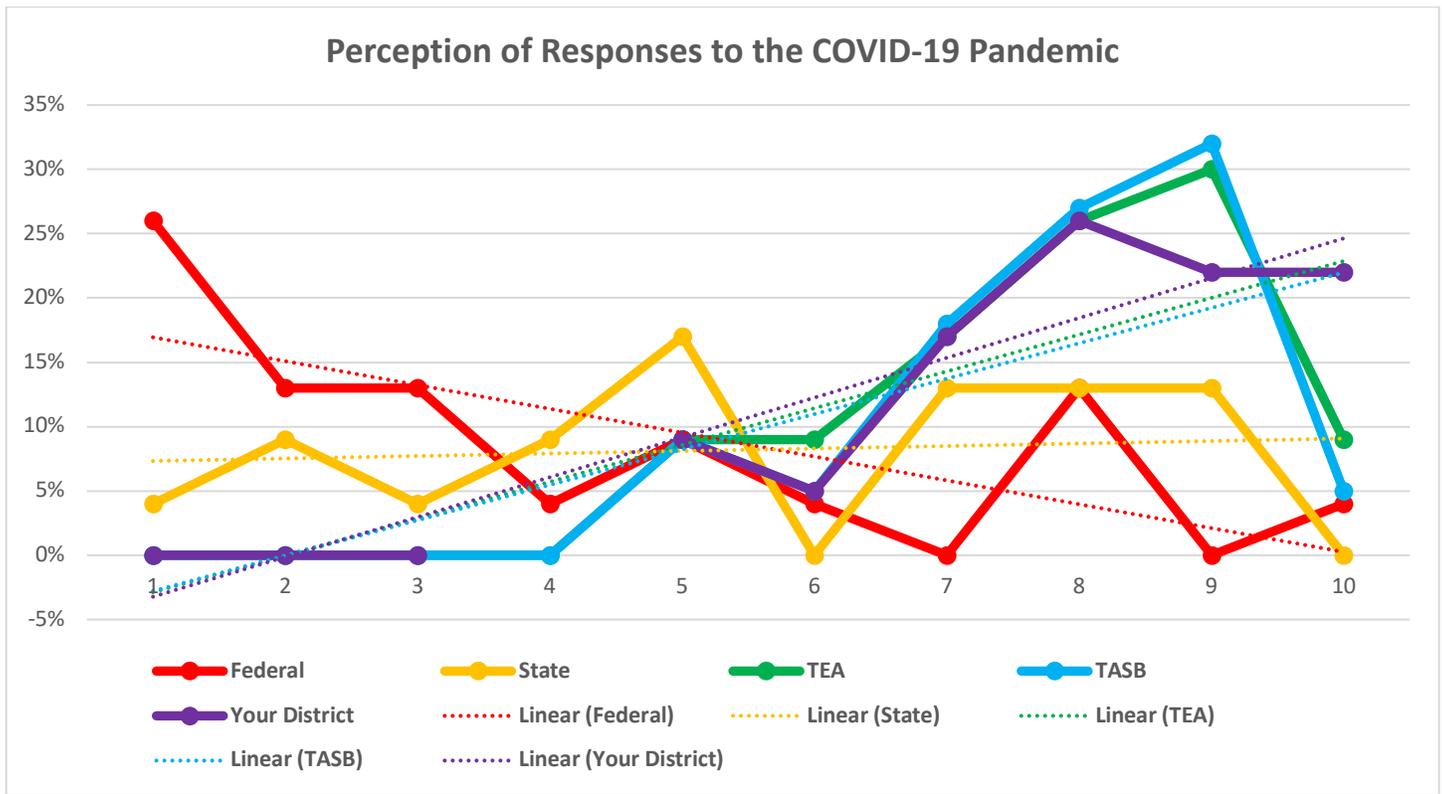
Post-meeting Survey Results

23 attendees (43%) responded to the post-conversation survey. They included:

- 15 school board members
- 1 superintendent
- 3 other district admin/staff
- 4 other

Attendees were asked to rate the response to this pandemic at various levels, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 0 for “unsure.” The following table shares their responses.

	Federal	State	TEA	TASB	Your District
10	4%	-	9%	5%	22%
9	-	13%	30%	32%	22%
8	13%	13%	26%	27%	26%
7	-	13%	17%	18%	17%
6	4%	-	9%	5%	5%
5	9%	17%	9%	9%	9%
4	4%	9%	-	-	
3	13%	4%	-	-	-
2	13%	9%	-	-	-
1	26%	4%	-	-	-
Unsure	-	-	-	5%	-
Avg. Score	4.17	5.73	7.87	7.50	8.13



Conclusion:

- The average scores and trendlines show that participants rated most highly their districts’ responses and the TEA’s response to the pandemic.
- The federal and state responses to the pandemic were rated lowest; the federal response is the only response with a positive skew, and the trendline of the state response is relatively flat. A quarter of respondents gave our federal government the lowest possible rating for its response to this epidemic.
- 5% were unsure of TASB’s response to the pandemic.

