



Oppose SB 893 / HB 2543

Relating to public school teacher performance appraisals, continuing education, professional development, career advancement, and compensation

April 7, 2015

Senate Bill 893 by Sen. Kel Seliger (R-Amarillo) and House Bill 2543 by Rep. Marsha Farney (R-Georgetown) amend state laws pertaining to teacher appraisals, compensation, and professional development. The Texas Senate has passed SB 893, and the Texas House is currently considering HB 2543. **ATPE recommends that educators call and/or email their state representatives and urge them to oppose SB 893 and HB 2543.**

Quick points about SB 893 and HB 2543:

- In their current form, SB 893 and HB 2543 would eliminate the minimum salary schedule for teachers and compel districts to evaluate and compensate teachers on the basis of overly prescriptive criteria and potentially unreliable data, such as value-added models of student growth based on students' standardized test scores.
- ATPE members want appraisals that provide timely and meaningful feedback based on multiple, observable, *proven* measures of performance. Teachers do not need or want a checklist-style appraisal system tied to STAAR testing that diminishes the role of observations and the work that teachers actually do inside the classroom every day.
- There is no justification for eliminating the minimum salary schedule and replacing it with a structure that relies too heavily on students' ability to perform well on standardized tests rather than locally adopted criteria. These bills will devastate teacher morale and almost certainly lead to a reduction in most teachers' salaries.
- If passed, these bills are more likely to reduce local control over personnel matters, including decisions about teacher appraisals and compensation by tying them to state-mandated criteria.

Additional information regarding SB 893 and HB 2543:

SB 893 and HB 2543 call for eliminating the minimum salary schedule for teachers and in reality will do nothing to help districts pay higher salaries to their teachers. The state minimum salary schedule gives districts ample flexibility under existing law to pay higher salaries, create strategic compensation plans, and differentiate teacher pay above the state minimums based on local criteria. Almost all school districts in Texas already pay above the state minimum salaries required for the first twenty years of a teacher's career, mainly because those minimums are lower than national averages and amounts typically paid to teachers by other states. Within the confines of existing law, districts have successfully implemented strategic salary plans that pay teachers more than the state minimums and differentiate their pay according to numerous factors of each district's own choosing through local control.

By eliminating the minimum salary schedule, the only real “flexibility” that SB 893 and HB 2543 would give districts is the ability to pay teachers less, not more. Paying teachers below the amounts delineated in the state minimum salary schedule will produce compensation that is far below market value, which would do a tremendous disservice to the education profession and hinder efforts to recruit great teachers in the future. The minimum salary schedule is a teacher retention driver that encourages valuable educators to remain in the classroom and choose education as a career, rather than a temporary job. Eliminating teachers’ minimum salary schedule will only hurt the morale of current and future classroom teachers and send a message that longevity in the school system doesn’t matter. Considering that an estimated 50 percent of teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching, eliminating the minimum salary schedule and opening the door to lower salaries is the wrong approach to improving teaching.

SB 893 and HB 2543 promote tying student test scores to teacher compensation. We don’t tie doctors’ compensation directly to patient survival rates because we want the best doctors to help hard-to-treat patients. We shouldn’t tie teachers’ pay to student performance because we want educators to teach all students – even the ones most likely to fail the test.

HB 2543 and SB 893 are too heavily focused on objective measures of student performance and tying appraisals to students’ scores on standardized tests, which are an unfair and inaccurate measure of educator effectiveness. Teachers repeatedly tell us that they want to be observed in action and given frequent, timely feedback about their instructional skills and any areas in which they might improve. In other words, appraisals should use multiple measures to assess the performance of the teachers in the classroom – not simply how well their students score on standardized tests given once a year. Parents and advocates increasingly question the effectiveness of standardized tests at measuring student performance; even test developers have acknowledged such tests were not designed to measure educator performance or effectiveness.

In their current form, SB 893 and HB 2543 will encourage school districts to employ overly simplistic, formulaic, and “objective” criteria for evaluating, compensating, and promoting educators. These include the use of value-added modeling (VAM) systems that attempt to isolate the effect of individual teachers on students’ test scores. VAM utilizes “black box” formulas that are difficult to understand and provide little meaningful feedback to teachers. Research points to VAM as an unreliable measure, which at the classroom level is highly vulnerable to false positives or negatives about a teacher’s effectiveness and cannot control for factors beyond a teacher’s influence.

SB 893 and HB 2543 impose a state-developed framework for personnel actions that diminishes local control. State law should preserve local control and encourage districts to focus on classroom observations and giving ongoing feedback to teachers rather than adhering to rigid state-imposed frameworks and making high-stakes employment decisions based on student test scores or questionable statistical formulas.

ATPE respectfully urges legislators to oppose SB 893 and HB 2543.

Call or email your legislator today about these bills, which are pending before the Texas House. Visit ATPE's advocacy website, TeachtheVote.org, to find out who represents you, obtain their contact information, and read more about these and other major bills. When you contact your representative, don't forget to identify yourself as a constituent, an educator, and an ATPE member. Most of all, be sure to be respectful and professional.