



Opposition to SB 1590

Regarding virtual observations of educator certification candidates

April 13, 2021

The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** offers the following input in opposition to **Senate Bill (SB) 1590** by Sen. Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston).

ATPE appreciates efforts to improve the educator preparation process. A rigorous educator preparation process is critical for preparing educators to meet the challenges and responsibilities of running a classroom. Part of that process includes partnering each candidate for educator certification with an experienced educator who has been trained as a field supervisor. By conducting in-person observations of the candidate's required field-based classroom training, the field supervisor provides the candidate with critical feedback and coaching based upon these observations.

Academic research has long shown that regular in-person observation provides high-quality feedback and improves rigor in the educator preparation process. For that reason, ATPE has advocated that observations should be required to be conducted in-person to the greatest practicable extent. Any exceptions should address a specific need and be limited in both scope and time.

In response to the temporary transition to remote learning necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic last year, the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC), under Section 228.1 of the Texas Administrative Code, allowed for virtual observations to take the place of traditional, in-person observations during the 2020-21 academic year. This specific and time-limited exemption was an appropriate response to conditions that rendered in-person observations temporarily unsafe or not allowed under local restrictions on in-person gatherings. This exemption is no longer needed after the return to safe, in-person learning.

Instead of a temporary exemption, SB 1590 would direct SBEC to *permanently* adopt "options for candidate observations to occur in virtual settings that are equivalent in rigor to in-person options for observation." It is well known in the education field that meaningful and effective observations include careful analysis of student-teacher interactions, which can be nearly impossible to assess from a screen. Furthermore, neither the code nor statutes offer a definition of "rigor" that may be used as a guide to implement SB 1590.

Without limits on the circumstances under which virtual observations may be substituted for in-person observations, there is nothing to prevent an educator preparation program (EPP) from conducting all of the required field-based observations virtually. Many programs could be expected to make such a transition, even if for no other reason than to reduce costs.

By allowing EPPs to rely solely on virtual observations, SB 1590 would reduce rigor and leave educator candidates less prepared to deliver critical instructional content to students in an in-person classroom environment. This would be a disservice both to future educators and their eventual students. Therefore, **we respectfully urge members to OPPOSE SB 1590**. For additional information, contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org.

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 5 million public schoolchildren. ATPE is the ally and the voice of Texas public school educators.