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*Interim Report*

TO THE EIGHTY-NINTH TEXAS LEGISLATURE

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
PUBLIC EDUCATION  
JANUARY 2025

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC EDUCATION  
TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
INTERIM REPORT 2024**

**A REPORT TO THE  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
89TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE**

**BRAD BUCKLEY  
CHAIRMAN**

**COMMITTEE CLERK  
JACK REED**

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Committee On  
Public Education

January 10, 2025

Chairman Brad Buckley

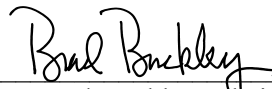
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

The Honorable Dade Phelan  
Speaker, Texas House of Representatives  
Members of the Texas House of Representatives  
Texas State Capitol, Rm. 2W.13  
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Mr. Speaker and Fellow Members:

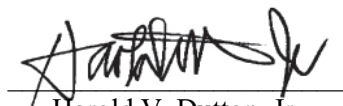
The Committee on Public Education of the Eighty-eighth Legislature hereby submits its interim report including recommendations and drafted legislation for consideration by the Eighty-ninth Legislature.


Respectfully submitted,

  
Brad Buckley, Chair

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Alma Allen, Vice Chair

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Steve Allison

  
Harold V. Dutton, Jr.

  
Cody Harris

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Brian Harrison

  
Cole Heffner

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Gina Hinojosa

  
Ken King

  
Oscar Longoria

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Matt Schaefer

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James Talarico

  
Charles Cunningham

Brad Buckley  
Chair

Alma Allen  
Vice-Chairman

Members: Steve Allison, Charles Cunningham, Harold V. Dutton, Jr., Cody Harris, Brian Harrison, Cole Heffner,  
Gina Hinojosa, Ken King, Oscar Longoria, Matt Schaefer, James Talarico

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## INTRODUCTION

Speaker Dade Phelan released interim charges for all House committees on May 8, 2024, including four interim charges for the House Committee on Public Education:

1. **Monitoring:** Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee’s jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 88th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure the intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:
  - **HB 1605**, relating to instructional material and technology, the adoption of essential knowledge and skills for certain public school foundation curriculum subjects, and the extension of additional state aid to school districts for the provision of certain instructional materials; authorizing a fee;
  - **HB 2209**, relating to establishing the Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP) program and creating an allotment and outcomes bonus under the Foundation School Program to support the program; and
  - **SB 2124**, relating to an advanced mathematics program for public school students in middle school.
2. **Educational Opportunity:** Consider issues and matters to increase educational opportunities in Texas to ensure that students and families have increased options to attend a high-quality school, regardless of circumstance. Evaluate the use of education savings accounts in other states and make recommendations for a Texas program, including suggestions on eligibility and prioritization of applicants.
3. **Teacher Certifications:** Examine the causes for and the impact to student outcomes of the increasing number of newly hired Texas teachers who are not certified by the State Board for Educator Certification. Make recommendations to enhance opportunities for uncertified teachers to become certified and strengthen parental rights and notifications.
4. **Early Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes:** Evaluate opportunities to improve students’ foundational early literacy and numeracy outcomes in Pre-Kindergarten through the third grade. Study best practices for identifying students requiring reading and math intervention and providing evidence-based intervention strategies. Recommend changes and evaluate investments to increase the number of students achieving reading and math proficiency by the end of third grade.

The Committee held two days of public hearings during the interim to consider all charges.

On August 12, 2024 the Committee held a public hearing and addressed interim charges related to monitoring passed legislation from the 88th regular legislative session as well as educational opportunity. The following day on August 13, 2024 the Committee held a public hearing and addressed interim charges related to teacher certification as well as early literacy

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and numeracy outcomes. Over the course of the two days, members heard from 131 witnesses, totaling more than 21 hours of testimony and conversation.

The archived recordings of these interim hearings can be found at the following links:

- August 12, 2024: <https://house.texas.gov/videos/11189>
- August 13, 2024: <https://house.texas.gov/videos/11188>

Additionally, 1070 comments were submitted via the House comment portal. Those responses can be found at the following links:

Implementation of HB 1605 (HQIM) (339 comments received):

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/publiccomments/Meetings/C4002024081209001/InputItems/75c98f31-6b17-4571-9f1e-13e244d1a3ea.pdf#navpanes=0>

Implementation of HB 2209 (R-PEP) (26 comments received):

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/publiccomments/Meetings/C4002024081209001/InputItems/030b602a-5fe5-44dd-9842-b01d7915ce32.pdf#navpanes=0>

Implementation of SB 2124 (Advanced Math Pathways) (9 comments received):

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/publiccomments/Meetings/C4002024081209001/InputItems/9437b95e-62f0-4b92-a418-a54235d4baa9.pdf#navpanes=0>

Educational Opportunity (606 comments received):

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/publiccomments/Meetings/C4002024081209001/InputItems/361d8e32-e055-4dd8-ad92-535106f1e431.pdf#navpanes=0>

Teacher Certifications (70 comments received):

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/publiccomments/Meetings/C4002024081309001/InputItems/ab81220a-09cf-4504-b603-b9438bb456fa.pdf#navpanes=0>

Early Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes (20 comments received):

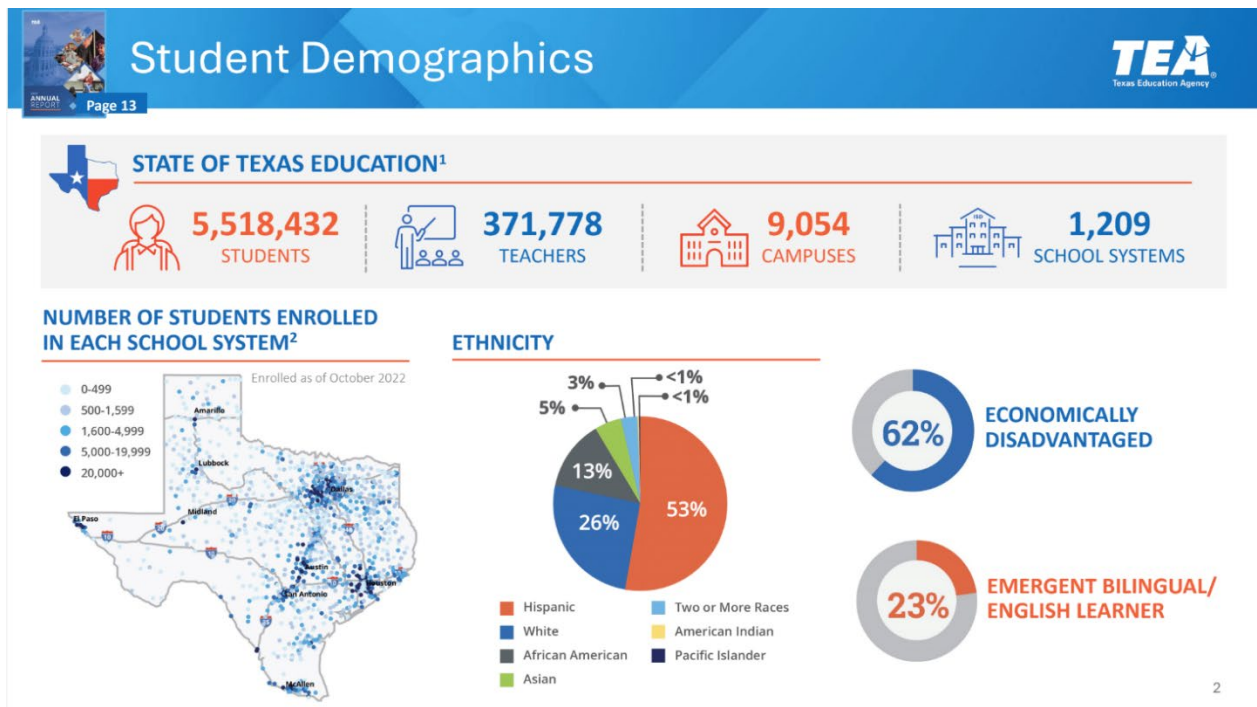
<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/publiccomments/Meetings/C4002024081309001/InputItems/bbdb44f5-ef3e-4d61-9549-73978927c7e9.pdf#navpanes=0>

