



Written Testimony Submitted *on* Teacher Certifications

Texas House of Representatives Public Education Committee

Submitted by Educate Texas

Honorable Chair Buckley and Members of the House Public Education Committee:

Educate Texas and the undersigned organizations appreciate the opportunity to submit public comment on the House Public Education Committee's interim charge regarding uncertified educators. **The classroom teacher is the most important in-school factor impacting student growth, yet too few Texas students have effective educators.** Increased teacher turnover, especially among under-prepared teachers early in their careers, and an inadequate supply of certified teachers have led districts to increasingly rely on uncertified and underprepared teachers. As the Legislature explores solutions to reduce this reliance, increase the supply of well-prepared teachers, and ultimately improve student outcomes, we urge this Committee to focus on the full continuum of the teaching profession. It is crucial to **prioritize comprehensive policies that support the recruitment, preparation, and retention of high-quality educators** like those found in House Bill 11 and Senate Bill 9 in the 88th Regular Session while avoiding proposals that might diminish the rigor of educator preparation or undermine the professionalism of teaching.

Current Challenges:

- The need for high-quality educators is urgent, with only 53% of students at grade level in reading and 41% in math last school year.¹
- In the 2023-2024 school year, over half of first-time, newly hired teachers were uncertified, with an even higher dependence on uncertified teachers in rural districts.²
- Students taught by new, uncertified teachers lost about four months of learning in reading and three months in math, except in instances where the teacher had prior public school experience as a paraprofessional or substitute.³
- Uncertified teachers leave the profession at three times the rate of other teachers.⁴
- Teacher turnover is expensive, costing school districts \$9,000 to \$21,000 to hire and train a replacement for each teacher who leaves.⁵
- As of 2021, 908 school districts in Texas (88.9% of the total 1,021 school districts) were recognized as Districts of Innovation. Of those, 840 school districts (92.5%) have specifically authorized exemption from teacher certification requirements (TEC §21.003), and 313 (34.5%) of those authorized waiving parental notification of certification status (TEC §21.057).⁶

¹ [Statewide Summary of 2024 STAAR 3-8 Results](#), Texas Education Agency.

² [Employed Teacher Attrition and New Hires 2014-15 through 2023-24](#), Texas Education Agency.

³ [Policy Brief No. 1](#), J. Jacob Kirksey, Ph.D., Texas Tech University, Summer 2024.

⁴ [Teacher Employment, Attrition, and Hiring](#), Texas Education Agency.

⁵ [What's the Cost of Teacher Turnover?](#) Learning Policy Institute, 2017.

⁶ [Texas Classroom Teacher Certification 2022](#), University of Houston, 2022.

To ensure all Texas students have access to high-quality educators, we urge the House Public Education Committee to consider solutions to both demand and supply side issues in the teacher workforce.

Decreasing the Demand for Uncertified Teachers

To reduce the demand for uncertified teachers, the committee should incentivize strategic staffing and hiring, mitigate the impact of District of Innovation policies, and reduce attrition of effective teachers.

**Indicates recommendations supported by the [Teacher Vacancy Task Force](#)*

Challenge	Recommendation
<p>Current staffing models keep our most effective educators from reaching the most students. As workforce needs evolve and student enrollment growth levels off, many districts continue to rely on outdated one-teacher, one-classroom models. These traditional approaches fail to address the diverse needs of both students and educators.⁷</p>	<p>Establish technical assistance and funding to support strategic staffing models to maximize the impact of effective teachers, create career advancement opportunities, and allow for compensation benefits, similar to those proposed in House Bill 11 (88R).*</p>
<p>Flexibilities under the state’s District of Innovation (DOI) policy (House Bill 1842, 84th Texas Legislature, Regular Session) have enabled the rise in employment of uncertified teachers. As a designated DOI, a school district may waive certain Education Code requirements, allowing for the hiring of uncertified educators for any teaching assignment other than bilingual or special education. Except in cases where the uncertified teacher had prior public school experience, students taught by new, uncertified teachers lost about four months of learning in reading and three months in math.</p> <p>Additionally, DOIs often waive the requirement to notify parents when their student is placed in a class with an uncertified teacher.</p>	<p>Create transparency to ensure parents are informed about school district hiring practices by eliminating the option to waive parental notification for uncertified teachers.</p> <p>Consider implementing timelines or conditions around DOI plans to drive school district hiring practices that prioritize more effective educators and emphasize strong recruitment, mentorship, and certification support.</p>

⁷ [Strategic School Staffing Landscape Scan](#). Education First, August 2023.

