

# OPINION

*El Paso* Times

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slipped away while state officials assumed we would just reopen schools with a few safety recommendations and hope for the best. After our disastrous experience reopening the Texas economy that way, it's clear that won't suffice.

This moment calls for the Texas Education Agency to provide real leadership, something we caught a glimpse of this week as the agency mandated masks for everyone returning to school this fall. The agency needs to go further. It needs to provide a clear picture of what reopening schools would look like, beyond simply requiring in-person and online options everywhere. Its safety protocols must come in the form of

mandates, not suggestions that may go ignored. And state and local officials must be willing to look outside their silos for the best practices and resourceful solutions this monumental challenge requires.

It's unclear whether the TEA has the backbone for the task, or how much of that work could be accomplished in time to start in-person schooling in mid-August. Texas still lacks rapid-results testing to identify and contain

outbreaks at schools. Using temperature scans to screen children will be of little use, pulmonologist Dr. Vin Gupta told our board and other reporters Thursday, because most children who get the virus never develop symptoms. But they could still pass it to teachers, cafeteria workers and counselors, all of whom could then bring it home to their families.

Texas is battling a monster resurgence of the virus: It took nearly four months for the state to see its first 100,000 cases, and only 17 days to add another 100,000. The state has such rampant spread that Harvard researchers say Texas needs another stay-at-home order. Gov. Greg Abbott remains opposed to one, but he acknowledged Friday in an interview with Lubbock TV station KLBK, "Things will get worse."

There's little hope the virus would somehow stop at schoolhouse doors. University of Texas epidemiologist Lauren Ancel Meyers told the Austin City Council this week that on the first week of classes at a school of 500 kids, "we would expect that somewhere between 15 and 20 (students) would arrive infected."

The TEA's mask mandate, which applies to staffers and students 10 and up, would help slow the spread. Other pieces of TEA guidance — including promoting the use of hand sanitizer and social distancing "where feasible without disrupting the educational experience" — are vague suggestions, not real standards that families and employees can count on.

Regrettably, Texas recently took the same tack with child care centers, until an upswing in cases prompted the state to reinstate some requirements, such as daily temperature checks, in late June. As of this week, the state had 555 children and 1,140 staffers at day cares who have been infected, according to figures obtained by the Texas Tribune, although it's unclear if they caught the virus at the facility or elsewhere.

## Extraordinarily high, 'Equestrian' statue base built to deter vandalism

### Your Turn

Kenna Ramirez

Guest columnist

The nonprofit XII Travelers Memorial of the Southwest Volunteer Board, founded in 1993, has raised nearly \$2 million through the private sector to erect three timeless monuments to El Paso's rich history, with a fourth monument on its way:

- **Fray Garcia de San Francisco**, founder of the first mission at Paso del Norte in 1659, is located in Pioneer Plaza Downtown and with a maquette in front of the Misión of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Juárez.

- **"The Equestrian,"** symbolizing the first successful colonizing expedition into New Mexico in 1598 and the coming of the horse, is located at the El Paso International Airport.

- **Susan Magoffin**, the first Anglo woman to travel the Santa Fe Trail in 1846, is located at Keystone Heritage Park.

- **Benito Juárez, from Child to Man**, remembering the great Mexican president (and Zapotec Indian) who lived at Paso del Norte in 1865 during the French Intervention, and for whom Ciudad Juárez is named — is to be located at the Chamizal National Memorial once the remaining \$150,000 is raised.

Since the first contract was signed between El Paso Mayor William Tilney and sculptor John Houser on Nov. 24, 1992, XII Travelers' goal is not to commemorate single individuals as most memorials do, but to recognize that history contains its own dynamic above and beyond the power of men and women, who modify the focus of what was set in motion.

In 1993, a city-appointed XII Travelers review committee recommended Mexican-born Don Juan de Oñate, whose wife was the great-granddaughter of Moctezuma, as the second monument. They decided that the Oñate colonizing expedition was an essential part of the development of the American Southwest, and the beginning of the rich co-mingling of the indigenous and Hispanic cultures we know today. In addition to bringing families, the expedition brought 170 men, 120 soldiers, and 1,700 animals, ranging from oxen, cattle, sheep and goats, along with the Spanish language, Catholicism, European musical instruments, fruit tree cuttings and mining equipment. This expedition introduced the horse to North America and especially to the Native Americans.

Because of concerns by the artist and the XII Travelers historian, Nick Houser, that the figure might be too controversial and result in vandalism, the base for "The Equestrian" was built extraordinarily high.

Sculptors John and Ethan Houser spent six years in a Mexico City enlarging studio (1998-2004). They



"The Equestrian" statue greets people near the El Paso International Airport. EL PASO TIMES FILE

shipped over 300 molds to Shidoni Foundry in Tesuque, New Mexico, which were cast into bronze. The monument pieces were assembled into large sections at Eagle Bronze Foundry in Lander, Wyoming, over a four-month period, then the sections were shipped to a hangar at the El Paso International Airport. The whole monument was assembled on site by Eagle Bronze in spring 2007.

On April 21, 2007, "The Equestrian" (the name was changed from Don Juan de Oñate because of the controversy) was dedicated, with The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, distinguished international guests, and members of the Acoma Pueblo, peacefully protesting with rhythmic tom-toms, in attendance.

The monument brought widespread acclaim as the largest — and most magnificent — equestrian monument in the world at 36 feet tall on an 8-foot base weighing 16 tons.

Since that dedication day, it has received international news coverage and has been admired by hundreds of thousands of visitors arriving at the El Paso International Airport.

El Paso has the richest crossroads of history in the entire United States.

It is the mission of the XII Travelers Memorial of the Southwest to communicate and promote this history.

We look forward to adding monuments that will tell a broader and deeper story and will oppose any effort to deface or tear any one of them down.

*Kenna Ramirez is president of the XII Travelers Memorial of the Southwest.*