The following report summarizes the work done by the Committee during the August hearings, including invited and public testimony, written testimony submitted to the Committee, and relevant comments submitted via the comment portal.

# OVERVIEW OF THE STATE OF EDUCATION

Texas Commissioner of Education, Mike Morath, opened the August interim hearings by presenting an overview of Texas’ public education system, updates on key student performance and educational progress metrics, as well as areas of focus for policymaker consideration.

**Texas’ Education System:** Texas public schools serve over 5.5 million students in 9,054 campuses across 1,209 school systems, employing over 370,000 teachers. Texas is the largest educator of rural students in the country and the majority (62%) of the states’ public school students are considered economically disadvantaged.

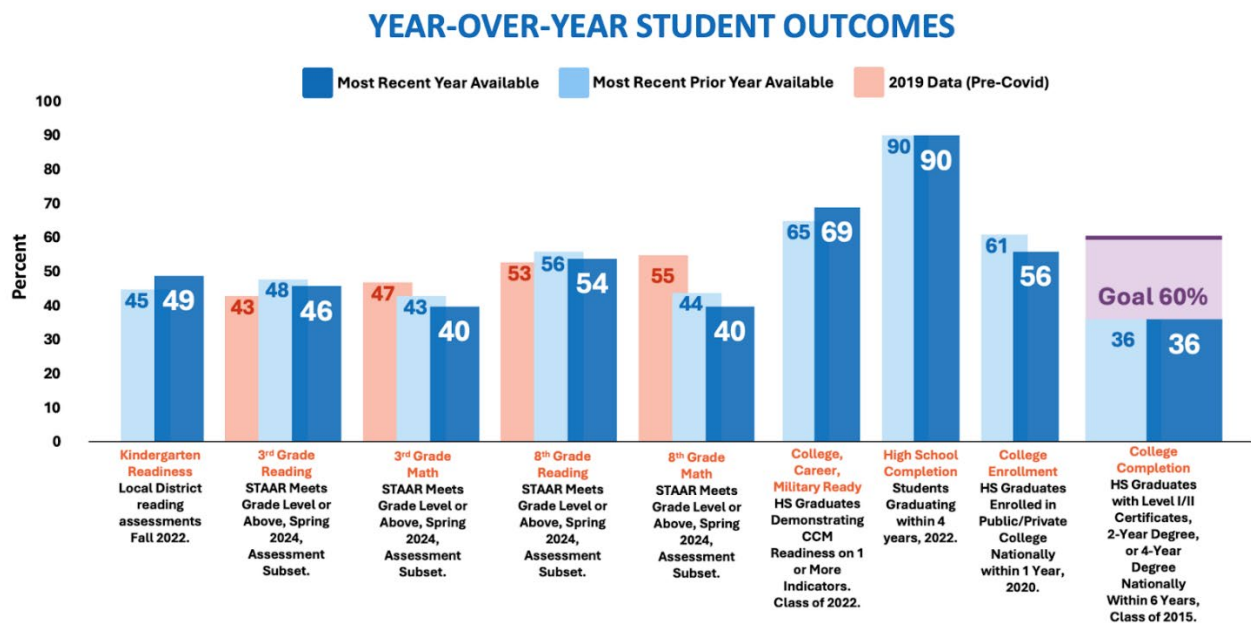


Within the public education system, Texas students have several options for where they attend school through mechanisms such as intra-district transfers, inter-district transfers, public charters, and virtual/hybrid schools. In addition, approximately 800,000 students do not enroll in Texas public schools altogether. As of school year 2023-24 over 286,000 students attended a private school and close to half a million (494,251) students were homeschooled.

Texas has seen rapid growth in its student population for the past three decades, but demographers now forecast school enrollment to peak in 2025 due to smaller birth cohorts working their way through the system. This population decline and subsequent flattening of student enrollment in conjunction with lower attendance rates (attendance is currently around 90% across the state which trails pre-COVID rates of 92%) will have implications for school systems and education finance more broadly in the years to come.

**Current Academic Outcomes:** With respect to academic proficiency, the percentage of students

meeting grade level standards or above in Reading is higher than pre-COVID levels, but remains at just 53% of all students. On the other hand, Math rates are even more sobering, with the percent of students meeting grade level or above at just 41%, 9% points below pre-COVID numbers with additional disproportionate declines for various student groups. This is particularly concerning given that students' mathematical proficiency is correlated with their long-term wage potential and Texas' economic and GDP growth.



Commissioner Morath furthermore remarked that across the U.S. assessment scores have declined since 2013 while smart phone utilization has increased, noting that some research suggests that cell phones may be harmful to student learning. He indicated that this might be a topic worthy of policy consideration as Texas schools grapple with how to address the growing impact of ‘distraction technology.’

In terms of preparing students for college, career, or the military, current metrics suggest that approximately two-thirds of Texas students graduate high school ready for their next step, with recent years seeing significant growth in students attaining Industry-Based Credentials.

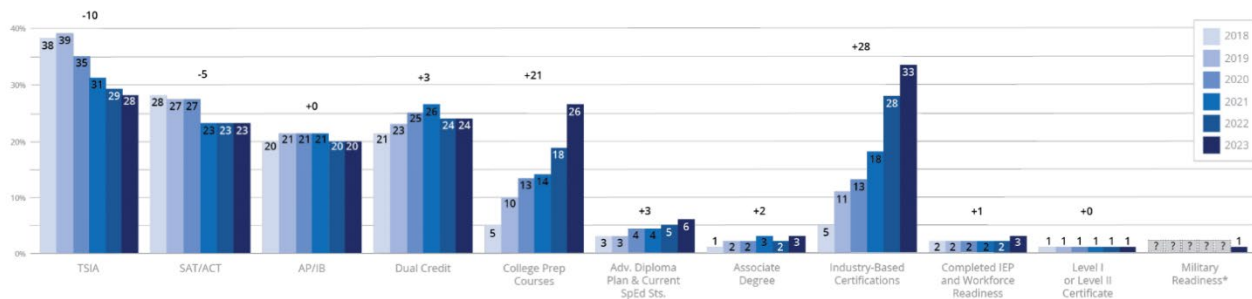


# Connect High School to Career and College



High schools in Texas work to prepare students not only for college, but also for careers. Students can demonstrate readiness for college in a number of ways, for example by taking dual credit courses.

