



Input to the Senate Education Committee

May 24, 2022

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) offers the following input to the Senate Education Committee regarding interim monitoring charges and the COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on the Educator Talent Pipeline.

High-quality educators are the most important factor in student achievement. Recruiting, training, and retaining high-quality educators is therefore a key prerequisite to addressing student learning loss resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, educators in Texas and elsewhere are leaving the profession at alarming rates. ATPE is actively polling members on this topic, and since March 24, 2022, more than 400 educators have responded¹ to an ATPE survey asking why educators are leaving. The responses largely fall under four main categories.

WORKLOAD: Teachers feel they are expected to perform more duties than ever outside of the primary responsibility of classroom instruction. These include extra reports, filling in for staff vacancies, reviewing curriculum to comply with statutory changes, completing **Reading Academies required by HB 3 (86R)**, and performing **accelerated instruction required by HB 4545 (87R)**. The latter two are mentioned frequently by educators who report being expected to spend more time working outside of normal school hours without additional compensation.

ATPE separately surveyed members regarding the Reading Academies² and compiled 975 educators' responses from December 2021. A majority found the training had value, but that the value was decreased by the one-size-fits-all nature of the training. Additionally, educators cited Reading Academies as a key factor driving burnout, with 48% reporting the training took longer than 120 hours to complete and 58% reporting they were not paid for their time.

COMPENSATION: In addition to a general perception of being inadequately compensated for their professional expertise and responsibilities, educators report feeling uncompensated for the extra work required of them, which increased even more with the COVID-19 pandemic. Although educators appreciate the overall increases to compensation from **HB 3 (86R)**, those increases have varied by district and largely not kept pace with inflation. Combined with increases in the cost of healthcare, educators have felt a decline in effective compensation. Despite its promises, the **Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA)** has benefitted an extremely small minority of educators³ and has added to anxiety over the increasing weight placed upon student test scores. Educators report seeing colleagues leave the profession for better paying jobs that require less work. Districts that are unable to compete with the market pressure on compensation will continue to be at a competitive disadvantage recruiting talent. According to state-level data cited by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the lack of salary competitiveness with industries that have similar educational requirements is a top factor decreasing the number of post-secondary students entering the educator preparation pipeline.

CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE: Educators report that the pandemic has had a negative impact on many students' ability to positively participate in a classroom setting. The additional time educators currently need to spend on classroom management and student acquisition or reacquisition of soft skills, the less time they have available to devote to academic instruction.

DISCONNECTION: Educators report feeling increasingly misunderstood by policymakers who are often disconnected from the realities of the diverse classrooms across our state. Educators report losing trust in state leaders and feeling frustrated by mandates that seem out of touch with the needs of teachers and students. For example, one respondent described the compounding mandates as "salt in the wound" and an insult to educators' professionalism.

The above factors contribute to attrition among current teachers, including veteran educators who are likely to have the greatest impact on student learning. These same factors pose challenges to recruiting and retaining new teaching talent. **New teachers are far more likely to leave the profession, especially if they arrive in the classroom ill-prepared to teach.**

Forty percent of new teachers enter the classroom on an Intern Certificate before their preparation is complete. This cart-before-the-horse training sets candidates up for failure. More than half of all Texas teachers are certified through alternative certification programs that result in higher attrition rates than traditional four-year programs, according to TEA⁴ data. Alternative programs have historically offered an expedited path to the classroom at the expense of training time and supports. This trade-off recently manifested in the state's largest provider facing sanctions⁵ and the potential loss of accreditation over complaints that its candidates were left poorly trained and without the support necessary to succeed as teachers.

ATPE believes the solution to inadequate preparation is not to place additional financial and logistical hurdles on educator candidates, such as a burdensome new certification exam that for most would be administered well after entering a classroom. Instead, **the state should create policies to improve the quality of teacher preparation by strengthening programmatic supports**, including enhanced field supervision, mentoring, and a portfolio framework that provides evidence of a candidate's readiness to teach *before* they enter the classroom.

ATPE appreciates this opportunity to provide feedback. Please contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org for any additional information.

1. Let Us Teach: ATPE Members Provide Input to Teacher Vacancy Task Force. <https://atpe.org/let-us-teach>
2. "'Too much.' Teachers weigh in on HB 3 Reading Academies requirement." Teach the Vote. January 13, 2022. <https://teachthevote.atpe.org/Our-Blog/Latest-Posts/Too-much-%E2%80%9D-Teachers-weigh-in-on-HB-3-Reading-Acade>
3. "Merit pay program for Texas teachers pushes salaries past \$100,000. But is it fair?" Houston Chronicle. May 5, 2022. <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/texas/article/Merit-pay-program-for-Texas-teachers-pushes-17152307.php>
4. Teacher Retention by Preparation Route 2015-2016 through 2020-21. Texas Education Agency. <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/teacher-retention-by-preparation-route-2022.pdf>
5. "Too big to fail? Texas' largest teacher prep program riddled with problems, state finds." Dallas Morning News. April 20, 2022. <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2022/04/20/too-big-to-fail-texas-largest-teacher-prep-program-riddled-with-problems-state-finds/>

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.