19 attendees shared what was most helpful about this conversation:

- **Dr. Drew Howard’s observations**
- **Drew Howard’s comments** were very helpful
- Hearing from **Drew** at TEA
- Hearing the **TEA perspective from Drew Howard**, especially concerning where TEA feels the priority should be right now. I appreciate his two-pronged answer & hearing where school boards fit into all this.
- Learning more about the **state’s response** to the pandemic
- Hearing from **colleagues** and gaining the **useful links**
- A board member’s **perspective**
- Collaborating and gathering information from various **perspectives**
- Great **perspectives** on how to shift governance to meet the needs of the current situation
- **Allowing attendees to ask their questions**
- Hearing what other districts have **questions** about, but also gauging how we are doing in relation to the work of others.
- Listening to the unique **questions** that boards are having to grapple with

- The opportunity to ask **questions**
- The **Q&A** portion
- **Good information** on things to seek out from local elected board and central office staff
- **Information** about what to do in emergency times
- There were a lot of different **ideas**, but ambiguity of the response isn't fully developed
- Conversation on **priorities**: What boards should be focused on during this time of crisis
- Board goals may need adjusting; **interesting discussion on GPA**

14 attendees share what might be improved:

- **Video** of the speakers; it's much easier to attend to the speaker if we can see the person talking
- Maybe ask if we are able to get connected via **video** or audio, I had some problems with the video but I was able to listen
- **PPT deck or video** to see speaker, if they opt in
- Great to have speakers. I like the raising the hand. **Remind folks to be concise.**
- **Limit the time** shared by the audience to 3 minutes, if possible
- Ask for **advance questions**
- I think you all did fine, but would be fine if you **just read my question**. Don't need to unmute me to help things move along quickly
- Maybe **select key points to address**, which are common for all boards, and **have the links up** when the call starts
- I know that Phil Gore will be able to add some **depth** to the discussion of how the school board fits in, and **what the board should be focused on** - or not focused on - right now
- **Specific ways that boards can remain appropriately engaged** with the superintendent during this time
- Hopefully as the situations of the different issues continue to develop, the answers will get **more clear**
- Great presentation
- All good

12 attendees shared the following concerning unanswered questions:

- The question about the COVID-19 crisis being **advantageous for charter schools** was asked but not answered. Can that be addressed in the next webinar?
- What are the believed advantages that **charters** have, and how do we mitigate them?
- The **names of attendees** for networking. **Clarity of whether school board members can attend commissioner daily briefing**. I will ask my superintendent.
- I wonder about budget: Are districts planning to open OR should they plan to open Aug with regular capacity, 10% less students, etc.? Don't think there is any modeling on this situation, but curious if anyone out there is promoting **a scenario for budget planning**
- There was mention of a child of a board member coming into contact with another child that had tested positive. **How does superintendent or board member get the "shelter in place" directive out more aggressively?** In my neighborhood alone, kids and their parents continue to gather as if there was no pandemic.
- Questions come on a daily basis. Primarily **grading** right now.
- What happens with **graduation**? How do we ensure that **gaps** do not widen due to access disparities?
- **Will school continue in August** if we do not have a cure for the virus?

- I think we covered most of it. Thank you.
- Can't think of any right now.
- None
- None

Ideas for **future speakers**:

- **Large and small district superintendents**
- **Superintendents** who are doing a great job to provide insight to other districts whose response may not be as thorough.
- **Crisis management/leadership experts** (i.e., **Dr. Angela Blanchard**)
- Perhaps a **Mayor or Chief of Police**.
- I really like **Kay Douglas'** comments about the continued team building that must happen - if even just by reading out to board members individually. It would be great to get Kay - and maybe others - who have some good examples of how [team building] is happening while still keeping within the law (open meetings act, etc.)
- Maybe create a 3-week cycle of going back to conversation.... In two weeks ask maybe a **panel of staff and trustees to address the two priorities discussed today...** Maintaining Safety and Security (meal distribution for students) and Continuity of Education for Students. Do a follow-up on this particular conversation of actual implementation.
- Maybe **someone from federal level who can offer more insight on ways districts offer SPED in online learning** format, etc. and what trustees can do to support staff in this - what is a realistic goal for trustees on this during this emergency time frame?
- **TEA SPED representatives**
- **Commissioner Mike Morath**
- **Experts in providing remote learning opportunities**

Ideas for **future topics**:

- **5 to 10 mins weekly for updates from TEA and TASB and sample resolutions**
- More insight from **superintendents & school districts** who have **1to1 tech and hotspots** for students both big and small + finding resources and making this a priority
- **What does remote learning look like, what does it not look like?**
- About **policies** that we need to pay attention to during this emergency!
- How **school districts, cities and counties can work together** on communication and delivering essential needs to the community
- **Maintaining positive working relationships between board members**
- How to move through the **budget** season while dealing with the crisis
- **How this whole experience is going to impact the law - HB3, and other laws put in place the last legislative session.** Reading academies, accountability etc.
- **The increase of family/domestic violence** during this crisis, and **how we can support families** on a statewide level, as well as hearing from districts about new initiatives they are launching - Thank You ALL!
- None at this time
- Open to any ideas.