## STUDENTS GRADUATING READY FOR COLLEGE, CAREER, AND THE MILITARY



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Multiple legislative and regulatory acts over the past few years have provided more high-quality opportunities, balancing college and career with a significant emphasis on a broad liberal arts education while also ensuring every student is ready to participate in the workforce. Specifically, Commissioner Morath highlighted the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) model, where students get both high school and work experiences as well as attain degrees and credentials. P-TECH in conjunction with Early College High Schools (ECHS) are seeing better student outcomes: 66% have completed their first semester of college by the time they graduate high school. The number of P-TECH campuses in Texas has grown dramatically over the last few years, since 2017, 276 have been established, outpacing the total number of ECHS.

**School Finance:** In addition to overviewing the outcomes of Texas’ education system in terms of student achievement, Commissioner Morath detailed various inputs that contribute to those outcomes. With respect to school funding, Texas spends upwards of \$80 billion on public education annually, equating to approximately \$15,000 per student, inclusive of local taxes and bond debt. As a result of the 88th Legislature, school safety, instructional materials, and Tier II funds increased. Per student spending for schools over the past several years is now at an all time high. With the expiration of COVID federal relief funds and high inflation rates (24%), however, Local Education Agencies’ purchasing power remains lower.

The significant growth in the number of students identified and receiving special education services in Texas schools over the last decade has also impacted school finance. Currently at 14% of the public school students qualify for special education services, a number that has increased by 72% since the 2014-15 school year. Given a current \$1.7B per year special education funding gap, the Commission of Special Education Finance convened in 2022 made a series of recommendations to address this including a core recommendation to transition the

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funding formulas to a service intensity model. These recommendations have not yet passed the Texas Legislature.

***Supporting Texas Educators:*** Commissioner Morath underscored how teachers remain the number one in school factor on student learning. Since COVID, the total count of teachers in Texas has risen while the number of students has largely stagnated. This has been partially due to an increase in specialized teacher roles, resulting in lower student-to-teacher ratios overall. While it is still higher than the pre-COVID baseline (a topic which motivated Governor Abbott to convene the Teacher Vacancy Task Force in 2022), teacher attrition is decreasing. Not accounting for inflation, Texas' teacher pay has increased 15% in the last 5 years, and teachers benefitting from the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) are seeing greater compensation increases across the state. TIA is estimated to grow to an over \$1 billion investment from the Legislature into the teacher workforce in just a few years.

***Measuring Educational Progress:*** Based on the belief that all students can achieve at high levels, Texas' current assessment and accountability system measures schools' ability to ensure students are proficient in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The committee heard testimony from Commissioner Morath on studies validating the accuracy of the STAAR test, which measures students proficiency in state standards. Morath also updated the Committee on the status of the state's educational accountability system that incorporates a host of outcome measures including

STAAR scores, College, Career, and Military Readiness indicators, as well as graduation rates. Past longitudinal studies show that public academic accountability systems work in Texas to support student outcomes. Ratings from the current A-F system have not been published for 2023 or 2024 given ongoing lawsuits, however, underlying data has been released to inform local decision making. Scale scores indicate that the breakdown of ratings for campuses in 2024 largely replicates that of 2023, with about half of campuses scoring an 80 or above.

***Additional Topics & Considerations:*** The Committee also received information about the state's grievance processes, highlighting how the volume of general education complaints has increased over the past several years since 2019. Finally, members learned about the steps that the Agency has taken to implement policies following the last legislative session to improve schools' safety postures and align local practices with identified best practices, including creating a School Safety Team and performing intruder detection audits on 100% of campuses in the state.

***Committee Discussion:*** Members asked Commissioner Morath about a wide range of topics from his presentation including diving deeper on enrollment/drop out trends and student proficiency rates by student groups, subjects, and grades along with policy levers for supporting improved outcomes. Commissioner Morath underscored the importance of a high-qualified teacher and school leader workforce, the need to focus on academic foundations in early childhood, the need for high schools to prepare and launch students for successful next steps in college and career after graduation, and the critical nature of intervening when low performance is identified. There was also extensive discussion covering details of the current school finance formula broken down by component and at a per-pupil level as well as Texas' investments in the public education system (including local, state, and federal contributions) in comparison to past

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years, national averages, economic factors, and key academic results. Commissioner Morath highlighted that some targeted investments in specific programming can lead to greater return on investment than broad-based funding infusions. Members also discussed the extent and coverage of the Supplemental Special Education Services (SSES) program, uptake of opportunities for students to transfer from low-performing schools to other public school systems, school safety investments including student mental health, inputs to support early literacy, and challenges for implementing quality vocational training for high school students.

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## INTERIM STUDY CHARGES

### **CHARGE I: Monitoring**

Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 88th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure the intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:

- HB 1605, relating to instructional material and technology, the adoption of essential knowledge and skills for certain public school foundation curriculum subjects, and the extension of additional state aid to school districts for the provision of certain instructional materials; authorizing a fee;
- HB 2209, relating to establishing the Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP) program and creating an allotment and outcomes bonus under the Foundation School Program to support the program; and
- SB 2124, relating to an advanced mathematics program for public school students in middle school.

### **CHARGE II: Educational Opportunity**

Consider issues and matters to increase educational opportunities in Texas to ensure that students and families have increased options to attend a high-quality school, regardless of circumstance. Evaluate the use of education savings accounts in other states and make recommendations for a Texas program, including suggestions on eligibility and prioritization of applicants.

### **CHARGE III: Teacher Certification**

Examine the causes for and the impact to student outcomes of the increasing number of newly hired Texas teachers who are not certified by the State Board for Educator Certification. Make recommendations to enhance opportunities for uncertified teachers to become certified and strengthen parental rights and notifications.

### **CHARGE IV: Early Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes**

Evaluate opportunities to improve students' foundational early literacy and numeracy outcomes in Pre-Kindergarten through the third grade. Study best practices for identifying students requiring reading and math intervention and providing evidence-based intervention strategies. Recommend changes and evaluate investments to increase the number of students achieving reading and math proficiency by the end of third grade.

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## CHARGE I: MONITORING – HB 1605

*Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee’s jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 88th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure the intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:*

*HB 1605, relating to instructional material and technology, the adoption of essential knowledge and skills for certain public school foundation curriculum subjects, and the extension of additional state aid to school districts for the provision of certain instructional materials; authorizing a fee;*

Registered witnesses are listed in alphabetical order by charge:

### **Monitoring HB 1605 (HQIM)**

- Bakich, Meg (Self)
- Besinger, Jackie (Self; National Alliance for Education Freedom)
- Blackburn, Angela (Self)
- Brooks, Evelyn (Self; State Board of Education, District 14)
- Cave, Tricia (Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE))
- Colbert, Paul (Self)
- Davenport, Lynn (Self)
- Eaton, Elise (Self)
- Erickson, Francine (Self)
- Gant, Karla (Self)
- Greene, Erin (Self)
- Hallamek, James (Texas State Teachers Association)
- Huff, Dr. Patrick (Self)
- Indemaio, Ayse (Self)
- Johnson, Liz (Self, IMRA reviewer)
- Kieschinick, Kelle (Self; Texas Business Leadership Council)
- Kinsey, Aaron (State Board of Education)
- Kling, Kelsey (Texas AFT)
- Linahan, Alice (Self)
- Lowe, Mary (Self)
- McCoy, Clair (Self)
- Morath, Mike (Texas Education Agency)
- Orebaugh, Tina (Self)
- Plemons, Hollie (Self)
- Russell, Ginger (Self)
- Scruggs, Susan (Self)
- Steubing, Madeline (Self)
- Super, Amie (Self)
- Williams, Michelle (Self; Houston Education Association)

