

Houston teachers and school staff unions on Monday warned that schools are not ready to reopen in the fall, and urged leaders to begin the year with virtual instruction rather than in-person classes amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gov. Greg Abbott announced last month that [schools must reopen for the new academic year](#), and will be required to offer five days of in-person instruction per week. But with a new school year set to begin in just six weeks, Andy Dewey, the Executive Vice President of the Houston Federation of Teachers, called the state and district reopening guidelines "stunningly inadequate," and claimed that the Houston Independent School District was "in no way, shape or form prepared" to reopen with face-to-face instruction come the fall.

"The governor is mandating that every school district offer in-person instruction, but he is offering no additional funding or infrastructure and has left the details up to the school districts," Dewey said.

"Given the spike in cases we've seen in Harris County and around the state, there shouldn't even be a debate that virtual instruction is where we must begin," he said.

The HFT provided recommendations Monday they feel are necessary if schools are to safely reopen in the fall, including a virtual instruction period that phases in to face-to-face in-school instruction, starting with early childhood students and those most vulnerable, "once the number of COVID-19 cases has declined over 14 consecutive days."

The union is also pushing for expanded availability of testing, contact tracing and isolation capacity to contain the virus. Dewey said that before schools reopen for in-person instruction, the positive test rate should be below 5% and the transmission rate should be 1.0.

"The failure to contain the virus should not land on teachers' shoulders and, right now, we feel like there are no good choices," De Leon said.

Houston Education Support Personnel President Wretha Rawls-Thomas said she was concerned about older, more vulnerable staff members. Among HISD bus drivers, for example, Rawls-Thomas said 80% are seniors, and many will likely will not return to work.