

October 13, 2020

To: Chairman Larry Taylor

CC: Vice Chair Eddie Lucio, Jr., Sen. Paul Bettencourt, Sen. Donna Campbell, Sen. Pat Fallon, Sen. Bob Hall, Sen. Bryan Hughes, Sen. Angela Paxton, Sen. Beverly Powell, Sen. Royce West, Sen. Judith Zaffirini

RE: Texas Senate Education Committee hearing on Teacher Workforce interim charges

Because teachers influence student learning more than any other in-school factor, especially for students who are behind, Texas cannot meet the goals of 60X30TX without a strong and diverse teacher workforce. We are heartened by and supportive of the [Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative](#)'s charge to increase the supply of highly-qualified and well-trained individuals entering the teaching profession - a task that is now even more critical to the state's educational and economic recovery.

Prior to the pandemic, participation in educator preparation programs (EPPs) had not recovered to pre-recession levels, dropping to a 20-year low in 2018.¹ This shortage of qualified and effective teachers in key subject areas and regions of our state has disproportionately impacted those who most need access to them: low-income students, students of color, English Learners and students with special needs. The pandemic will only exacerbate these challenges as the teacher pipeline gets further squeezed at both ends. Rising retirements, health concerns and financial insecurity are likely to fuel ongoing turnover among current educators and inequitable access to high-quality pathways for aspiring educators. While we recognize the effort and important work happening across the state to address these issues, more must be done. The Senate Education Committee should prioritize three efforts:

Align systems to increase access to strong and diverse teachers

- Set clear and numeric goals at state, regional and district levels, and then, publicly report, monitor and track progress towards these goals
- Collect and analyze disaggregated data to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the workforce and teacher effectiveness
- Support regional partnerships to design, implement and sustain innovative pathways into the profession, including scaled teacher residencies and Grow Your Own strategies

Build the capacity of the existing workforce with aspiring teachers

- Employ teacher-candidates as tutors, small-group instructors, and co-teachers
- Prioritize investment in minority-serving institutions (MSIs) that prepare and support disproportionate numbers of aspiring teachers of color

Expand the pipeline of future Texas teachers

- Expand targeted financial aid and loan forgiveness programs for aspiring teachers
- Create accessible certificate pathways for paraprofessionals and teacher assistants that allow them to continue serving - and be paid - in the classroom

The following brief explores these priorities and supporting recommendations in greater depth. For more information, please contact **Jonathan Feinstein** (jfeinstein@edtrust.org) or **Patrick Steck** (psteck@deansforimpact.org).

¹ Source: <https://uh.edu/education/research/institutes-centers/erc/reports-publications/deans-report-epp-july-2020.pdf>

Align systems to increase access to strong and diverse teachers

Set clear and numeric goals at state, regional and district levels, and then, publicly report, monitor and track progress towards these goals

Just as every child deserves great teachers, so, too, do aspiring educators deserve preparation that is rigorous, coherent, aligned, and evidence-based. For too long, institutional barriers have limited participation in these high-quality preparation experiences, especially for aspiring teachers of color and individuals from low-income backgrounds. The state should set clear and numeric goals at state, regional and district levels to increase access to strong and diverse teachers and then publicly report, monitor and track progress towards these goals.

Collect and analyze disaggregated data to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the workforce and teacher effectiveness.

The Texas Education Agency has done important work to strengthen its Accountability System for Educator Preparation (ASEP) and EPP data systems. But, to more fully understand the impacts of COVID-19, the state should collect and publicly report disaggregated data on personnel reductions and on the placement of teachers entering the field under modified certification requirements, including which requirements were modified or waived, and whether those teachers were placed in high-need schools. This data will allow the state to systematically address ongoing shortages in the state that stand to be further impacted by COVID-19, particularly for our highest need communities. For example, English Learners have been especially impacted by the shortage of bilingual/ESL teachers: in 2019, there was only one certified ESL teacher for every 70 elementary ESL students, and 146,000 elementary age English learners attended schools without a single certified bilingual educator.²

This data is essential to meet teacher workforce demand with the state's increasingly diverse supply of talent. While the percentage of Black and Latino EPP completers in Texas has increased gradually in recent years, teacher production rates by race have remained stubbornly static. This is particularly troublesome given research demonstrating the positive benefits of a teacher workforce that reflects the student body.³ TEA data shows that Texas EPPs have an opportunity to recruit far more Latino college attendees into the pipeline and that Black applicants are disproportionately under-progressing through the admission and observation process. The state must investigate state, institutional and program policies to ensure equitable access into programs and the profession.

Support regional partnerships to design, implement and sustain innovative pathways into the profession, including scaled teacher residencies and Grow Your Own strategies.

To meet teacher workforce demand in ways that are reflective of and responsive to local assets and needs, the state should consider the establishment of regional consortiums that facilitate partnership between school districts, postsecondary institutions, high-quality EPPs and other community-based resources. Public-private partnerships can help bolster the regional "backbone" capacity needed to design, implement and sustain

² Source: Texas Education Agency, PEIMS Standard Reports, Teacher FTE Counts and Student Course Enrollment 2019-2020.

³ Sources: Holt and Gershenson. (2015) "The Impact of Teacher Demographic Representation on Student Attendance and Suspensions." Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, Papageorge. (2017). "The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers." ; Dee, Thomas. (2004) "Teachers, Race, and Student Achievement in a Randomized Experiment. Review of Economics and Statistics," ; Egalite, Kisida, and Winters. (2015). "Representation in the classroom: The effect of own-race teachers on student achievement,"; Klopfenstein. (2005). "Beyond Test Scores: The Impact of Black Teacher Role Models on Rigorous Math Taking,"

impactful Grow Your Own strategies by strengthening recruiting, data sharing and evaluation, accessible sharing of best practices, dual credit pathways, clinical experiences and mentoring to meet unique local teacher workforce needs.

In El Paso, this kind of partnership is developing and implementing a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy to meet the region's teacher workforce needs. Central to this strategy is the University of Texas El Paso (UTEP) College of Education's transition to a full-year, high-quality clinical residency for 100% of its candidates by 2022 in partnership with multiple area districts. Teacher residencies, which pair a candidate with an experienced mentor teacher for a full-year of clinical teaching/co-teaching, have proven to be a successful model of teacher preparation, effectiveness and retention. But not all candidates have access to the high-quality programming that residencies offer: oftentimes only a small number of teacher candidates go through the residency model, while EPPs continue to maintain other, lower-quality pathways or program components.

Exacerbating the problem of limited access is program affordability: oftentimes the full-time clinical experience and coursework required for a residency hinders a candidate's ability to pursue other employment, rendering the program financially infeasible.⁴ Critically important to the approach in El Paso is that it will be financially sustainable without relying on external grants. Districts are building these residencies into their strategic staffing models to provide sustainable funding for stipends that allow candidates to focus fully on their training and preparation during the residency year. In addition to generating shared investment in candidates' success, this financial compensation is essential to creating more equitable access for candidates and is especially needed given the added hardship brought on by the pandemic. But El Paso isn't stopping there; UTEP has also redesigned their post-bac pathways, including their alternative certification pathway, and launched a teacher mentorship program with local districts to match beginning teachers with their most effective educators, while design of high school recruitment pathways are also in development.

Similar partnerships between districts and EPPs are emerging in regions across Texas to scale full-year clinical residency models, in the Permian Basin, Panhandle, Dallas/Fort Worth, Waco, Austin, San Antonio, Houston and the Rio Grande Valley. Through the TEA and regional ESCs, the state has an important role to play in developing and providing the technical assistance needed to effectively implement this and other best practice Grow Your Own strategies.

Expand the capacity of the existing workforce with aspiring teachers

Employ teacher-candidates as tutors, small-group instructors, and co-teachers.

There are nearly 85,000 individuals enrolled in teacher-preparation programs across our state who can help provide critical defense against traditional 'summer melt' and the anticipated 'COVID-Slide,' while gaining experience to help prepare them to lead classrooms and create the workforce Texas needs.

Aspiring teachers can provide tutoring and small group instruction to families that may not otherwise have access to this resource. These future teachers can potentially augment virtual and hybrid learning by providing essential academic support to students who are not physically in school. These aspiring teachers will not supplant existing full-time teachers, but will provide critical support to students and schools while gaining valuable, practice-based experience. By partnering with community-based organizations (CBOs), aspiring teachers can potentially provide socially distanced in-person instruction, which will have the additional benefit of providing parents with more hours of childcare. This targeted support can help stem the inequities that the pandemic is exacerbating. Without intervention, many resources and solutions, like creating learning pods and hiring private tutors and teachers, will be out of reach for low-income families.

⁴ Source: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/bankstreet-wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Student-Financial-barriers.pdf>

Aspiring teachers nearing the completion of their pre-service development can partner with experienced, certified teachers to team teach, allowing vulnerable teachers to provide critical support, instruction, and mentorship from home. These future teachers can provide additional capacity needed to maintain social distancing by providing instruction to small groups, or floating between classrooms.

Prioritize investment in minority serving institutions that prepare and support disproportionate numbers of aspiring teachers of color

For innovative and effective strategies like these to take hold, districts and quality EPPs must have reliable and stable funding necessary to maintain investments. To more fully capitalize on the strength of our diversity, the state should prioritize investment in MSIs that prepare and support a disproportionate number of aspiring teachers of color, along with those preparing teachers in rural areas and content shortage areas. Texas is home to 63 MSIs, representing a third of our postsecondary institutions and the largest number in the country, except California. In particular, the state should increase funding to public HBCUs to match or exceed its investment in public flagships, which receive nearly \$2,500 more per student, and explore funding opportunities to support the state's highest-producing Hispanic-serving Institutions.

Expand the pipeline of future Texas teachers

Expand targeted financial aid and loan forgiveness programs for aspiring teachers

Targeted financial aid and loan forgiveness for aspiring teachers is especially necessary during this challenging economic period. The state should be expanding - not limiting as it is currently - funding and access to programs like the [Teach for Texas Loan Repayment Assistance Program \(TFTLRAP\)](#) designed to recruit and retain teachers in fields and communities that have a shortage of teachers. Federal CARES Act funds should also be considered for this purpose.

Create certificate pathways for paraprofessionals and teacher assistants that allow them to continue serving - and be paid - in the classroom.

This moment also allows us to consider ways to expand opportunities to existing pipelines of future educators, like our paraprofessionals and teacher assistants that are more diverse than the teacher workforce. These individuals are often forced to forgo certification because of the financial strain and time constraints placed on traditionally prepared candidates in fulfilling their clinical teaching requirements. The state should consider how to create a pathway for this pool of aspiring teachers to continue serving - and be paid - in the classroom while being enrolled in a high-quality teacher-preparation program, especially in critical geographic and content areas, such as Bilingual/Dual Language and Special Education.

At a time when Texas students will require even more support to make up for unfinished learning resulting from the pandemic, collective, bold, and creative action is needed to ensure every child in Texas has access to great teachers now and in the future. By exploring these opportunities, Texas leaders can take the appropriate steps needed to ensure children, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, have access to caring, passionate adults equipped to address their social, emotional and academic needs.

Simultaneously, they will support diverse teacher-candidates access rich, practice-based experiences with students that are essential to pre-service training now and for the foreseeable future.

Sincerely,

Patrick Steck
Deans for Impact, Director of Policy
psteck@deansforimpact.org
512-636-9524

