Governor Abbott Mismanaged the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Texas Governor Greg Abbott predicted the obvious about future cases of COVID-19 in the state, declaring that next week things “will look worse.”

On Friday there were less than 1,000 ICU beds available throughout the state of Texas, according to the. Additionally, there were 9,869 Covid-19 positive patients hospitalized in Texas. The latest information shows that this was a record number of hospitalizations and that they have steadily increased since mid-June—and likely will continue to increase.

The Governor is partially to blame for the severity of the crisis, prematurely opening the state before meeting CDC health gating criteria. He chose to side with Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick (who has made
absurd and insensitive statements about the pandemic), business interests and political preferences instead of the health of Texans.

Now Abbott is doubling down on that mistake, threatening to disallow mayors in major urban areas like Austin, Dallas, Houston and San Antonio from issuing new stay at home orders for a set period of time. Hence, many of the lives lost will be on the Governor’s conscience.

Making matters worse, the Governor refuses to suspend the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) standardized test. Spending $90 million this year to administer the Texas STAAR test in the middle of a pandemic makes no sense.

Texas is in the middle of an alarming spike in Coronavirus cases; Houston, for example, has a 25% COVID-19 test positivity rate and Texas has the highest number of uninsured individuals in the country. Abbott doesn’t realize that continuing high stakes testing is an affront to every homeless student and every poor and vulnerable person who was struggling before this pandemic.

The Governor is punishing schools and communities at a time when the state should be promoting safety, racial equity, as well as the academic, social and emotional well-being of students and families. Administering the STAAR exam further exacerbates what we knew before the pandemic—that high stakes testing measures poverty, not learning.

Moreover, the Governor seems unwilling to release the $1.2 billion CARES Act funds to local school districts. Instead he’s holding the money hostage at the expense of students, teachers and staff. This not only sabotages reopening plans at the local level but places the most vulnerable students at increased risk.
Put bluntly, Texas’ Governor is playing a dangerous political game with both health and education of the state’s citizens. This is unacceptable. I hope voters will not forget this when Abbott is up for reelection.

While I respectfully disagree with most of the Governor’s policies on non-pandemic issues, prior to the pandemic I thought he was a decent person and believed his promise to allow policies to be based on data. I am no longer certain about that judgment. As a former University of Texas at Austin (UT) faculty member, Abbott is no longer one of our graduates for whom I am proud. UT’s motto is: “What Starts Here Changes the World.” In the case of Abbott, perhaps that change may not be good.

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