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- *Registered, but did not testify*
    - Greer, Kate (The Commit Partnership)
    - Holubec, Bryan (Self)
    - Rhodes, Fran (Self; True Texas Project)
    - Simmons, Sally (Self)
    - Trejo, Shannon (Texas Education Agency)

## BACKGROUND

Texas schools have the authority to determine curriculum locally and the wide-range in instructional materials utilized and their varying quality likely contribute to poor academic outcomes. Results from curriculum audits both nationally and in Texas suggest that far too many students are not exposed to rigorous and standards-aligned instructional materials. Pilot data show that when schools use [high-quality instructional materials \(HQIM\)](#), however, their academic growth outperforms the state average.

In response, the 88th Legislature passed HB 1605 to increase student access to high-quality, on-grade-level instructional materials throughout the state and provide support to Texas educators. As such, this bill sought to address the learning acceleration needed to propel student outcomes post-COVID and beyond and also to implement the recommendations from the *Teacher Vacancy Task Force (TVTF)*. TVTF recognized the burden that a lack of vetted materials places on the Texas educator workforce: teachers spend on average seven to 12 hours each week searching for instructional materials.

Specifically, HB 1605 (88R) reformed the curriculum and instructional material process in Texas and infused over \$540 million into education funding to boost the utilization of HQIM and improve the state's educational outcomes. The wide-ranging legislation included the following components as outlined by SBOE presentation materials:

- **Instructional Materials Review and Approval (IMRA):** Created new criteria and an overall process for the State Board of Education (SBOE) review and approval of submitted instructional materials. Materials to be reviewed to ensure Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) coverage, quality, suitability in terms of grade & subject, free from factual error, no harmful content & other statutory compliance, and parent portal compliance.
- **Parent Transparency:** Required local systems to establish a classroom instructional material review process and required publishers to make IMRA-approved textbooks accessible to parents through the internet.
- **State-Owned Textbooks (Open Education Resources, OER):** Required the TEA to develop state-owned textbooks which are subject to approval by the SBOE through the IMRA process and provided optional teacher training for districts to utilize OER and a related grant for educator prep programs as well.
- **TEKS Review & Revision:** Required a new vocabulary and book list addendum to the

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Reading Language Arts standards; created flexibility in the TEKS review & revision schedule; and prohibited the use of three-cueing in phonics materials.

- **Teacher Protections:** Teachers cannot be required to use bi-weekly planning time to create initial instructional materials unless there is a supplemental duty agreement.
- **Associated Funding:** Additional funding (on top of the restored Instructional Materials and Technology Allotment) of \$40/student provided to districts who choose to use materials approved by the SBOE through IMRA as well as an additional \$20/student for districts printing state-owned materials.

Since HB 1605’s passage, the TEA and SBOE have made significant strides to implement the legislation by establishing the IMRA process and getting underway with the inaugural cycle of materials review, which began in 2024 with K-12 Math and K-5 English/Spanish Language Arts & Reading materials. Specifically, by August 2024 the SBOE had:

- Conducted 40 hours of public debate and rulemaking related to HB 1605 across 7 meetings
- Approved 6 Quality rubrics (TEA-developed) focused on implementation quality and learning quality principles and 1 Sustainability rubric (SBOE-developed) to ensure content in materials meets requirements by the SBOE and is compliant with state and federal law.
- Adopted 5 new sections of administrative rules.
- Selected and trained 295 IMRA reviewers (53% of whom are classroom teachers) out of a pool of 1,100 applicants.
- Reviewed 400+ public comments on rubric design and IMRA criteria.

The SBOE will determine approved materials from this review cycle in November 2024 with school systems able to access funding to support utilizing approved HQIM products starting in the 2025-2026 school year. Future review cycles will expand to additional grades and subjects.

## LEGISLATIVE DISCUSSION

Members of the Committee heard testimony from TEA, State Board of Education members, IMRA reviewers, and advocates who spoke to the implementation of HB 1605 thus far.

Witnesses reflected on the evidence base behind the legislative intent of HB 1605; the newly established review process for instructional materials, parent access to curricula, updates to TEKS, and teacher relief from curriculum development. An overview was provided by SBOE Chairman Aaron Kinsey detailing the Board’s efforts to develop new rubrics for assessing quality and suitability, and plans to provide updates and feedback reports to publishers throughout the IMRA process. IMRA reviewers specifically detailed the intentionality of the process including the training they’ve received and the team-oriented, consensus-building procedures built into the review cycle. They also underscored the potential impact this process

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would have in terms of creating a shared understanding of high-quality materials and increasing student outcomes. The discussion also touched on the development of the state-owned OER, intended to be freely accessible for Texas classrooms. Panelists emphasized the ongoing and iterative nature of the process, as the interim hearing took place months in advance of the conclusion of the first IMRA cycle with several implementation steps remaining outstanding.

Throughout the hearing concerns were raised about the curriculum's inclusion of specific religious content, with some members questioning whether it adheres to constitutional principles like the separation of church and state. Discussion also included the importance of making both digital and printed materials available for school systems. Public testimony also spoke to the intersection of HQIM and teacher preparation, highlighting concerns that there might be a reduction in teacher standards if the requirement for teachers to learn how to design and plan lessons were to be removed. Conversations centered around how to ensure that all teachers have the necessary training to implement HQIM and provide high-quality lessons to meet student needs.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Continue Texas' commitment to a rigorous instructional materials review process that results in the state's ability to provide interested school systems with high-quality on-grade-level, engaging materials (in both digital and printed modalities) that meet the needs of all learners, accelerate instruction, and support educator workloads. Consider additional funding necessary to ensure HB 1605 implementation meets initial legislative intent.
2. Monitor the completion of the first IMRA review cycle and the IMRA process in future years, encouraging the TEA and SBOE to work together on the process in order to provide school systems with clarity about their available options.



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## CHARGE I: MONITORING – HB 2209

*Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee’s jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 88th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure the intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:*

*HB 2209, relating to establishing the Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP) program and creating an allotment and outcomes bonus under the Foundation School Program to support the program;*

Registered witnesses are listed in alphabetical order by charge:

### **Monitoring HB 2209 (R-PEP)**

- DeWitt, Christopher (Texas Education Agency)
- Gonzalez, Michael (Rural Schools Innovation Zone)
- Gutierrez, Ava (Self)
- Salazar, Alejos (Self; Lasara ISD)
- Vega, Adrian (Education Partnership of the Permian Basin)
- *Registered, but did not testify*
  - Avini, Mitrah (Texas 2036)
  - Hodge, Andrew (Texas Education Agency)
  - Holubec, Bryan (Self)

## **BACKGROUND**

Texas educates more rural students – just over one million students in total – than any other state in the country. Given the distinct challenges rural school districts face in providing a breadth of high-quality options that prepare students for life after graduation, the Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP) program (HB 2209) was passed by the 88th Legislature with the specific aim of expanding access to high-quality postsecondary pathways aligned to local workforce needs for rural high school students. The program was replicated after the successful Rural School Innovation Zone (RSIZ) model, which brought together several districts in South Texas to pool resources and offer shared pathway programs aligned with regional high-wage, high-demand fields such as nursing, welding, cybersecurity, education and more.