Challenge (cont.)	Recommendation (cont.)
<p>Even among certified educators, retention rates vary greatly across preparation routes.⁸ Teachers exiting the profession often cite compensation, working conditions, and training as primary drivers for exiting the profession.⁹</p>	<p>Strategically increase compensation for educators through expansion of the Teacher Incentive Allotment to retain the best teachers.*</p> <p>Develop and scale teacher mentorship programs and the Mentor Program Allotment. Offer opportunities and technical assistance to establish and enhance teacher leadership roles.*</p> <p>Improve working conditions with benefits like free pre-kindergarten eligibility for teachers' children and similar reforms proposed in House Bill 11 (88R).</p>

Increasing the Supply of High-Quality Teachers

An insufficient supply of quality teachers is a major barrier to improving student outcomes. Following stagnant STAAR results this year, with roughly half of students meeting grade-level expectations in reading, and even fewer in math, it is imperative that the Committee prioritize policies that expand access to clear, high-quality preparation at multiple entry points leading to certification, and create pathways towards high-quality certification at multiple entry points.

*Indicates recommendations supported by the [Teacher Vacancy Task Force](#)

Challenge	Recommendation
<p>Uncertified teachers constitute a significant portion of the teacher workforce, yet there are few incentives for them to pursue rigorous certification paths.</p> <p>When certification is pursued, teacher candidates often opt for expedited, fully online programs, which frequently fail to adequately prepare them for the complexities of the classroom. This results in educators who are less effective and more likely to leave the profession prematurely.¹⁰</p>	<p>Incentivize rigorous pathways for both current uncertified educators and other teacher candidates to become certified teachers. Prioritize high-quality certification routes, such as residencies, apprenticeships, and grow-your-own models, over fast-track, low-quality programs.*</p> <p>Building off the residency certification already established by the State Board for Educator Certification, support comprehensive, hands-on training through a residency allotment that funds stipends for resident teachers.*</p> <p>Modify the minimum salary schedule to differentiate compensation based on certification status and preparation route to clearly signal the value of rigorous preparation, while also ensuring that all teachers receive additional compensation.*</p>

⁸ [Teacher Retention by Preparation Route 2013-14 through 2022-23](#), Texas Education Agency.

⁹ [Teacher Vacancy Task Force Final Report](#), February 2023.

¹⁰ [Innovations in University-Based Teacher Preparation](#), J. Jacob Kirksey, Ph.D., Texas Tech University, 2022; [Texas Educator Preparation Pathways Study](#), University of Texas College of Education, June 2022.

Challenge (cont.)	Recommendation (cont.)
Teacher candidates face significant financial barriers and time constraints when it comes to completing their certification exams.	Reimburse or waive certification and exam fees to alleviate financial burdens and remove barriers to entering the teaching profession.*
Both school districts and teachers lack access to real-time data on positions and vacancies across the state. The absence of real-time data on hard-to-staff areas makes it difficult to offer targeted incentives for effective teachers and for teachers seeking employment to identify opportunities.	Prioritize data transparency. Collect and analyze recruitment and retention data to inform hiring decisions and ensure clarity regarding the certification route of teachers from various programs.*

To ensure all Texas students have access to high-quality educators, the House Public Education Committee should consider recommendations made above and supported by the undersigned organizations. We urge the Committee to focus on policies that address both demand and supply issues in the teacher workforce, focusing on the development of well-prepared, certified teachers and avoid measures that undermine quality. Implementing these strategies will create a sustainable pipeline of educators equipped to drive student success.

Sincerely,

Ryan Franklin
Senior Director, Policy and Advocacy
Educate Texas



Supporting Organizations:

