



Teacher Shortages Require State Investment in Public Education and Community-Based Solutions

TLEEC Testimony on Interim Charge 1, Submitted to House Committee on Public Education, and House Committee on Higher Education, September 20, 2022

Chairmen and members of the committees,

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of over 20 organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. We advocate at the local, state, and national levels for high-quality teaching, curriculum and instructional practices and bilingual education for emergent bilingual students (English learners), as well as fair funding and enhanced college access and success.

The teacher shortage in Texas is not a new problem. It is a result of long-standing issues in a workforce that has failed to reflect the diversity of Texas students and continues to suffer from systemic underfunding. Before the pandemic, the schools most likely to experience chronic teacher turnover were those that consistently suffered the consequences of racialized inequality. After the pandemic, teacher turnover has affected even the most affluent communities. Increasing the basic allotment and tying it to inflation will give all districts, rich and poor, the resources they need to build a healthy and sustainable work environments because if our teachers feel good about being in the classroom, our students will as well.

Something Clever About Tax Compression

HB 3 was great. It finally gave teachers a little something more than what they had received in a long time. Unfortunately, even in HB 3, the needs of the public education system, especially those of teachers and students, were outweighed by the need for costly tax breaks that ultimately did little toward their intended purpose. 2019's tax cut bill did more to harm teachers, schools, and students over the long term than it is helping in the short term. On top of all that, people's property taxes are as high as ever and still rising. As local governments see their tax rates further compressed, the state's responsibility to public education funding increases. Before any new "tax cut," the working and living conditions for teachers as well as the learning environment for Texas students must be addressed with increased, equity-based funding.

Investing in Local Solutions

The committee can be most effective with increased funding by redoubling its support for "Grow Your Own Teacher" programs in historically marginalized communities. Studies show that failing to retain already qualified and trained staff in the first five years of service is a significant cause of high turnover. With preliminary data showing more mid-career teachers leaving as well, it is critical for the state to

empower schools to harness the labor potential already working with their students. Increasing funding for the Grow Your Own Teacher program will enable districts to harness the teaching potential already in their schools while offering social mobility to the dedicated, yet poorly paid, para-professionals in classrooms across the state.

Creating a Sustainable Work Environment

Giving Texas teachers a better working experience by increasing the basic allotment and paying them as professionals are the first steps to creating a healthier, more effective learning environment for students, especially for those in bilingual and special education classrooms.

Local administrators also need the funds and flexibility to address specific issues their schools are facing, such as providing educators experiencing rapidly rising housing, healthcare and childcare costs, with more targeted assistance.

Districts could use flexible funding to cover training and certification costs to provide relief to overworked teachers and underserved students in bilingual education, special education, science, mathematics, and technology courses. Retaining highly qualified teachers is a complex problem that could be addressed with easy-to-access, flexible grants targeted at districts who need them the most.

Re-instilling Trust in Our Teachers

Autonomy, for any profession, results in higher job satisfaction and lower turnover, but recent escalations of attacks on educators, following years of increasing regulation, exacerbated feelings of powerlessness among an already demonized workforce. A recent Butt Foundation Poll found only a slim 55% majority of teachers feel valued by their school administrators, and even fewer feel valued by Texans overall or elected state officials. Seventeen percent of Texas teachers feel valued by their fellow Texans while a disturbingly low 5% feel valued by state elected officials.

One West Texas middle school teacher, said, “I know what my students need most; I just need time and freedom to analyze data and create effective plans to meet their needs.” It is cost-neutral to trust teachers, and it can have significant benefit on their well-being and willingness to remain in a challenging work environment.

Public school parents and communities trust their teachers to give their children high-quality, effective education. It is time for the state to show that, yes, it does trust its educator workforce by investing them as the professionals who help guide the lives of 5.5 million Texas students.

For questions, please contact TLEEC either through Jaime Puente, at Every Texan (puente@everytexan.org), Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes at IDRA (chloe.sikes@idra.org), or Fátima Menéndez at MALDEF (fmenendez@maldef.org).

References

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- Every Texan & Texas AFT. (2022). The Lost Decade: Texas Schools Are Underfunded & Facing Devastating Staffing Shortages. <https://everytexan.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/The-Lost-Decade-final.pdf>

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TLEEC Member Organizations

ARISE Adelante	San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Breakthrough Central Texas	Texas American Federation of Teachers
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities	Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE)
Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum	Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE)
Every Texan	Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC)
Houston Community Voices for Public Education	Texas Center for Education Policy at the University of Texas – Austin
Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA)	Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE)
McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership	Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)	Texas NAACP
Mexican American School Board Members Association (MASBA)	The Education Trust
National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) – Tejas Foco	UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)