The data show that students participating in R-PEP have significantly increased postsecondary readiness outcomes. For example, Freer ISD joined the RSIZ in 2019 and saw their College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) rates increase 52.9% points between 2017 and 2023 as well as their Industry-Based Credentials attainment and Dual Credit participation increasing 47.5% points and 39.2% points respectively in that same time period.

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To enable other school partnerships to achieve similar gains, HB 2209 builds off of this model defining R-PEPs as collaborations of districts with:

- fewer than 1,600 students (over 600 districts in the state meet this criteria)
- college and career pathways – or programs of study or endorsements aligned with regional labor market projections for high-wage, high-demand careers, incorporating CTE, P-TECH & ECHS models, college and career advising, and a continuum of work-based learning experiences – available to all students
- a Coordinating Entity that operates and oversees pathways, coordinating the multi-district partnership with a governing or advisory board
- a performance agreement outlining Coordinating Entity and school district roles and responsibilities with metrics to measure and track success.

Under the statute, collaboratives that meet this definition are provided two newly created supports:

1. **Additional Allotment:** R-PEP designated districts receive an additional school finance allotment for each student enrolled in a postsecondary pathway, as well as an outcomes bonus for each student who earns a valuable postsecondary credential within up to five years after graduation.
2. **Startup Grant Program:** TEA supports new R-PEP collaboratives through a grant that offers districts both funding and technical assistance for planning and implementation.

The R-PEP formula funding allotment is meaningful: a high school student enrolled in these pathways typically brings in an additional \$2,928 per ADA for the district if the student is considered economically disadvantaged and \$2,546 per ADA if the student is non-economically disadvantaged. Additionally, bonuses for CCMR outcomes for students within these partnerships have also been enhanced.

Since HB 2209's passage, TEA has designated a first cohort of 3 R-PEP partnerships in the Rio Grande Valley (the RSIZ), Permian Basin, and Falls County, including 10 school districts and 9 institutions of higher education offering 18 pathways in total. There are also four new collaboratives up and running, involving 17 districts and providing access to over 2,000 students that will seek R-PEP designation in the coming year as part of a second cohort.

## LEGISLATIVE DISCUSSION

Members of the Committee heard from TEA, as well as leaders and a student from existing R-PEP collaboratives who are seeing value first-hand on-the-ground from the implementation of HB 2209. Witnesses expressed gratitude for the legislation as they overviewed the reasons driving R-PEP creation including districts' desires to strengthen alignment and rigor of college/career pathways in rural regions, to design and implement real-world work experiences for their students, to leverage economies of scale to maximize efficiency and effectiveness of educational offerings, and ultimately to increase student postsecondary outcomes. Early adopters

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of R-PEP are realizing similarly positive outcomes to the original RSIZ. Specifically, the R-PEP in the Permian Basin has 100% of its students on track to take at least one dual credit or continuing education course. The program experienced a 127% increase in student enrollment in the program, and 93% of students surveyed expressed that their academic performance in other courses increased as a result of the program. An RSIZ student informed the Committee that the opportunities afforded through the program are “setting her up for success,” enabling her to invest back in her community as it is currently investing in her to have a strong future as an educator.

To achieve these results and further scale impact throughout the state, R-PEP participating districts and leaders emphasized the importance of start-up funding and planning support provided by philanthropic sources, which helped them initially launch their quality partnerships and programming. The need for interagency coordination and new data collection systems are emerging challenges in this respect. Additionally, they noted that the state grants as outlined in the legislation are currently delayed due to a lack of dedicated funding separate from the allotment (currently all appropriated funds are flowing to the entitlements and grants are not able to be simultaneously prioritized). Rural districts require about one year to plan their participation in programs like R-PEP as resources and district capacity are stretched across various programs and initiatives. The importance of funding for startup collaboration is essential to ensure smooth partnerships in alignment with local workforce needs as school districts must also closely collaborate with employers to ensure that programs are relevant to regional labor market demands.

The sustainability of workforce training programs and the formalized process for R-PEPs to connect with employers to ensure students are aligned with local job market needs was a key concern raised by members, highlighting the importance of ongoing collaboration between education and industry to adapt quickly to shifting economic demands and workforce requirements.

The Committee learned about the growing demand for R-PEP across Texas with over 50 school districts across 30 prospective coordinating entities having expressed interest in launching an R-PEP. Although members were impressed by how this interest holds great promise for statewide impact, the current funding cap (of \$5 million annually) as detailed in statute hinders program growth in the mid-to-longer term and prevents school systems and institutions of higher education from the clarity needed to plan programming and expansion efforts. TEA estimates that this existing funding cap will be maxed out by FY28 or FY29 (only serving ~2500 students), while current demand could exceed 6,000 students served by FY32 for just the first 5 R-PEP cohorts. Testimony suggested raising or removing the cap to ensure more systems are able to participate in the program and support strong outcomes for students and thriving local rural economies.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Meaningfully adjust the \$5 million R-PEP funding cap to ensure high-quality postsecondary readiness opportunities can be provided to more rural students.
2. Ensure the R-PEP Planning and Implementation Grant has a dedicated funding source to enable state support of essential start up costs and quality partnership development.

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## CHARGE I: MONITORING – SB 2124

*Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee’s jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 88th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure the intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:*

*SB 2124, relating to an advanced mathematics program for public school students in middle school.*

Registered witnesses are listed in alphabetical order by charge:

### **Monitoring SB 2124 (Advanced Math Pathways)**

- Flores, Priscilla (E3 Alliance)
- Herron, Dr. Angela (Grand Prairie ISD)
- Martinez, Monica (Texas Education Agency)
- Robinson, Sile (The Commit Partnership)
- Williams, Michelle (Self; Houston Education Association)
- *Registered, but did not testify*
  - Dickie, Lez (Self)
  - Holubec, Bryan (Self)

## **BACKGROUND**

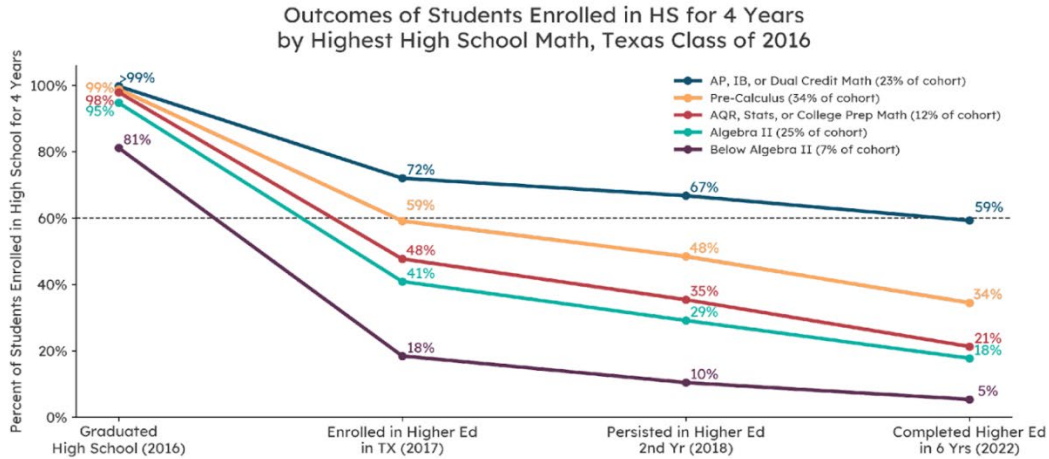
Students’ early understanding of math concepts is critical as it is the strongest predictor of later academic success and enables access to broader academic and workforce opportunities. Specifically, research shows a strong correlation between taking advanced math courses and positive postsecondary outcomes, including higher education completion and increased wages.

This process, however, starts early on in a student's academic journey: completion of Algebra I by 8th grade enables students to pursue college-aligned math coursework in high school. Students taking math for all four years of high school are then twice as likely to attain a postsecondary credential. Similarly, students completing a college-aligned math course in high school are more likely to complete a postsecondary credential than those who only complete up to Algebra II.

Students who take advanced math courses in high school are more likely to persist in and complete higher education



## Math Pipeline—Texas



Source: E3 Alliance analysis of TEA and THECB data at the UT Austin Education Research Center

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Before SB 2124 was passed by the 88th Legislature, enrollment policies for middle school advanced math varied across Texas school systems, with some relying on inconsistent, incomplete or subjective measures such as educator, counselor, or parent recommendations to inform course placement decisions. Additionally, some school systems did not offer advanced courses to their students at all. The Committee heard data from Dallas County school systems that highlights this disparity and mirrors a larger statewide trend, showing significant variation in the percentage of 8th grade students taking Algebra I and achieving proficiency across different school systems.

SB 2124 aimed to address these disparities and ensure all capable students have the opportunity to access advanced math coursework. Specifically, it required all school systems to offer an advanced math middle school program, and notably it established a consistent, statewide "opt-out" policy for middle school advanced math. Under this policy, students scoring in the top 40% on the 5th grade standardized math assessment or a comparable local measure are automatically enrolled in accelerated math in 6th grade, placing them on the trajectory to take Algebra I in 8th grade and subsequently access higher-level math courses in high school. While requiring robust communication on the program from school systems, the policy empowers parents with the choice to opt their child out of the advanced math pathway if desired, with associated rulemaking ensuring that school systems receive written approval from parents before a student is removed from the advanced program. A scan of existing state policies across the nation estimates that Texas is one of only a handful of other states leading the way on this innovative, data-driven decision making process to enroll top performers in advanced coursework early on and set more students up for success.

Since the legislation’s passage, the TEA has provided several supports for school districts in implementing its required provisions starting in the 2024-25 school year. In particular, the Texas Virtual School Network (TXVSN) has been highlighted by the Agency as an option for school

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systems to utilize, providing access to fully developed 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade math courses taught by certified instructors. Additionally, new reporting on the Texas Performance Reporting System (TPRS) helps school leaders and policymakers identify Grade 8 Algebra I participation for students demonstrating proficiency in Grade 5 Math across student groups at the campus, district, and state levels. TEA anticipates these data reports to reflect SB 2124's impact of bringing Algebra I participation up for high proficiency students in all student groups.

In conjunction with the resources shared from TEA and best practices of school systems already implementing advanced middle school math, the State Board of Education took action in June 2024 to move forward with the establishment of TEKS for middle school advanced math, laying the foundation for the development of associated advanced 6th and 7th grade math HQIM to be approved and implemented by the 2028-29 school year.

## **LEGISLATIVE DISCUSSION**

Witnesses expressed appreciation for the policy's data-backed rationale, emphasizing the link between advanced math course-taking and improved postsecondary outcomes. SB 2124 has the incredible potential to increase the number of students prepared for college and pursuing higher-paying careers. According to testimony from the E3 Alliance, if SB 2124 had been in place during the 2021-2022 school year, projections estimate that 52,099 more 8th graders would have been automatically enrolled in advanced math pathways reaching Algebra I in the 2024-2025 school year. A North Texas district testified that the number of 6th graders enrolled in their advanced math pathway has nearly doubled over the last two years since SB 2124 was passed.

Overall, the Committee learned that school system leaders are excited to implement the policy, grow or improve their advanced middle school math programs, and engage parents in the process, signaling a significant shift in the way schools are communicating and thinking about math pathways. Witnesses highlighted how some school systems have gone above and beyond to support student success in the new program including leveraging tutoring and afterschool time to bridge necessary learning acceleration and establishing shared service agreements across districts to pool resources and expand offerings.

At the same time, witnesses also testified to the importance of a comprehensive approach to implementing SB 2124. Advocates and school systems leaders stressed the importance of early math development, even before fifth grade, in preparing students for success in advanced math pathways. This sentiment aligns with research highlighting the strong predictive power of early math skills for later academic achievement. In this same vein, witnesses acknowledged that without strong foundations parents may have concerns about their student's readiness for advanced math. There is a need for robust support systems to ensure student success once placed in the advanced course and potentially alleviate anxieties that could lead to opting out of the program.

The Committee received some input that further clarity around onramps to the advanced math pathway in 7th grade – beyond the bill's 6th grade entry point - would be beneficial. Panelists expressed appreciation for the SBOE's development of advanced math TEKS, providing additional perspective that aligned, advanced curricular materials that span the entire program

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pathway are warranted for SB 2124 to meet its potential.

Finally, school system leaders and advocates alike highlighted the importance of ensuring an adequately certified educator workforce and equipping teachers with the necessary skills and resources to effectively implement SB 2124. The need for professional development opportunities, particularly in math content knowledge, was emphasized to ensure teachers can confidently deliver high-level instruction.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Monitor comprehensive data collection (e.g., student demographics, opt-out rates, and long-term academic outcomes) to ensure successful implementation aligned with legislative intent, evaluate program efficacy and identify areas for future improvement including intersections with other education policy issues.
2. Monitor the SBOE's implementation of middle school advanced math TEKS to ensure their timely development in support of school systems' implementation of SB 2124 with fidelity.



