



Input to the Senate Education Committee Regarding Teacher Workforce Issues

October 12, 2020

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) offers the following input to the Senate Education Committee regarding its interim charge on teacher workforce issues.

Specifically, the committee is charged with examining best practice models to recruit, prepare, and retain highly effective teachers, focusing on methods to train and prepare educators for teaching through virtual, in-person, or a blend of methods.

Recruitment and retention for any profession are impacted by both practitioner and societal perceptions of the prestige, pay, and purpose of the profession. Educators have long been drawn to teaching by the sense of purpose associated with the profession, but purpose alone is not enough to recruit and retain sufficient top-tier candidates. The Legislature can and should continually seek to enact policies to enhance the prestige and pay associated with being a Texas professional educator. Of the two, pay is perhaps the easiest for legislators to impact most directly.

ATPE has long supported increasing educator compensation to elevate the teaching profession. In peer nations with top-tier education systems, educators are viewed as highly trained and critically needed professionals, on par with their peers in business, law, and medicine. Compensation is one important factor in setting this heightened expectation. Higher pay serves to retain experienced educators and attract top-quality candidates to the education field, both of which translate to higher student achievement. Additionally, regular pay raises help keep educator compensation on pace with inflation and rising healthcare costs. To merely keep up with inflation, an annual increase in salary must exceed 2.5%. To change perceptions and improve outcomes, the increases in compensation must be *permanent* and *meaningful*.

One of the key components of last session's House Bill (HB) 3 was funding to increase base compensation for educators through increases to the Minimum Salary Schedule and tying educator compensation rates to increases in school funding through the Basic Allotment, which ATPE supported. Based on feedback ATPE received from our members, the nature and size of compensation increases effected by HB 3 varied from district to district. Some districts, such as Austin ISD, raised teacher salaries between 6% and 7%. ATPE members in other districts reported raises in the 3% range, and some districts offered their teachers stipends or bonus checks in lieu of raises.

ATPE supports a compensation model that includes base salaries equal to or greater than the national average and competitive with private industry. In addition, ATPE supports differentiated pay for educators who undertake advanced certification or training, advanced coursework or degrees, or other professional duties they are required to perform outside normal instructional activities. Additionally, ATPE opposes the use of student performance as the determining factor for a teacher's compensation. Policies that adequately boost minimum salary formulas while also requiring districts to spend a portion of any state funding increases they receive on compensation are one method of achieving these goals. Viewed in that light, HB 3 took

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. It is the leading educators' association in Texas with approximately 100,000 members statewide. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, future, retired, and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for the more than 5 million public schoolchildren of Texas.

substantial steps toward improving teacher pay. At a minimum, **ATPE recommends that the Legislature ensure funding is in place to maintain educator salary increases under HB 3 and encourage districts to distribute any additional funding in the form of permanent raises, which play an important role in attracting and retaining a high-quality educator workforce.** By making sure educators are compensated respectably for the work they do, the Legislature can go a long way toward improving educator retention and student outcomes.

Of course, there is no pay raise that can turn an ineffective teacher into an effective one. In Texas, it is important that we strive to continually improve our educator preparation programs (EPPs) to keep up with a student population that is becoming larger and more challenging to educate. Our state must also do a better job of identifying strong teaching candidates and giving them the support needed to complete their EPP program and be highly effective in their first years of teaching. Efficacy and support from employing school districts, in the form of mentorship and induction programming, will increase the chances that beginning educators are retained in the field, which saves the state and districts money. **ATPE recommends the Legislature fully fund districts' ability to offer mentoring and induction programs and that funds be equitably distributed to ensure adequate resources in high-need districts where beginning teachers may need extra support to teach effectively.**

Since 2017, Texas law has required that mandatory continuing education for teachers and principals include instruction regarding digital learning, digital teaching, and integrating technology into the classroom and curriculum. This training armed teachers with a basic readiness to adapt to the educational delivery models necessitated by COVID-19, but the pandemic has illustrated just how important it is for today's educators to be equipped to utilize technology and facilitate digital learning. The unique school experience of 2020 also highlights the importance of providing quality professional development capable of being tailored to suit individual educators' needs and the evolving education landscape. **ATPE recommends the Legislature fund continuing professional education initiatives and maintain the freedom for educators to choose the professional development programs that will help them continue growing throughout their careers.** Whether offered through their district, campus, or from an approved third-party provider, continuing professional education must be capable of being tailored to individual educators' needs and the evolving education landscape, especially considering all the changes wrought by COVID-19 this year.

Over the past decade, there has been a nationwide decline in EPP enrollment and completion. Contrary to this trend, a 2019 report from the Center for American Progress, an independent, nonpartisan policy institute, showed that in Texas, more aspiring teachers are enrolling in EPPs due to Texas policymakers' expansion of the alternative certification route. Unfortunately, the increase in enrollment was not met with a matched increase in completion. While enrollment in Texas EPPs increased, completion declined more than 15% during the 2010–2018 period.

Texas has incubated the for-profit, alternative certification pathway to teaching even though this route is associated with a lower five-year retention rate (58.6%) than that of traditional, undergraduate EPPs (70.1%), according to the Texas Education Agency. Although alternative certification is now the most common route to the classroom in Texas, it appears to be less effective, on average, at training teachers as compared to the traditional certification pathway. A 2014 study by the National Council on Teacher Quality found that virtually all Texas alternative certification programs received failing grades, as determined by standards of effectiveness within the study. A 2016 study by Vanderbilt University found alternative certification is tied to higher teacher turnover. This may be attributed to alternative certification programs' emphasis on online coursework and fewer high-quality clinical teaching experiences that combine in-person teaching with a rigorous feedback and coaching cycle. Research has consistently shown that virtual programs are a poor substitute for in-person learning and experience.

Recent data have shown that men, Black educators, and older individuals are more likely to go through alternative certification programs. In 2018-19, 29.5% of those certified through an alternative route were male, compared to 17% in the traditional undergraduate route. The same year, Black educators were 3.5 times more likely to go through an alternative certification route than through an undergraduate EPP, and newly certified educators in alternative certification programs had a median age of 30 compared to the median age in undergraduate EPPs of 23. Alternative certification programs often cite the higher enrollment rate of diverse candidates as a justification for supporting their non-traditional preparation model. However, the disappointing performance of the alternative programs and the higher turnover rates of teachers who become certified through this route make it clear that too many candidates are not receiving a good return on their investment. A better approach would be for the state to remove barriers to entrance into high-quality EPP programs. **ATPE recommends that the state provide targeted tuition assistance for enrollment in high-quality EPPs and work on promoting the teaching profession to top-tier students of color in secondary and early post-secondary education settings.**

Texas policymakers must ensure new teachers are prepared to face the rigors of the classroom, whether they have chosen a traditional route to teaching or an alternative route, in which much of the training takes place online. Although the Accountability System for Educator Preparation Programs helps to identify programs that need to improve, there are other things the Legislature can do to improve teacher success and retention in Texas. **ATPE recommends that the state work toward ensuring EPPs engage candidates in high-quality clinical teaching experiences, reducing the financial burden of attending a higher-quality undergraduate EPP, and enhancing and supporting grow-your-own initiatives to bring high school students and paraprofessionals into the profession.**

ATPE appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback during this process and invites Senate Education Committee members and their staff to contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org for any additional information.