

ATPE Testimony on Teacher Compensation

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) is an independent professional association representing more than 100,000 educators across Texas. ATPE members include teachers, administrators, school bus drivers, educational aides, cafeteria workers, and other public employees involved in educating Texas schoolchildren. Our member-owned, member-governed structure results in advocacy based on what our members share is working within their classrooms and schools. Recognizing that teacher pay is far below the wage deserving of the difficult and critical work performed, the following are key components to consider when developing compensation plans.

1. **Compensation plans should be funded and sustainable.** Plans that are not funded from the beginning and then well into the future are ineffective, because (1) they fail to exist or be effective at impacting change, and (2) participant buy-in languishes with regard to both the current plan and all future compensation plans.
2. **Compensation plans should be built from an adequate base with meaningful steps.** ATPE members support maintaining and improving the minimum salary schedule, which provides a cost-of-living adjustment for many educators; protects teachers whose districts are forced to pay at or near minimums from receiving a disturbingly low wage; fosters retention by recognizing that experience impacts student success; and provides for differentiated pay above the base. Those steps and any additional differentiation built into compensation plans should reflect research that shows limited dollar amounts lead to limited impact, but more meaningful steps can influence behavior.
3. **Compensation plans should be based on valid data and a meaningful picture of teaching.** A teacher is far more than the scores of one's students on standardized tests.¹ Compensation plans should be based on a number of other factors, such as training and credentials, professional growth opportunities, leading a classroom at a struggling school, more meaningful examples of student performance, or teaching in a hard-to-staff subject area.
4. **Compensation plans should be transparent with buy-in from local educators.** Plans are more effective when local educators support and trust them. Transparency can also serve to help teachers improve their craft. If a plan is transparent and built on a model representing a meaningful picture of an educator, it can offer feedback to teachers on where their practice can improve.
5. **Compensation plans should be locally developed with participant involvement in their creation and revision.** Texas is a vast and diverse state that cannot be looked at with a one-size-fits-all approach. Local campuses or districts must decide what works best for them. The input of on-the-ground educators working within the respective classrooms of a campus or district is crucial to developing a plan that is effective, reflective of the local environment, and flexible.
6. **Compensation plans should consider alignment with aspects of the entire teaching pipeline.** Working conditions are another highly reported cause of attrition. Efforts to support teachers once they are no longer novice, offer more time in the day for teachers to plan and prepare lessons, and even enhance building conditions or access to supplies can have an impact on retaining and recruiting our best teachers. Preparing teachers adequately before they enter the classroom and enhancing non-salary compensation benefits can have the same impact.

¹ See attachment for more regarding ATPE's concerns with using standardized tests and value-added measurement to determine teacher compensation or success.

Will VAM work?

6 concerns about the use of Value-Added Models (VAM)

- 1. VAM is less reliable at the individual teacher or classroom level.** While VAM measurements conducted at the campus level or higher provide a more holistic snapshot of a school's success, VAM calculations at the classroom level are more vulnerable to false positive or negative conclusions about an individual teacher's effectiveness.
- 2. VAM calculations rely on students' standardized tests scores.** This makes them applicable only to teachers of certain tested subjects and grade levels. It also necessitates multiple years' worth of test data for each student and low mobility rates.
- 3. VAM requires random classroom assignments to be most effective.** Students are rarely assigned to teachers randomly.
- 4. Countless factors outside a teacher's control impact student success.** VAM typically ignores home or school influences such as school facilities, resources and policies.
- 5. VAM formulas are often kept under lock and key.** Successful VAM methods rely on sophisticated mathematical calculations and they might use complex statistical models that are kept secret by vendors for proprietary reasons. This makes it difficult for teachers to understand the standards by which they are being judged and skeptical of the measures.
- 6. More study is needed.** There is still insufficient research to validate the accuracy of relatively new VAM methods.

