



# ATPE Input to Public Education Committee

Regarding Teacher Certification

August 13, 2024

The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** appreciates this opportunity to offer written input to the House Committee on Public Education concerning the interim charge on teacher certification, which asks the committee to:

*“Examine the causes for and the impact to student outcomes of the increasing number of newly hired Texas teachers who are not certified by the State Board for Educator Certification. Make recommendations to enhance opportunities for uncertified teachers to become certified and strengthen parental rights and notifications.”*

Texas Education Agency (TEA) data show **a historically high 34% of new teachers hired in the 2023-24 school year were uncertified**. Houston ISD alone, under the control of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and its appointed superintendent and board of managers, hired 839 uncertified teachers in the 2023-24 school year. The hiring of uncertified teachers has severe negative impacts on academic achievement, staff turnover, and student safety.

- **Academic Achievement:** TEA officials have long acknowledged—and research supports—that high quality educators are the single most important in school factor in student success, and they have warned about the problems associated with uncertified educators. According to research by Texas Tech University, Texas students with new uncertified teachers lost the equivalent of four months of learning in reading and three months of learning in math.
- **Staff Turnover:** Agency statistics show roughly a quarter of uncertified teachers will quit within their first year, compared to just 8% of teachers certified through traditional undergraduate programs. Just 39% of uncertified teachers remain in the classroom by year five, compared to nearly two-thirds of traditionally certified teachers. Higher turnover costs districts more money in the long run and creates additional obstacles to student achievement by introducing disruptions and instability into the learning experience.
- **Student Safety:** Each teaching certificate is a permanent record of an individual educator’s professional conduct and tracks their work history from one district to the next. Certified teachers may face flags, sanctions, or loss of their certificate for inappropriate behavior. The agency has no similar method for tracking uncertified teachers.

Certification guarantees a baseline level of preparation and pedagogy skills as well as a means to track and enforce professional behavior and ethics. Yet teacher certification remains among the agency’s most widely granted exemptions under the Districts of Innovation (DOI) law. Schools often resort to hiring uncertified teachers as a stopgap staffing measure when they are unable or unwilling to pay the market price for a certified teacher. Schools also hire uncertified teachers for career and technical education (CTE) courses where an individual may bring significant industry-related experience but lack formal teacher training.

Private schools and charter schools are allowed to hire uncertified teachers without any form of parental notification. By contrast, public independent school districts are generally prohibited from hiring uncertified teachers. In the rare instances in which a public school is permitted to hire an uncertified teacher, the school is required to notify the parents of each child affected. Yet most DOI districts that exempt themselves from certification also exempt themselves from these parental notification requirements.

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*The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. It is the largest educator association in Texas and one of the largest independent, nonunion educator associations in the United States. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, future, retired and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for more than 5 million public schoolchildren.*

**Students simply cannot be expected to make the desired academic gains while hamstrung by untrained, underprepared, and under-supported teachers.** In order to better serve students, ATPE makes the following recommendations:

- 1. Amend the Districts of Innovation law under Chapter 12A, Texas Education Code (TEC), to limit permissible certification exemptions to educators teaching CTE courses.** Non-DOI school districts may already request certification waivers from the agency to address extenuating circumstances, such as severe and unexpected personnel shortages. These waivers are generally narrowly tailored and time-limited in order to minimize the negative impact on students. Limiting DOI certification waivers to CTE courses would ensure students retain access to valuable industry experience without subjecting them to the harms of general waivers from certification requirements, particularly involving core academic subjects.
- 2. Amend Chapter 12A, TEC, to prohibit Districts of Innovation from exempting the requirement to notify parents when a student is subject to an uncertified teacher.** Parents are the ultimate decisionmakers when it comes their child's education and must be provided the information to be informed partners in the educational journey. There is no valid justification for waiving parental notification requirements.
- 3. Instruct TEA staff to terminate all initiatives to adopt edTPA as a certification exam** and focus instead on collaborating with stakeholders to revise the pedagogy and professional responsibilities (PPR) exam. Despite being rejected by the State Board of Education (SBOE) in 2022, TEA staff continue to pursue efforts to implement edTPA as a replacement for the PPR certification exam. A significant number of states that have adopted edTPA as a certification exam have since reversed course. Many cited reductions in the teacher pipeline as edTPA contributed to burnout, inequities, and financial barriers to educator candidates' successful completion of the certification process.
- 4. Establish a grant program to assist uncertified teachers in earning their certification within three years.** Alternative certification routes provide an expedited pathway for educator candidates who did not complete a traditional undergraduate teaching program. Retention among alternatively certified teachers is not as high as traditionally certified teachers but significantly better than the uncertified population.
- 5. Convene a commission to study increasing the quality of educator preparation programs.** Educator preparation is a complex issue. Under the current regulatory framework, the methodology and quality of educator preparation programs in Texas varies widely. There is much knowledge to be gleaned from national and international peers as well as scholarly research that policymakers could use to improve the statutory and administrative framework around teacher preparation here at home.

While it is important that Texas both does a better job of attracting more high-quality candidates into the teacher pipeline and providing those candidates with higher minimum preparation standards, it would be extremely inefficient to not also recognize and address the impact of relatively high attrition rates, even among newer certified educators. Texas has a significant number of certified educators, not of retirement age, who have simply left the profession. In addition to inconsistent educator preparation standards, this is largely due to insufficient increases in pay beyond the entering salary and poor working conditions. Addressing these problems will make the task of providing enough newly certified teachers to staff Texas classrooms infinitely more achievable. Having to prepare three-plus educators for every two that stay in the classroom is inefficient and does not set schools, or the students they serve, up for success.

Under the current framework, students across Texas are consigned to struggle under an exponentially increasing number of uncertified educators while parents are left in the dark. ATPE urges the committee to consider these recommendations and looks forward to working together to better serve the students of Texas. For additional information, contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or [government@atpe.org](mailto:government@atpe.org).