



# Input on Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Regarding the impact of new legislation on the teacher pipeline

**June 1, 2026**

The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** offers the following input regarding progress on teacher recruitment and retention following the 89<sup>th</sup> legislative session:

We want to thank Chairman Buckley and the members of the committee for their hard work last session in addressing this urgent and complex issue. As the Teacher Vacancy Task Force highlighted in early 2023, high-quality preparation has a major impact on the efficacy of a teacher in the classroom. There were many positive strides made last session toward strengthening the teacher pipeline. That said, there is still a long way to go in order to make the profession an attractive option for young people entering the workforce.

## **PREP Allotment**

The state's recent investment in educator preparation through the PREP allotment is a strong and important first step toward improving teacher retention. The program was designed to strengthen teacher recruitment by reducing the financial and structural barriers often preventing aspiring educators from entering the profession. Through funding provided to school districts and educator preparation programs, the allotment was intended to support candidates with stipends, tuition assistance, and paid clinical experiences while they complete training. The additional funds were also used as certification incentive payments to districts to help solve the problem of uncertified educators teaching core content subjects in Texas.

We have not yet seen numbers on how many districts are ensuring their uncertified teachers obtain certification, but we have seen urgency from districts to use these funds and help uncertified educators achieve certification and remain in the classroom. The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) also recently passed rule revisions aimed at complying with HB 2, including revisions to 19 TAC Ch. 227, 228, and 230. Those rules are slated for discussion and potential approval at the June State Board of Education (SBOE) meeting.

One important concern has arisen: How is progress in teacher recruitment and retention being measured, particularly following the recent SBEC rulemaking process? Recent changes expanding who qualifies for intern certificates and extending the length of time candidates may remain on that certificate may artificially improve state-level metrics and provide districts with short-term staffing flexibility, but these changes do not address the underlying issue of fully

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preparing and certifying teachers prior to putting them in charge of student education. Specifically, the agency has broadened eligibility to allow more candidates to serve as teachers of record earlier in their preparation programs and to do so for a longer period before meeting full certification requirements. These changes risk masking the true number of uncertified or underprepared teachers in classrooms by reclassifying them under a different label. While this may make the data appear stronger on paper, it does not ensure students are being taught by fully trained, certified educators. If the goal is to build a stable, high-quality teacher pipeline, attention should be paid to accelerating and broadening high-quality pathways to full certification rather than extending interim status in ways that obscure the scope of this challenge.

As Texas works to strengthen its teacher pipeline, it is important not to place too much emphasis on residency models as the primary solution to recruitment and retention challenges. Residency can provide valuable hands-on experience, but it is only a single aspect of effective educator preparation and is often time-intensive and financially difficult for many candidates, particularly those who cannot afford to work full-time in a classroom with limited compensation. Without greater flexibility and accessibility, these programs may unintentionally narrow, rather than expand, the pool of potential educators. Additionally, residency is largely comparable to an extended student teaching experience—an important component of preparation, but only one aspect of what teachers need before earning full certification. Effective teacher preparation must also include coursework, content knowledge, and pedagogical training that builds a strong foundation for long-term success in the classroom. A balanced approach that supports multiple high-quality pathways to the profession will better meet the diverse needs of future educators and help ensure a stable, well-prepared workforce.

### **Teacher Retention Allotment**

It is still early to fully discuss whether the Teacher Retention Allotment (TRA) will have a long-term positive effect on retention of current educators. However, signs already indicate implementation challenges may be limiting its impact.

ATPE's recent member survey on the TRA showed confusion exists among districts and educators over fund distribution, including continued uncertainty about which educators qualify to receive the funds. The definition of "classroom teacher" has been a cause for some debate. Notably, certain certified educators—such as school librarians, counselors, and certain special education teachers—were excluded from the TRA despite their critical roles in supporting student learning and campus instruction. We have also received reports of unanticipated instances in which TRA raises have replaced rather than supplemented traditional salary increases. In a reality where the working environment for many educators remains challenging or continues to further erode, there is also an important question about whether compensation alone is enough to improve retention. The original Teacher Vacancy Task Force recommendations emphasized not only pay but also workload, mentorship, preparation quality, administrative support, and teacher working conditions. This means that while pay increases, including those tied to the TRA, are seen as a potentially important piece

of the overall solution, they often do not serve as a standalone fix for Texas' broader recruitment and retention issues.

Another specific issue most district-level administrators understand but the majority of educators are still learning is the fact that TRA provides districts with state funding to increase teacher salaries but does not fully cover the total cost of related required expenditures tied to payroll. In practice, when teacher salaries increase, districts incur additional costs for employer-paid contributions, such as contributions to the Teacher Retirement System (TRS). Because these costs are calculated as a percentage of salary, they increase automatically alongside the mandated raises. As a result, the TRA funding can create a gap between the amount of the state allotment and the district's actual financial obligation, forcing districts to use local funds—often a reallocation of budget from other programs—to cover the difference. That amount is reported to be approximately \$400 per teacher. Across an estimated 400,000 teachers statewide, that equates to roughly \$160 million in costs not covered by the state. When spread across approximately 5.4 million students, this represents about \$30 per student in unfunded expenses. This is a difficult additional expense for districts already straining under deficit budgets.