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## CHARGE II: EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

*Consider issues and matters to increase educational opportunities in Texas to ensure that students and families have increased options to attend a high-quality school, regardless of circumstance. Evaluate the use of education savings accounts in other states and make recommendations for a Texas program, including suggestions on eligibility and prioritization of applicants.*

Registered witnesses are listed in alphabetical order by charge:

### **Educational Opportunity**

- Abell, Rachael (Self)
- Adams, Bryce (Self; Texas Public Charter Schools Association)
- Ale-Opinion, Aihanuwa (Self)
- Aleman, Steven (Disability Rights Texas)
- Alexander Greta (Self)
- Bagley, Robyn (Utah Education Fits All)
- Bresnahan, Leticia (Self)
- Brimer, Chelsey (Self)
- Brooks, Evelyn (Self; State Board of Education, District 14)
- Burton, Jarred (Self)
- Castle, Mary Elizabeth (Texas Values Action)
- Chartier, Michael (ExcelinEd)
- Cohen, Hayden (Students Engaged in Advancing Texas)
- Colbert, Paul (Self)
- Dippell, Colleen (Families Empowered)
- Easley, Jennifer (Texas PTA)
- Exeter, Monty (Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE))
- Fox, Merrir (Self)
- Garcia-Tejeda, Jessica (Self; ACE Scholarships)
- Ginn, Vance (Self)
- Gonzalez Saucedo, Sabrina (The Arc of Texas)
- Guglielmo, Jaclyn (ACE Scholarships)
- Hermes, Lisa (Self; McKinney Chamber of Commerce)
- Hoffacker, Daphne (Self)
- Johnson, Russ (Self; Lorena ISD)
- Jones, Carl (Self)
- Kaetzel, Christina (Indiana Treasurer of State)
- Kling, Kelsey (Self; Texas AFT)
- Kosobud, Terry (Self)
- Kuhl, Ken (Self)
- Latham Sikes, Chloe (Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC))
- Lehman Lopez, Jeanne (Self)
- Lopez Valdez, Daniella (Self; Brownsville Independent School District)

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- Luke, Charles (Self; Coalition for Public Schools)
  - Mcdonough, Robbie (Self)
  - Moore, Savant (Self)
  - Norris, Robert (Self)
  - Noyola, Alicia (Self; South Texas Association of Schools)
  - Nunn, Karalei (Self; Meridian World School)
  - ODell, Stephanie (Self)
  - Papari, Arshia (Self)
  - Pascarella, Ryan (Texas Values)
  - Pieniazek, Ray (Self; Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas)
  - Puente, Jaime (Every Texan)
  - Rainey, Norton (ACE Scholarships)
  - Rice, Conor (Self)
  - Salazar, Alejos (Self, Lasara ISD)
  - Salazar, Ruben (Self)
  - Solis, Laurie (Self; Austin Council of PTA)
  - Swift, Laurel (Self)
  - Watts, Pam (Self; Midway ISD- McLennan County)
  - Wolf, Patrick (Self)
  - *Registered, but did not testify*
    - Blankenship, Sheri (Self; Hereford ISD)
    - Chevalier, Andrea (TCASE)
    - Dawer, Daniel (Self)
    - Guerrero, Faithe (Self)
    - Guerrero, Fernando (Self)
    - Hallamek, James (Texas State Teachers Association)
    - Holubec, Bryan (Self)
    - Mbaya, Sarah (Texas Values)
    - Morrison, Shinara (Self)
    - Panju, Arif (Self; Institute for Justice)
    - Posey, Cassandra (Self)
    - Schutte, Marian (Self)
    - Venezia, Charles (Self)
    - Villalobos, Lupita (Self)
    - Williams, Michelle (Self; Houston Education Association)

## **BACKGROUND**

Texas is home to more than 6.2 million K-12 students who attend educational programming across a variety of settings: roughly 88% attend a public or public charter school, 8% are homeschooled, and approximately 4% attend private school.

## Current Learning Options for 6.2 Million Texas K-12 Students



Learning Option	Students Participating	Additional Details
<b>Intra-District Transfers</b>	Not Collected by TEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Districts may allow for this by established enrollment policy.</li> <li>Ultimately, the board of trustees determines assignment and transfer of students and may deny petition of transfer based on 'reasonable basis for denying the request.'</li> </ul>
<b>Inter-District Transfers</b>	2023-24: <b>230,858</b> <small>PEIMS Data</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents may request transfer to another district but receiving district determines whether to accept (i.e., not open-enrollment).</li> <li>Districts may charge tuition on transfers.</li> </ul>
<b>Public Charter Schools</b>	2023-24: <b>422,930</b> <small>PEIMS Data</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Charter schools provide public school options for families outside of their assigned school district</li> <li>Open-enrollment, if oversubscribed students selected by lottery</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual and Hybrid Schools</b>	2023-24 TEC 30A Waiver: <b>16,540</b> 2023-24 TXVSN: <b>35,364</b> <small>PEIMS Data</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issued waiver to programs created through SB 15 (expired September 1, 2023) to continue to operate under TEC Chapter 30A until 2025 TXVSN also allows full time virtual school; temporary waivers have been extended for expiring SB 15 schools.</li> </ul>
<b>Private Schools</b>	2023-24: <b>286,624</b> <small>Texas Private School Association School Enrollment</small> 2023-24 IDEA Placement: <b>718</b> <small>PEIMS Data</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private schools provide options for families aligned to a variety of models / school designs; families pay tuition and other costs.</li> <li>Under IDEA, public schools pay for a small number of students with disabilities to be placed in private schools or facilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Homeschool</b>	2023-2024: <b>494,251</b> <small>U.S. Census Bureau Pulse Survey June 2024</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents may choose to educate their children, have children educated in another home, or hire a tutor to provide education</li> <li>Families pay for curriculum and/or services.</li> </ul>

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Policies regarding additional educational opportunities for Texas students, specifically education savings accounts (ESAs), were debated in the 88th Regular Session and subsequent education-focused special sessions, but a corresponding bill has not yet passed.

ESAs are flexible spending accounts funded by the state and controlled by parents to customize and direct funds to approved uses for their students. Across the country, 29 states have implemented a single school choice program or more; 16 of which at least one program structured as an ESA. Other states thus offer several examples from which Texas can learn and inform policy decisions on this issue. For example:

- Indiana:** The state has four school choice programs. The ESA program administered by the Indiana Treasury of State was enacted in 2021 and accepted students beginning in the 2022-23 school year, providing up to \$20,000 for students with disabilities and their siblings who meet the income requirement of 400% free or reduced meal rate. ESA grant funding can be used on private school tuition, curriculum, services, therapies, transportation, training programs and camps, and assessments. The state currently appropriates \$10 million annually to support the program. In the 2023-24 school year 555 participated in the program. The state's one-of-a-kind Career Scholarship Account (CSA) program which is jointly administered across three state agencies was more recently enacted in 2023 and first accepted students in that same school year. The program is universal and aims to provide 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students with internships, apprenticeships, and applied learning experiences toward attaining a credential of value with the ultimate goal of supporting work-based learning programs and addressing barriers to entry for students. With an annual appropriation of \$10 million the program supports 2,000 students at \$5,000 each.

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- **Utah:** The Utah Fits All Scholarship program was passed in 2023, offering universal school choice for K-12 students beginning in the 2024-25 school year. This program awards \$8,000 per student regardless of income or demographic variables. Notably public schools can participate in the program as providers. Initially the state appropriated \$40 million to accommodate 5,000 students but soon after doubled the allocated funding to serve 10,000 students. The legislature must appropriate further funds for the program to expand, but the per student funding is set to increase as it's tied to an inflationary index to adjust for rising costs. With limited appropriations, Utah relies on income preference levels and a lottery selection system. Given Utah's broader statute concerning parent opt out of state assessments, accountability for the ESA program offers participating students two options: 1) participation in a variety of approved assessments including national norm-referenced tests, or 2) completion of a portfolio including a description of the students' opportunities and achievements.

## LEGISLATIVE DISCUSSION

Members heard from agency staff administering school choice programs from several other states as well as national researchers on the topic in addition to parents, educators, and advocates.

