

Superintendent: We need to fight COVID learning loss

By Joe Gonzales Superintendent, Burnham Wood
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The COVID-19 pandemic has hit our region hard. While much of our attention has rightly focused on reducing the spread of the disease and responding to the economic needs of businesses and affected families, we also need to be thinking about the “long tail” of the shutdowns going forward. That includes our children – how the pandemic will affect student learning and educational attainment and what actions we can take now to quickly reverse the damage.

Studies suggest that the shift to online schooling has cost students several months, and possibly up to a year and a half, in lost learning. Locally, El Paso school districts report decreases in attendance this past year, and more students are receiving failing grades. This risks undermining the progress many local school districts have made on state STAAR exams in recent years.

Fortunately, organizations like CREEED are stepping up to expand the number of high-performing seats in the region and raise the level of educational attainment for all El Paso students. Thanks to CREEED’s support, Burnham Wood will soon break ground on a new wing of our Linguistic Academy of El Paso, which offers Pre-K through 5th grade students an innovative dual-language immersion curriculum in languages, including Spanish, French, Mandarin Chinese and Russian, along with English.



As a public charter school, Burnham Wood is open to all students in the region. Our students’ success demonstrates that El Paso youth can learn and perform to a high standard when high expectations are paired with a learning environment that meets their needs. In 2019, we were proud to be recognized as one of the top-performing schools in the region based on the number of students who passed both STAAR reading and math tests.

Of course, not one type of public school can meet the needs of every student. Parents should choose a public school that works for their child. But it is also important, especially in the wake of the pandemic, that we make high-quality education available to as many El Paso students as possible.



Even during the pandemic, demand at Burnham Wood Public Charter Schools has outpaced capacity, especially at our Linguistic Academy. This comes at a time when connecting students with high-quality education has never been more critical. Without quick intervention, the impacts of a year of stalled learning could snowball, resulting in fewer college graduates, lower lifetime earning potentials, and a smaller pool of workers qualified for high-skilled jobs in the area.

One way to increase the number of high-quality seats in the region is to build new ones based on a pedagogy that we know works. Thanks to CREEED's grant, we will be able to more than double enrollment at the Linguistics Academy. As a result, we are well on our way to an even greater growth plan by the 2024-25 school year.

By that time, we hope COVID-19 is far behind us, and that El Paso students are again thriving in high-performing classrooms across the region. Every student deserves a high-quality education no matter where they go to school.

Joe Gonzales is the superintendent of Burnham Wood Charter Schools, which operates four campuses in El Paso. It recently received a \$150,000 grant from the Council on Regional Economic Expansion and Educational Development, or CREEED.