### **Teacher Incentive Allotment**

While we appreciate the Legislature's intent in creating the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) and its goal of encouraging teachers to excel, the program's current structure is producing consequences that undermine the goal of teacher recruitment and retention. Educators, including those who are designated, are sensitive to the fact that TIA does not provide an equitable pathway for all teachers to qualify. Many are excluded based on the course they teach, the population they serve, or the limitations of standardized growth measures. This is particularly harmful for educators who choose to work with at-risk students or students with disabilities, whose progress is often not accurately reflected in traditional assessments. In a recent ATPE survey, only one-third of TIA-designated respondents and 12% of undesignated respondents say TIA is a fair way to identify and reward educators, compared with over half of TIA-designated respondents and over 70% of undesignated respondents who say the program it is not. Similarly, less than a third of designated respondents and only 12% of undesignated respondents say that TIA effectively rewards educators for the quality of their work, while 50% of designated respondents and 68% of undesignated respondents say it does not. As one ATPE member stated, the program feels like "all hoops, with little reward," a sentiment shared across the feedback we received. Our members broadly and consistently raised concerns about fairness, evaluator consistency, and the exclusion of essential staff such as paraprofessionals. Our members also report that some districts, including Houston ISD, are retaining a portion or even all of the TIA funds earned by teachers, which is fundamentally unfair to the staff working hard to meet the TIA requirements. Teachers receiving the allotment value the extra pay even if they are not fully satisfied with the program as a whole, which underscores the importance of expanding the program to more fairly include all educators, including those who do not teach core subjects and those who work with special populations. **ATPE recommends the state develop a more inclusive and transparent TIA**

**model that ensures the program fulfills its intended purpose and strengthens rather than strains the teacher workforce.**

**Finally, in looking at educator compensation, ATPE recommends the 90th Legislature enact a educator retention stipend specifically designed to discourage mid-year departures.** When educators leave mid-school year, students experience significant disruption to their learning environment, often with a revolving door of substitutes or uncertified placeholders taking the place of a permanent trained educator. This negatively affects academic progress, classroom stability, and overall student performance. A targeted retention stipend would provide a meaningful incentive for teachers to remain in their positions through the end of the academic year, ensuring continuity of instruction and consistent, high-quality teaching for students. Structuring this stipend for payout to educators who work through their final contract day each year would allow districts to reward commitment to completing the full school year while avoiding practices that either tie incentives to contract renewals or simply reaching the 90-day mark tied to receiving service credit for the year. This approach, which supports the overall goal of teacher retention and student academic success, would address both address a major parental complaint and benefit teachers in a way that preserves personal and professional autonomy.

### **Student Discipline Policy**

While HB 6, which addresses student discipline, was designed to improve classroom safety and reduce negative classroom behavior, many teachers report its impact has not been strongly felt at the classroom level. A likely key reason is that much of the bill's implementation is directed at the administrative level—such as disciplinary placement procedures, documentation requirements, and district-level decision making—rather than direct classroom supports for teachers. As a result, the changes have had the most impact on campus and district leadership rather than day-to-day classroom culture. In addition, many of our teacher members report limited awareness of the bill itself, suggesting communication and training on the bill's provisions are not reaching classroom teachers and staff. While HB 6 is a great first step, and ATPE proudly supported the bill, more work is needed to ensure that classroom teachers feel supported and empowered to maintain a safe, nondisruptive classroom environment for their students.

### **Increased Tensions**

Teachers across Texas increasingly find themselves working in a highly politicized environment where public debates over curriculum, school policy, and student behavior often spill into overall perceptions of their work, their effectiveness, and their intentions. The heightened attention and discourse over recent years have contributed to the sense that educators are under constant scrutiny, which affects morale and makes recruitment and retention more difficult. Recent controversies, political debates over school issues, and reactions to sensitive events—including the assassination of Charlie Kirk and student-led immigration protests across the state—have further cast aspersions on teachers. Having state leaders, including the governor and attorney general, openly blame educators for events such

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as student protests, which teachers neither planned nor had the ability to control, is demoralizing. This rhetoric only further amplifies tensions among educators, families, and policymakers, especially when the majority of teachers themselves are not directly involved in the events at the heart of the commentary.

In addition to the public rhetoric mentioned above, both enacted and proposed legislation, including bills such as Senate Bill 12 and other measures focused on classroom conduct and instructional content, have contributed to increased administrative requirements and public confusion about what actually happens in classrooms. When unconfirmed reports, such as rumors around “furries,” make it into legislation, they effectively confirm what are in actuality unfounded rumors to the public, further creating division, even if that is not the intention. Additionally, when teachers are given conflicting directives, it leaves them confused about which to follow. One recent example of this would be the actual words of SB 12 and conflicting guidance issued by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) early this school year. Even when policies are intended to improve transparency or student outcomes, they can unintentionally create a perception that teachers are frequently at the center of cultural or political disputes, even though most educators do not wish to be professionally involved in these political debates. Over time, this environment makes the profession feel more stressful and teachers feel less supported, further complicating efforts to strengthen the teacher pipeline.

If we are serious about improving the teacher pipeline and strengthening recruitment and retention, we must change the rhetoric used about teachers’ work in the classroom. We must reduce the level of negative discourse surrounding educators and refocus public attention on strengthening a community culture that places high value on education and educators. Teachers are more likely to enter and remain in the profession when they feel respected, trusted, and supported by the communities they serve and the officials who represent them. When public discourse consistently frames educators as part of broader political or cultural conflicts, it can discourage potential candidates from pursuing teaching and contribute to burnout among current staff. A more effective approach is to prioritize policies and messaging that affirm teachers as professionals, highlight successful schools and classrooms, and support constructive collaboration between educators, families, and policymakers. By fostering a more positive and stable environment around public education, the state can better attract new teachers and retain experienced ones who are essential to student success.

As always, ATPE and our members stand ready and excited to work collaboratively with members of this committee to increase educator recruitment and retention. For additional information, contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or [government@atpe.org](mailto:government@atpe.org).