Proponents of education savings accounts (ESAs) discussed how parents are the foremost experts on their students' educational needs and should be empowered to make decisions on their behalf. They claimed that school choice programs such as those outlined at the hearing support democratized access to educational settings, and recognize the dynamic and responsive policies needed to support all learners.

Researchers highlighted that select studies show that school choice programs can be effective if they meet the following criteria: 1) attract a large, diverse set of high-quality education providers, 2) provide adequate information to parents to support them as informed consumers, and 3) initially prioritize serving disadvantaged and specific student groups (low-income, special education, and Kindergartners) before expanding to other populations. On the other hand, additional panelists shared the perspective that universal programming should be prioritized.

Several themes emerged in the conversation overviewing lessons learned from other states including parental empowerment and family flexibility (e.g., there are many differing views on what should be considered an allowable expense), fiscal accountability and transparent program information (including the production of an annual report with aggregate outcomes data), ease of program administration for parents, providers, and state agencies, and policies to prioritize highest impact populations while programs face limited funding.

Although witnesses acknowledged the need for program accountability and fairness, requiring open admission and mandating participation in the state accountability test can deter private schools from participating in the school choice program. Some proponents of ESAs instead offered that private school accreditation provides a measure of quality and adequate information for parents on the educational services provided when combined with test scores from a norm-referenced assessment aligned to the private school (not public school) curriculum. Indiana and

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Utah's programs offer differing models for considerations, including practices around accreditation and student assessment requirements.

With respect to program implementation, additional reflections were shared with the Committee such as setting aside a share of funds to administer the program (~5-10%) with highest costs to be anticipated in the program's initial years; establishing a broad timeline (e.g., year-round) for parents to be able to sign up for an ESA to promote fair participation; eliminating the need for annual reapplications; scaling parent navigators to support information dissemination with families; and conducting targeted, sample expenditure audits as opposed to comprehensive reviews in order to sustain program capacity. Members were curious about allowable expenditures in other states' programs and if there had been any evidence of fraud. Testimony informed the Committee that program expenditures are typically all tuition-based in the initial years of a program but diversify as the program matures.

Opponents of ESAs shared concerns about the potential resulting impact on public school funding if an ESA program expands, as well as the ability for providers to adequately serve students with high levels of need. Legislators countered that more than 80% of private schools in Texas teach special education students through special education programs, with many campuses solely dedicated to serving students with special education needs. Additionally, conversation included discussion of appropriate oversight and accountability in an ESA program. Legislators and public testimony both expressed concerns with private school selection and admissions policies (beyond compliance with federal discrimination laws) as well as how to measure overall program success. Furthermore, Committee members asked questions about the data regarding student outcomes and experiences in states that have implemented ESA and voucher programs thus far as well as the variance by rural and urban settings and the impact of programs on the number of private education providers and the traditional public school systems.

Throughout the hearing, members expressed interest in learning more about programs and associated outcomes in other states, as well as distinguishing information between voucher- vs. ESA-structured programs to better understand their differing definitions, parameters, and respective outcomes. There was general acknowledgement that any school choice program participation is limited by state appropriations, and the committee weighed how to structure a school choice policy in Texas that results in high-quality options for families, realizes improved outcomes for students in need, and can be implemented to see sustained results.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In any proposed school choice policies, require annual, program-level reporting (when student participation numbers allow) to ensure transparency of taxpayer dollars and effective programming leading to improved student outcomes. Specifically, ensure private providers share individual student level data to families to make informed decisions and share aggregate data with the state, resulting in the production of a publicly available annual report with disaggregated program data on key indicators.
2. In any proposed school choice policies, ensure adequate focus on rollout and implementation supports, such as ensuring an appropriate timeline for the designated state agency to successfully administer the program.
3. In any proposed school choice policies, establish a universal program which prioritizes serving specific student groups with the greatest need.

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## CHARGE III: TEACHER CERTIFICATIONS

*Examine the causes for and the impact to student outcomes of the increasing number of newly hired Texas teachers who are not certified by the State Board for Educator Certification. Make recommendations to enhance opportunities for uncertified teachers to become certified and strengthen parental rights and notifications.*

Registered witnesses are listed in alphabetical order by charge:

### Teacher Certifications

- Chevalier, Andrea (Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education)
- Easley, Jennifer (Texas PTA)
- Eaton, Holly (Texas Classroom Teachers Association)
- Edmonson, Stacey (Self; Sam Houston State University)
- Exter, Monty (ATPE)
- Feinstein, Jonathan (The Education Trust)
- Flores, Sarai (Self; MASBA)
- Gray, JoMeka (Self)
- Hallamek, James (Texas State Teachers Association)
- Huber, Diann (Iteach)
- Iannaccone, Marisa (Self)
- Jones, Joshua (Tarelton State University)
- Kirksey, Jacob (Texas State University)
- Malone, Cara (Hutto ISD)
- Oeser, Kelvey (TEA)
- Parker, Jennifer (Clint ISD)
- Rozell, Scott (Self; 240 Tutoring)
- Serna, Jayne (Self; ATPE)
- Streepey, Jean (Self; State Board for Educator Certification)
- Torres, Laura (UT Austin)
- Van Overschelde, Jim (Self; Texas State University)
- Wetherington, Pam (Self; Houston Education Association)
- *Registered, but did not testify*
  - Castanos, Christina (Self)
  - Clark, Laura (Self)
  - Franklin, Ryan (Educate Texas at Communities Foundation of Texas)
  - Hodge, Andrew (TEA)
  - Holubec, Bryan (Self)
  - McLoughlin, Jessica (TEA)
  - Morrison, Heath (Teachers of Tomorrow)

### BACKGROUND

Ahead of the last legislative session Governor Abbott convened a Teacher Vacancy Task Force

(TVTF) to examine increasing teacher turnover rates and make recommendations for the Legislature to consider in order to improve teacher retention, bolstering the profession and Texas’ education system more broadly. The Task Force’s recommendations regarding compensation, training and support, and working conditions were discussed in the 88th regular and special sessions with broad consensus but resulting legislation did not pass. As the state continues to grapple with addressing those same issues and realizing the recommendations of the TVTF, emergent trends as illustrated in recent data from TEA, UT, and Texas Tech warrant further legislative attention.

Texas currently employs more than 370,000 teachers, with recent years witnessing an unprecedented increase in new hires. Approximately 1 in 10 Texas students were served by a first year teacher last year. In conjunction with this sharp rise in hiring over the past two years, the state has seen a shift in the preparation routes from which these new teachers have been hired: the proportion of non-certified individuals has more than tripled over the past decade, rising to 34% in 2024 from just 7% in 2015. During the 2023-24 school year, uncertified teachers accounted for over 80% of new hires in 40 out of the 54 Texas counties, with substantially higher prevalence in rural districts. Furthermore, data from this same time period reveals that nearly 1 in 5 of the uncertified new teachers did not hold a bachelor’s degree.

Texas educators have several pathways to enter the teaching profession, with varying practices that contribute to high-quality preparation. TEA has identified that high-quality educator preparation supports teacher candidates to gain clinical classroom practice, content knowledge, and mentorship/coaching in the first years in the classroom. However, with limited direct state funding for teacher preparation, many teacher candidates opt for the lowest cost preparation models available, not necessarily the highest quality, often more expensive, options. