



## ATPE Input on Interim Charge 3

Educator Compensation, Evaluations,  
Professional Development, Certification and Training

Senate Education Committee – July 20, 2010

The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** is the preeminent educator association in Texas and makes a positive difference in the lives of educators and schoolchildren. ATPE is a member-owned, member-governed professional association with more than 115,000 members, making it the leading educators' association in Texas and the largest independent association for public school educators in the nation.

The subject matter of this hearing – educator compensation, evaluations, professional development, certification and training – can be directly connected to an overarching goal of improving the quality of the educator workforce in Texas. Teacher quality has been a cornerstone of ATPE's advocacy work in recent years. For this reason, we have sought out new data to identify the state's greatest needs in this area and to develop policy recommendations to improve the quality of teaching throughout the public schools of Texas.

In 2008, ATPE commissioned Dr. Ed Fuller of the University of Texas to conduct a *Study on Teacher Quality and School Improvement in Secondary Schools*.<sup>1</sup> The purposes of the study were to examine, through qualitative and quantitative analysis, the effect of teacher qualifications (quality measures) and teacher distribution on academic achievement in Texas secondary schools and to document the correlation between teacher quality and gains in achievement at high-improvement schools.

The methodology of Fuller's 2008 study included the following:

- Examining the distribution of teacher quality across Texas secondary schools.
- Examining the relationship between changes in teacher quality and school outcomes on the state's assessment.
- Investigating the strategies used by "turnaround" schools to increase passing rates on the state's assessment.

Fuller's study on teacher quality drew the following conclusions:

1. There is a ***positive association between the measures of teacher quality in this study and student achievement as measured by the state's assessment instrument, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)***. Indeed, in every case, high-performing schools had a far greater aggregate teacher quality than low-performing schools.
2. Not only was teacher quality positively associated with levels of performance on the TAKS, but ***changes in teacher quality were also positively associated with increases in performance on the TAKS from 2003 to 2007***.

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<sup>1</sup> The full study may be viewed on the ATPE Web site at [www.atpe.org/Advocacy/Issues/teacherqualitystudy.asp](http://www.atpe.org/Advocacy/Issues/teacherqualitystudy.asp).

3. As previous analyses in Texas have shown, the Fuller study found that *teacher quality continues to be inequitably distributed across schools*, with high-poverty, high-minority and low-performing schools having much lower teacher quality than low-poverty, low-minority and high-performing schools. In fact, on almost every single measure, the study found significant differences in teacher quality between these sets of schools.
4. The most acute areas of shortage and the largest gaps in teacher quality tend to be in the areas of mathematics and science.
5. High-improvement middle and high schools employed many of the best practices found in the literature on “turnaround” schools.

Fuller’s study identified certain measures of teacher quality that directly correlate to student achievement data, including the percentage of beginning teachers. Fuller cites a number of researchers for the proposition that “beginning teachers and novice teachers (those with less than three years of experience) are not just less effective than teachers with more experience but substantially less effective.”

Considering the strong body of research that high quality teachers can positively affect student achievement and the evidence that teacher quality is not equitably distributed in our schools in spite of legislation mandating an equitable distribution, it is fitting that the Legislature undertake a close examination of factors related to teacher quality. Accordingly, ATPE greatly appreciates this opportunity to offer the following comments on the four areas addressed in Interim Charge 3.

**I. Educator Compensation:** *The committee has been charged with reviewing teacher compensation including the Minimum Salary Schedule, incentive pay, merit pay and stipends.*

A strong minimum salary schedule provides predictable and meaningful salary increases that help encourage potential educators to enter and then remain in the field. ATPE acknowledges that other factors, such as administrative and community support, play a large role in educator satisfaction; nevertheless, compensation is a manifest piece of the equation that cannot be ignored. ATPE believes that maintaining a minimum salary schedule is a critical factor in attaining wages for Texas educators that are competitive with teacher salaries in other states and wages paid in other professions. Ideally, the state salary schedule would provide for step increases over a 30-year period to recognize longevity in the profession. It is not difficult to find veteran educators who have taught for more than 20 years and have reached the top of the current salary schedule; it is rarer for an educator to remain in the classroom for more than 30 years. Providing predictable and meaningful salary increases over the entirety of most teachers’ careers not only encourages the most experienced educators to stay in the profession but also provides an incentive for prospective educators to enter the profession.

ATPE would oppose any attempt to eliminate or weaken the minimum salary schedule. Removing or allowing exemptions to the minimum salary schedule would hinder the state’s ability to attract and retain quality educators. Competitive salary structures are a major determining factor for prospective employees. The minimum salary schedule sets a floor for professional educators’ salaries; breaking through that floor would have an eventual effect of lowering average teacher salaries and moving us farther away from reaching the national average. There are approximately 250,000 certified teachers in Texas who are not currently teaching. A primary reason many of these teachers have abandoned the profession is the lack of a long-term compensation structure that is competitive with other professions for which these educators are qualified.

It is worth noting that abandoning the minimum salary schedule would cost the state approximately \$260 million. Under our present compensation system, the state pays for a portion of the contributions going into the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) fund. However, the state is only responsible for matching educator contributions for the portion of the educator's salary mandated by the minimum salary schedule. Required contributions on the portion of a teacher's pay that is above the minimum salary schedule must be covered by the district employing that teacher. If the state were to abandon the minimum salary schedule, the responsibility for making contributions to TRS for the portion of salaries currently covered by school districts would by default shift to the state, resulting in a yearly cost of approximately \$260 million.

With respect to various types of incentive pay plans, ATPE has generally supported incentive pay except when student test scores are used as the determining factor for a teacher's compensation. Since 2007, more than \$742 million dollars has been spent on three state-funded incentive-pay programs: The Governor's Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG), the Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG), and the District Awards for Teacher Excellence (DATE). The Texas Education Agency (TEA) phased out the GEEG program last year, and at the same time ATPE and others lobbied successfully to eliminate the TEEG program and makes changes to the DATE program in order to help districts use program funds for mentoring and induction programs, as well as educator recruitment and retention. While these changes were positive improvements, ATPE believes more can be done to increase the flexibility of the DATE program.

Some additional recommendations ATPE offers with regard to incentives are as follows:

- Monetary and non-monetary incentives that would encourage highly qualified teachers and administrators to go to work in hard-to-staff schools. This might include redesigning existing incentive programs or new initiatives such as loan forgiveness.
- Rewards for teachers who take on leadership roles at a campus.
- Rewards for educators who model best practices involving parental involvement.
- Incentives for well-qualified teachers and administrators to remain at campuses that are facing sanctions under the academic accountability system.
- Rewarding principals for allowing teachers to be active participants in the hiring of new faculty.
- Financial incentives for efforts to reduce class sizes and/or pupil-teacher ratios.
- Financial assistance to districts for implementation of recommendations made in a campus improvement plan.

II. **Teacher Evaluations:** *The committee has been charged with reviewing how teacher evaluations can be effective mechanisms for increasing student achievement and improving instructional practices by including multiple measures, particularly student achievement data based on growth. The committee has also been asked to evaluate how teacher evaluations can direct district decisions on providing professional development, mentoring, intervention, and possible dismissal in response to underperforming teachers.*

If there is a desire to reform the current system of evaluating teachers in Texas, it is no doubt tied to the recognition that educators play a fundamental and irreplaceable role in the academic success of students. On that score, we entirely agree. ATPE also agrees that student achievement data has a role in evaluating educators, but we do not believe student test scores should be the primary determining factor in appraisals and other employment-related decisions. Multiple measures are needed to identify effective and ineffective teachers, and we must be cognizant of the difficulty in correlating student test scores to teacher effectiveness. Many recent studies point out the risks of relying on student test scores for appraisals, and there is no academic consensus on the efficacy of grading teachers based on their pupils' test scores.

In 2006, the Legislature passed House Bill 1, which required in part that TEA create a method to “measure annual improvement in student achievement from one school year to the next” using standardized test scores and performance targets. Shortly thereafter TEA began development of the Texas Projection Measure (TPM). By 2007, legislation was inevitably introduced to require the use of that data for “value-added” assessments of teachers. ATPE cautioned against this move for a number of reasons. First, the plan would require a complex matrix of data on each individual student, linked with data on each individual teacher, linked with data on school districts and teacher preparation programs, tracked over the course of time and constructed in a way that withstands the mobility of both teachers and students. ATPE also expressed doubt that TEA would be prepared to implement such a technologically sophisticated system. At that time TEA officials had recently conceded an inability to cross-reference the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) database of certified educators with the database of members of TRS for the simple purpose of updating mailing addresses. ATPE had dire concerns about our members' livelihoods being at the mercy of such a complicated system of untested and potentially unreliable technology.

Today, legislators and policymakers in Texas and elsewhere are still debating proposals to use a value-added data system for purposes of evaluating the effectiveness of teachers. The same concerns ATPE expressed in 2007 about value-added assessments of educator effectiveness remain valid today and are even bolstered by major fallacies of the TPM uncovered during a recent legislative hearing.<sup>2</sup> When looking at evaluations as a tool for increasing student achievement through the use of data on student growth, we must first ask whether a valid growth model exists that is capable of producing statistically reliable data about Texas educators.

Most disquieting, perhaps, about the use of a growth model in teacher evaluations is the potential for high-stakes employment decisions to be based principally on data from questionable value-added systems like the TPM that may disregard true teacher effectiveness and thwart legitimate efforts to improve teacher quality. If students' standardized test scores become the chief barometer under which a teacher can be subject to virtually “automatic” termination of her employment, the result will be an overall decline in educator morale and a disincentive for teachers to accept assignments in hard-to-staff schools where students are struggling academically. Such automatic termination rules based solely on student test scores would also increase the number of challenges by aggrieved educators and likewise increase the cost and administrative burden for districts defending those challenges.

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<sup>2</sup> At a June 29, 2010 interim hearing of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education, Chairman Scott Hochberg quizzed TEA officials about instances in which the TPM counted as passing students who failed state assessments, even in cases where none of the student's answers were correct. Commissioner Scott has subsequently informed school administrators that the TPM could be eliminated in the near future, which would send state policymakers back to the drawing board on growth modeling in Texas.

More importantly, research indicates that value-added analyses can overlook the achievements of some teachers while masking the ineffectiveness of others. Consider these findings in a 2008 report published by the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research:

“If value-added measures of teacher quality are unbiased, yet highly variable, their efficacy in high-stakes personnel decisions will be limited. For example, some have proposed using value-added measures to determine which teachers are granted tenure and which are dismissed after an initial probationary period. If value-added measures vary over time, a tenure policy based on a short time frame could lead to the dismissal of many truly effective teachers and the retention of other who ultimately turn out to be relative ineffective in boosting student achievement.”<sup>3</sup>

Equally important as the validity of appraisal systems is the need for school districts to use evaluations equitably, consistently and appropriately. Evaluating the use of teacher appraisals to direct decisions on the dismissal of “underperforming” teachers predicated a look at our state’s teacher contract laws. Texas has utilized a system of teacher contracts since 1981, and students have made huge strides in academics during that time frame. In our zeal for improving public education, we must take care to avoid the unnecessary alteration of such a well-designed system of due process.

Texas has in current law the effective means for school districts to get rid of educators who persistently fail. Our Commissioner’s rules provide that “a teacher who has not met all requirements of the intervention plan... by the time specified may be considered for separation” from employment. Moreover, the Education Code empowers districts to hire and fire teachers as they choose before each school year.

In other words, it is absolutely possible for a school district to get rid of a low-performing teacher. Term contracts, which cover most educators, can be non-renewed for virtually any reason, as long as the district’s cited reason is not specifically discriminatory or otherwise illegal. In this sense, the nonrenewal standards as a practical matter are no higher than the standards for termination of at-will employees. If a teacher does not meet expectations, the district can and should replace him. There is no compelling reason to change or abandon current laws relative to dismissals merely because of anecdotal, unsupportable claims that it’s too difficult to get rid of a teacher.

The contract non-renewal process is efficient and quick. It begins in April and can be completed by the end of the school year if all statutory timelines are followed. The ironic fact is that districts often choose to prolong it by waiving the timelines. The process requires no more paperwork than would be kept in the ordinary course of business and therefore places no additional administrative burdens on school principals. Teacher evaluations, if conducted appropriately, already offer adequate documentation of a teacher’s performance whether his contract is ultimately renewed or not; that documentation is all that is required for non-renewal. It is the same paperwork and level of inquiry that would be undertaken by a principal annually in determining whether or not to recommend the renewal of each teacher’s contract.

There is no evidence that the current system presents widespread difficulty or high costs for school districts. If district personnel are trained in using the non-renewal process, it does work. As explained by Hudson ISD Superintendent Mary Ann Whiteker, “With nonrenewals, we’re going to have all our ducks in a row.... If my staff on a campus has done their job correctly, then at that point in time either the

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<sup>3</sup> Sass, Tim R. “The Stability of Value-Added Measures of Teacher Quality and Implications for Teacher Compensation Policy.” November 2008.

teacher is turning around and moving in the direction they need to, or I have all I need to go through the hearing process for a nonrenewal.”<sup>4</sup>

Also, as has been pointed out by Commissioner Robert Scott, ‘contracts exist for the benefit of both parties, and there is a benefit to the districts for having a contract.’<sup>5</sup> Our state’s teacher contract laws offer stability for educators, campus administrators and students while minimizing the burdens of costly employment litigation for districts. There is a common misconception that school districts could save money by simply eliminating contracts. ATPE believes the opposite to be true. Not only do contracts benefit educators and their students, but they also provide school districts with a degree of insulation against costly lawsuits. Contract rights exist to ensure continuity in the classroom. One of the roles of a contract is to prevent educators from resigning in the middle of a school year without good cause. Educators risk harsh penalties for contract abandonment, including being sanctioned by SBEC. Without contracts, disruptions caused by mid-year resignations and job changes would be highly detrimental to students’ learning.

Watering down teachers’ contract rights in an effort to make it easier for districts to fire teachers would result in a substantial increase in costly employment litigation against school districts. The current system offers an effective administrative process for dispute resolution. If that system were restructured in such a manner that teachers would lose hope of getting a fair hearing, then more teachers would inevitably pursue the alternative of litigation. We should not forget either that educators would benefit from a large body of well-established due process law that exists irrespective of state law; even if Chapter 21 of the Education Code was dramatically weakened, teachers would still have constitutional rights that could be enforced through court action, but at a much greater expense to both sides. Without our current contract laws in place, the majority of school-related wrongful termination claims would end up on crowded court dockets and in protracted Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) proceedings. Districts would be compelled to hire more attorneys, deal with costly and extensive document production, and risk involvement in extremely lengthy cases. A consequence of such an increase in litigation is that liability insurance premiums would rise. Additionally, with such a high risk of costly litigation, every adverse employment action would be subject to intense scrutiny, making it harder for administrators to manage and staff our schools. Clearly, contracts benefit both the educator and the school district.

Additionally, it’s worth noting that limiting teachers’ rights to challenge adverse employment actions would not necessarily correspond to improved student instruction. The suggestion that Texas’ classrooms are widely staffed by bad teachers has not been backed up by statistics. Subsequent to the adoption of rigorous accountability standards, school ratings and overall TAKS passage rates have risen consistently. Surely these numbers have some correlation to the quality of instruction that is taking place with the current methods of evaluating educators and effecting decisions about their continued employment.

Finally, it’s important to avoid the temptation of a wholesale replacement of the teacher appraisal system while the state is in a major budget crisis. The current appraisal system incorporates objective measures, observations of behavior and considerations of how a teacher’s students are performing. Commissioner’s rules mandate that a teacher who is evaluated as unsatisfactory in any one category of the appraisal be deemed a “teacher in need of assistance” and that intervention plans be created for such teachers. An intervention plan may be developed even before a teacher receives an evaluation that is “unsatisfactory” or “below expectations,” if there is any indication that the teacher might be headed for a negative appraisal. We *already* have a system in place to evaluate teachers and to provide concentrated assistance

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<sup>4</sup> April 22, 2010 hearing of the Select Committee on Public School Finance Weights, Allotments and Adjustments.

<sup>5</sup> April 22, 2010 hearing of the Select Committee on Public School Finance Weights, Allotments and Adjustments.

for those who do not meet expectations. ATPE urges lawmakers not to needlessly spend taxpayer dollars on efforts to change the current law. If it's not broken, it doesn't need to be fixed, and there is no real evidence that the appraisal system is broken. Instead, efforts should be focused on better training about how the current system works and how it can be used to improve teaching quality.

ATPE believes that current law provides districts the tools and flexibility needed to evaluate educators, identify strengths and weakness, prescribe supplemental training where necessary and dismiss educators who are underperforming. Any change to current law regarding educator evaluations or procedures for dismissal should preserve districts' discretion to develop local appraisal plans and should not require the use of student test scores or problematic value-added systems as a primary determinant in employment decisions.

III. **Professional Development:** *The committee has been charged with reviewing state sponsored professional development initiatives including the alignment of professional development with curriculum and real work experiences and the value of professional development for bilingual, ESL and special education teachers in increasing student achievement.*

Teachers are required to complete a minimum number of continuing education hours for renewal of their teaching certificates. In recent years there have been some efforts to limit teachers' flexibility in choosing courses that will fulfill this requirement. For instance, some have proposed requiring teachers to select only continuing education courses that are directly linked to the subject they currently teach. While we certainly recognize the need for educators to use professional development opportunities as a tool for improving the skills critical to their current job assignments, ATPE believes this type of limitation would have the unintended consequence of discouraging teachers from pursuing additional certifications or taking courses to become "Highly Qualified" in additional subjects. For example, a social studies teacher might be disinclined to work toward becoming a math teacher if she were unable to counter her math coursework toward the continuing education requirements.

Each year, ATPE asks our members for feedback on professional development, and they consistently advise us that they want and need professional development covering a broad range of topics related to their employment. These include areas such as utilizing technology, understanding the school laws of Texas, educating special populations such as students with disabilities or students identified as gifted/talented, managing crises, improving classroom discipline, ensuring school safety and promoting cultural awareness.

ATPE members have told us emphatically they want professional development that will assist them in instructing students with disabilities. While many studies have shown the benefits of mainstreaming students with disabilities, they sometimes ignore the fact that teachers not certified in special education may not have the requisite knowledge and skills to meet the special needs of those students. For this reason, ATPE has supported past legislation to require teacher training in areas of special education.

ATPE hopes that in the future the state will be able to offer additional funding to school districts to help them provide enhanced staff development that will meet the particular needs of each district's personnel.

IV. **Certification and Training:** *The committee has been charged with reviewing the need to adopt statewide standards for teacher certification and in-service training programs for regular and*

*special education teachers at both the pre-service and in-service levels to ensure all teachers are highly qualified to teach students with disabilities.*

As discussed in preceding sections of this document, one of our state's top education priorities in recent years has been measuring student growth. However, measuring student growth is of little consequence unless there are concerted efforts to ensure that the necessary underlying structure of a high-quality teaching work force is put in place to enable each and every student to achieve growth. If parents were given a choice between improved assessments of student performance or a guarantee that each of their children's teachers would be well-qualified and trained, our experience leads us to believe that most parents would choose the latter.

Research has shown that of the many school-based factors that affect a student's academic success, having access to an effective educator is the most important factor. Thus, recruiting, training and rewarding high-quality teachers, though expensive endeavors, are essential to the success of public education. Educator certification standards help ensure that teachers are appropriately trained to handle the rigors of the classroom and provide a quality education for their students while also helping to reduce costly teacher turnover. Teachers who have completed the training that leads to certification are more effective than those who have not. Strong certification standards help ensure that prospective teachers acquire the background knowledge required to be successful in the classroom. This includes both knowledge of the subject matter content to be taught and knowledge of how to teach that content to a wide range of learners, as well as the ability to manage a classroom, design and implement instruction, and work skillfully with students, parents and other professionals. Those who hold full certification have been shown to be more effective than other teachers in stimulating student achievement gains in both reading and mathematics over a multi-year period.

State law requires school districts to hire certified educators. ATPE supports a state certification process that ensures practitioners are appropriately trained and certified exclusively by the state. Educator certification candidates need comprehensive pedagogical training, including training on classroom and discipline management, child and adolescent psychology, and methods courses, along with mandatory coursework in the areas of reading, special education, gifted and talented, ESL and computer literacy. As discussed in the previous section, it is important to offer teachers professional development related to special education; for the same rationale, ATPE believes that instructing students with special needs should be an important aspect of the curriculum in educator preparation programs.

With the adoption of Senate Bill 174 last year, Texas has put in place accountability requirements for educator preparation programs and a system that will attempt to evaluate their effectiveness. SBEC also took a huge step in the right direction by implementing in 2009 minimum standards for admission into educator preparation programs – including alternative certification programs – and for the preparation those programs should offer. ATPE commends the Legislature and SBEC for these steps taken in recent years. Still, more can be done to improve the preparation that our future educators receive.

ATPE believes that current minimum standards are lower than what the research on educator preparation supports and should be made more rigorous. For instance, for admission into an alternative certification program, SBEC requires only a 2.5 Grade Point Average (GPA) in the last 60 hours of college, and programs can waive that requirement for up to 10 percent of the certification candidates they admit. Also, SBEC rules require certification candidates to have only 12 hours of study in the particular area in which they are seeking certification; that minimal standard combined with the fact that huge numbers of teachers seek multi-grade generalist certificates means that too many teachers are becoming certified to teach



subjects in which they do not have a strong foundation of content knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, ATPE believes that educator preparation programs share in the responsibility to ensure that new teachers receive adequate mentoring and support at the beginning of their careers. SBEC should take further steps to standardize the policies and practices of these programs in order to hold them accountable for providing support to their graduates. Also, the state should consider placing educator preparation training components and minimum standards in statute, as opposed to listing them only in rule as is the current practice. Other reforms the state should consider include offering financial incentives to entice reputable educator preparation programs to produce teachers that can fill shortage areas and rewarding those programs that succeed in that area. ATPE also believes the state should require administrators to have at least five years of classroom teaching experience.

Strong educator preparation and certification rules are not enough; it is essential that we ensure that all students are taught by someone who is certified in that particular field. ATPE believes the state should require districts, through the state accountability system, to assign all certified educators to teach in their certification areas. In 2009, ATPE recommended legislation to incorporate teacher quality measures into the state's accountability system by making an assessment of teacher quality one of the performance indicators in the system. ATPE believed that such legislation would force schools to work toward an educator quality target that consisted of fully certified teachers being assigned to teach the subjects in which they are certified with a high level of teacher retention. We recognized that it would take time and resources for districts to reach this target, and for that reason ATPE's proposal called for the educator quality assessment to be structured so as to measure both absolute compliance and progress toward compliance. Under ATPE's plan, a district that had no choice but to assign teachers out-of-field would be required to submit an educator quality improvement plan. Such improvement plans would allow the state to analyze the reasons for the out-of-field assignments and direct state resources where needed to address those situations. For instance, if a district had teaching vacancies because its compensation range was not competitive with neighboring districts, the state could work with that district to secure additional incentive funds to boost its compensation raise or offer signing bonuses to attract the teachers needed for those positions. Under ATPE's proposal, if a campus were determined to be out of compliance with educator quality standards and not on target to achieving compliance, the commissioner would assign a technical assistance team to assist the campus in improving the quality of its workforce. Similarly, if a district were out of compliance and not on target toward compliance, the commissioner would appoint a management team to oversee operations of the district. The commissioner would also have the authority to use the educator quality assessment to examine other factors such as the duration of the principal's employment at a campus. ATPE also urged the Legislature to require an annual report documenting the distribution of teacher quality across the state and a periodic statewide survey of educators' working conditions in public schools. Unfortunately, none of ATPE's teacher quality recommendations were incorporated into the accountability legislation that passed in 2009.

Without a doubt, high-quality educator preparation programs and holding school districts accountable for the equitable distribution of high quality teachers can improve public education. However, ATPE also believes that a ***statewide mandatory comprehensive induction program*** would not only help ramp up teacher quality among new educators but also help the state avoid the approximately \$500 million per year lost to teacher turnover. Mentoring and induction programs are highly effective education-profession recruitment and retention tools that can produce long-term savings following a minimal up-front investment. Since 1996, SBEC has required that all beginning teachers who do not have prior teaching experience be assigned a mentor teacher. In spite of this regulation, however, there has been no

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<sup>6</sup> Generalist certificates (such as the EC-6 Generalist) employ composite certification examinations that may include only a small number of test items in the actual subject that a teacher taking the exam might eventually teach.

structured, statewide, state-funded mentoring program in Texas. Current Texas law merely states that districts “may” provide mentors to certain inexperienced classroom teachers.

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), in the 2008 edition of its annual *State Teacher Quality Yearbook*, criticized Texas for not requiring effective induction for all new teachers, with special emphasis on teachers in high-needs schools. The report emphasized the fact that Texas does not require mentoring for all new teachers. The NCTQ recommended not only that mentoring be made mandatory for new teachers, but also that mentoring programs be implemented early in the school year and that the state employ support strategies such as providing release time and time for observation of experienced teachers. The NCTQ also believes that mentors should be properly trained, evaluated and compensated. Despite being at the forefront of so many education reforms, Texas has not shown leadership in any of these areas highlighted by the NCTQ.<sup>7</sup> Stating it bluntly, Texas education leaders have simply not made mentoring a priority. To illustrate the lack of a strong focus on mentoring in Texas, one need only visit the “Teacher Resources” section of the TEA Web site to realize that there is not a single mention of mentoring.

ATPE has long recommended that the state compensate mentors and give them sufficient training and resources in order for them to be successful. Research indicates that comprehensive, rigorous induction programs can reduce educator turnover, increase teacher effectiveness and eventually increase student achievement. ATPE believes that the state should greatly expand its efforts to encourage and fund district- and campus- based induction programs for both beginning teachers and those moving to a new subject area or grade level. The Legislature should also explore ways to utilize not only veteran teachers but also retired teachers to provide mentoring to new or struggling teachers. In addition, districts would benefit from opportunities to receive funding that would allow for beginning teachers to have reduced course loads and/or additional planning time.

We are fortunate that Texas already has an excellent model for state-funded educator induction programs. In 1999, SBEC implemented the Texas Beginning Educator Support System (TxBESS). This three-year pilot program offered comprehensive support, training and formative assessment to assist novice teachers in their first years of teaching. The state’s regional education service centers (ESCs) provided training for the mentors in accordance with the TxBESS standards and framework. The standards guided participating ESCs and school districts in the design and organization of their mentoring programs, strategies for the support and assessment of beginning teachers, and resources to operate and strengthen the mentoring programs. The TxBESS framework helped to identify the skills that beginning teachers should acquire. The program also incorporated a formative assessment to provide feedback to the beginning teacher with the goal of fostering the teacher’s continued professional growth. Initial funding for the TxBESS pilot was provided by a \$12 million grant through the U.S. Department of Education and state funds.

Evaluations of the TxBESS pilot program after three years showed significantly increased retention rates overall for beginning teachers who participated in the program. For minority teachers and high school teachers, the improvement in retention rates was even more significant. Principals of schools that implemented TxBESS reported improved performance by their beginning teachers who were mentored through the program. Veteran teachers who served as mentors in the TxBESS pilot program reported that

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<sup>7</sup> The NCTQ identified South Carolina as a model state for best practices in effective induction for new teachers: “**South Carolina** requires that all new teachers, prior to the start of the school year, be assigned mentors for at least one year. Districts carefully select mentors, who must undergo additional training, based on experience and similar certifications and grade levels. Adequate release time is mandated by the state so that mentors and new teachers may observe each other in the classroom, collaborate on effective teaching techniques and develop professional growth plans. Mentor evaluations are mandatory and stipends are recommended.”

the experience improved their professional development. The third-year evaluation of TxBESS concluded: “If TxBESS is to be sustained and expanded, state funding is required to support program training, teacher release time, and mentor stipends.”

Sadly, Texas legislators did not heed the recommendation for state funding upon conclusion of the TxBESS pilot program. When federal funding for TxBESS ended in 2002, the program was all but abandoned, although some school districts still use TxBESS as a framework for local mentoring and induction plans. Texas’ Beginning Teacher Induction and Mentoring (BTIM) program was created in 2006 with an initial appropriation of just \$15 million for mentoring. In 2007, the 80th Legislature funded BTIM with an appropriation of \$15 million per year for the 2007-08 and 2008-09 school years. The 81st Legislature in 2009 recommitted the \$30 million appropriation for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. If you use a very conservative estimate of 20,000 new teachers in Texas per year, our state’s current \$30 million biennial appropriation only allows for about \$750 per teacher per year for mentoring and induction support.<sup>8</sup> This amount is woefully inadequate for mentoring even when supplemented by districts through other limited sources.<sup>9</sup>

Despite its low funding level, a 2009 evaluation of the BTIM program found that participating districts experienced increases in beginning teacher retention by as much as 30 percent. In 2009, ATPE successfully lobbied for legislation to allow districts greater flexibility in the use of BTIM grants, particularly so that they could use the funds to provide mentors to teachers who were not necessarily new to the profession but new to a subject area or grade level. Although BTIM has proven to be successful at increasing teacher retention in some districts, policy reforms may be necessary to maximize the program’s effectiveness and increase district participation.

Among the policy recommendations generated by Fuller’s 2008 study for ATPE on teacher quality was funding TxBESS “or other mentoring and induction programs with a proven track record for all high-need schools.” Studies have demonstrated that between 30 to 50 percent of teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching. Experts such as Dr. Fuller point out that the attrition rate for teachers in Texas has been even higher than the national average. An abundance of research points to mentoring as one of the most effective ways to improve teacher retention rates.<sup>10</sup>

ATPE has long been a staunch advocate for state-funded programs that would provide trained, compensated mentors for all beginning educators. We believe that a comprehensive, mandatory mentoring program would not only improve teacher satisfaction and retention, but also have a positive

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<sup>8</sup> In 2008, SBEC issued initial teaching certificates to 30,124 individuals. The Texas Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data for the 2008-09 school year actually indicated that 24,000 beginning teachers were employed full-time statewide. Using the 24,000 figure, an appropriation of \$30 million actually only covers \$625 of the cost of mentoring each of those teachers in a year.

<sup>9</sup> Eligible school districts are also permitted to use up to 40 percent of their District Awards for Teaching Excellence (DATE) incentive funds for various initiatives that could include mentoring, which would amount to an additional \$80 million per year. However, it’s important to note that the 40 percent is not dedicated *exclusively* to mentoring; it is also used at the district’s discretion for stipends to address critical shortage areas, bonuses paid to principals and other staff, awards for teachers who obtain post-graduate degrees or national certification, professional development, increasing local data capabilities and more, thereby substantially diluting the \$80 million.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1997). *The characteristics of stayers, movers, and leavers: Results from the teacher followup survey, 1994–95* Washington, D.C.; and U.S. Department of Education, Southern Regional Education Board (2001). *Reduce your losses: Help new teachers become veteran teachers* (available at <http://www.sreb.org/main/highered/TeacherAttrition.pdf>).

outcome on student achievement. A comprehensive, mandatory mentoring program would open the door for accountability reforms at the state level that would actually—and finally—hold school districts responsible for employing and equitably distributing high-quality teachers throughout their schools, which is already a requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act but rarely accomplished. Mentoring is also a wise investment from the standpoint of simple economics: It might cost thousands of dollars to provide adequate support to a first-year teacher, but the cost of replacing that teacher when she walks away from the classroom in frustration is more than double the cost of proper mentoring and induction.

An investment in building a powerful, stable work force of high-quality teachers is arguably the most important expenditure the state can make, especially when funding is scarce and must be prioritized. Texas has already made investments in promising education reforms, such as transitioning to rigorous end-of-course exams, setting high achievement standards for accountability ratings, beginning to raise the standards for educator preparation programs and adopting college readiness standards well ahead of the curve. However, there simply is no substitute for widespread, properly funded implementation of research-based practices that are proven effective at increasing teacher quality. One of the most effective of these research-based practices is state-funded mentoring.<sup>11</sup>

The need for mentoring is even more critical in struggling schools. Mentoring would help to improve the distribution of teacher quality across high-poverty, high-minority and low-performing schools. Consider the following excerpt from the report *New Teacher Support Pays Off: A Return on Investment for Educators and Kids*, published in late 2007 by the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz:

“While all schools and students can benefit from more effective teachers, the power of high-quality induction holds special promise for hard-to-staff schools that serve disproportionately low-income and minority students, where teacher turnover is rampant, and which often employ a disproportionately high percentage of inexperienced and out-of-field teachers. High-quality induction programs can develop the human capacity that these high-need schools require for success. Without teachers at the heart of a functioning learning community that nurtures professional growth, the academically disadvantaged students who overwhelmingly populate these schools will continue to flounder.”

Without question, a comprehensive statewide mentoring program for all beginning teachers is an expensive undertaking. However, the short- and long-term benefits to the schoolchildren of Texas far outweigh the initial investment that would be necessary to implement such a reform. ATPE strongly encourages legislators to conduct their own cost-benefit analyses, after which we believe the most logical conclusion will be that teacher quality initiatives such as mentoring should become the state’s highest public education priority.



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<sup>11</sup> ATPE had hoped that Gov. Perry would allow Texas to compete for approximately \$700 million in potential funding under the Race to the Top (RTTT) federal stimulus grant program. ATPE recommended that TEA use such funding for a comprehensive mentoring program. **See Appendix B for the details of our recommendation.** With the availability of RTTT funds and other federal stimulus dollars, Texas had a unique opportunity to fund new teacher quality initiatives at an unprecedented level and set an example for other states by growing and cultivating the teachers we need for future success.

On behalf of our more than 115,000 members, ATPE appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the Senate Education Committee. For any additional information or for assistance in developing legislative proposals to improve teacher quality across the state, we encourage you to contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or [government@atpe.org](mailto:government@atpe.org).

## APPENDIX A

The **ATPE Legislative Program** is developed and voted on annually by our members. Below are excerpts from our current Legislative Program relating to Interim Charge 3.

### *Educator Compensation*

ATPE supports a career compensation and benefits package for all certified, licensed and contracted public school employees that mandates competitive salaries that are equal to or greater than the national average and competitive with private industry. The state program should include a minimum salary schedule that provides for step increases over a 30-year period to recognize longevity in the profession.

ATPE supports full state funding for compensation and benefit increases that districts are required to pass on to individual educators in the exact amount funded without any loss of local supplement. ATPE recommends that the state prohibit districts from substantially reducing an employee's effective rate of pay through the imposition of additional duties outside the classroom or extension of the school day, week or year. The state should prohibit school districts from making changes to local policy after the deadline for resignation, if those changes would reduce educators' compensation or benefits.

In addition to minimum salaries, ATPE supports differentiated pay in the form of step increases or stipends for public educators who undertake advanced certification/training, advanced coursework or degrees or other professional duties that they are required to perform outside normal instructional activities.

ATPE opposes incentive or performance pay programs unless they are designed in an equitable and fair manner as determined by educators on a campus basis.

ATPE supports a state minimum salary schedule for all paraprofessionals employed by the school district as well as duty-free lunches, due process, basic notification and reasons for employment termination considerations.

### *Teacher Evaluations:*

ATPE opposes the use of student test scores as the primary measure of a teacher's effectiveness, as the determining factor for a teacher's compensation or as the primary rationale for an adverse employment action.

ATPE supports the creation of a statewide set of evaluation standards for campus administrators that includes a survey of campus classroom educators and staff regarding the professional performance of the campus administrators.

ATPE supports maintaining current educator contract laws and due process laws regarding teacher assignment, transfer, hiring and dismissal, including requirements for independent hearing examiners.

### *Professional Development*

ATPE supports quality professional development programs for all school district personnel. Programs should meet the standards in the Professional Development Imperative (PDI), be offered at no cost and be made easily accessible. ATPE recommends that school districts/the state:

- a. Require site-based decision-making (SBDM) committees to determine how staff development days are used in accordance with campus needs.

- b. Offer comprehensive staff development in areas including but not limited to special education, school law, technology, gifted/talented education, crisis management, discipline, school safety and cultural awareness.
- c. Accept and approve all State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC)-approved professional development for credit by all school districts.

### ***Certification and Training***

ATPE supports the maintenance of a separate, independent state board that allows educators to govern their own profession and enforce the Educator Code of Ethics. ATPE recommends that a majority of the board's voting members be public educators elected by the profession. ATPE supports laws requiring criminal background checks of public school employees so long as public school employees are not responsible for the cost of such checks and appropriate safeguards are in place to protect the confidentiality of results.

ATPE supports a state certification process that ensures educators are appropriately trained and certified exclusively by the state. ATPE opposes mandatory national certification. ATPE supports a requirement for a review of any recommendation or decision that would deny an educator certification if such a review does not already exist. ATPE recommends that the state:

- a. Standardize teacher preparation programs to include policies and practices designed to ensure that new teachers receive adequate mentoring and support.
- b. Require comprehensive pedagogical training, including classroom and discipline management, child and adolescent psychology, and methods courses.
- c. Require coursework in the areas of reading, special education, gifted/talented, ESL and computer literacy.
- d. Require districts to assign all certified educators to teach in their certification area(s).
- e. Require administrators to have at least five years of classroom teaching experience.

ATPE supports employees of charter schools having applicable certification requirements, standards, rights and benefits commensurate with employees of traditional public schools.

ATPE supports the goals established for the Windham School District and the Texas Youth Commission. Educators employed by those entities should have certification requirements, standards, rights and benefits commensurate with other public school district educators.

## APPENDIX B

### ATPE's Recommendations for the Use of Race to the Top (RTTT) Funds for Mentoring\*

Insofar as the state's mentoring statute is permissive, we doubt that TEA could implement a statewide mandatory mentoring program absent a legislative directive, which could not occur until 2011. However, TEA would have authority to implement a pilot program and stipulate that mentoring will be required for all first-year teachers employed by the districts that opt to participate in that pilot program. Existing TxBESS standards could be used for the new pilot program.

ATPE proposes, first, that TEA solicit applicants from participating school districts to enter into an intensive summer training program to become mentors. Mentor applicants should have the approval of their school districts and should receive a modest state-funded stipend upon completion of the training. In addition to the stipends, all costs associated with the training should be covered by the state using the RTTT grant funds. TEA staff should endeavor to recruit a diverse population of mentor trainees capable of supporting a cohort of first-year teachers, which might entail quotas or limitations on the number of mentor trainees per subject, per grade level and per geographic area. Retired educators might also be trained as mentors and utilized to fill any gaps. The objective of this phase of the program would be to create a sufficient pool of trained mentors to meet the mentoring needs of the participating school districts for their first-year teachers.

Second, TEA should recommend that the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) create a type of supplemental certification for trained mentors. Mentors who have completed the state's training program and met any other criteria established by the board or commissioner should be eligible for certification as a mentor. The mentor certification would be recognized by all school districts throughout the state, ensuring portability for mentor teachers. School districts looking to employ experienced, high-quality teachers would be aided by the existence of the mentor certification process to help identify those teachers. The state should also consider offering a more specialized training program and mentor certification for teachers of students in special education or students with limited English proficiency.

Next, ATPE proposes that every beginning teacher in the participating school districts, regardless of certification status, receive three hours of mentoring per week during the first year of teaching. The mentor assigned to each first-year teacher should be trained and certified in accordance with the recommendations above and should meet the existing criteria in the state's mentoring statute. If employed full-time by a school district, each mentor teacher should be assigned to work with no more than two novice teachers per school year. If the mentor is a retiree not otherwise employed, she could be assigned to work with up to four novice teachers, which would require a commitment of 12 hours per week and thus not trigger any interruption in Teacher Retirement System (TRS) benefits.

School districts participating in the pilot program must agree to provide three hours per week of release time to their first-year teachers; this time should be in addition to and not supplant any release time already required by law or district policy. Similarly, they should provide their certified mentors with three

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\* Excerpt from an ATPE report submitted to the TEA in December 2009.



or six hours of release time per week, depending on whether the mentor is assigned to one or two beginning teachers. Participating school districts should be required, also, to arrange for the first-year teacher and her mentor to have a common planning period. It is worth noting that participants in the state's TxBESS pilot program who were surveyed earlier this decade highlighted the need for beginning teachers and their mentors to have common planning periods and similar teaching assignments and to work in close proximity to each other.

Additionally, first-year teachers participating in the program should be required to observe classes taught by their mentors throughout the school year. TEA and/or SBEC should determine the appropriate number of observation hours that will benefit the first-year teacher with minimum disruption of class schedules, and participating school districts should make necessary scheduling arrangements to allow for these observations.

Mentors would receive a \$3,750 stipend for each novice teacher they mentor, for a maximum of \$7,500 for an actively employed teacher or \$15,000 for a retired teacher serving as a mentor. As with the training stipends, this would be funded by the state using the RTTT grant. Teachers who serve as mentors should continue to be able to earn continuing professional education credits for their work as mentors.

Using an estimate of 24,000 new teachers hired by Texas school districts each year, it would require 2.6 million man hours to provide three hours of mentoring services per week to all of those teachers during their first year of teaching.<sup>†</sup> Assigning each mentor to work with two novice teachers would necessitate approximately 12,000 mentors working six hours per week. A \$7,500 stipend for each of those mentors would equate to an approximate pay rate of \$35 per mentoring hour for 36 weeks. Based on these figures, the cost to the state for mentor stipends in a single school year would be \$90 million; however, if the program is implemented as a pilot, the state's cost of providing these stipends is likely to be considerably less depending on the magnitude of the pilot program and the number of school districts participating in it.

In addition to the mentor stipends, RTTT funds should be used by the state to award formula grants to each school district participating in the pilot program. These grants should be designed to offset costs incurred by the district in providing the necessary release time and schedule accommodations for the first-year teachers and their mentors.

RTTT funding should also be set aside for a comprehensive evaluation of the pilot program, including a longitudinal study of the participating teachers. The study should assess teacher retention rates as well as growth in the achievement of students taught by those teachers over a period of at least three years. Evaluations should also include surveys of the first-year teachers who receive mentoring, the teachers who serve as mentors, and administrators in the schools in which both the first-year teachers and the

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<sup>†</sup> According to "The Cost of Underpaying Texas Teachers," a 2006 study by the Texas Comptroller, the average number of new teachers hired each year was approximately 16,600 between the years 2000 and 2004. That figure has since increased. SBEC issues approximately 30,000 new certificates each year, but not all of those certificate holders become first-year teachers in Texas public schools. As previously noted, statewide PEIMS data for 2008-09 showed that 24,000 beginning teachers were employed full-time for that school year.

mentors are employed. The evaluation of the program should include recommendations for implementing a similar mandatory mentoring program statewide for all first-year teachers and for sustaining its funding.

While the parameters of ATPE's mentoring recommendation are based on a cohort of first-year teachers only, we believe the state should consider including second-year teachers in the pilot program if there is sufficient funding. Also, the duration of the pilot program would be dependent on the amount of RTTT funding received and the restrictions imposed by the federal government. With Texas in the running for \$350 to \$700 million in RTTT funds, there is potential for our state to make a sizeable and smart investment in a mentoring pilot program as recommended by ATPE.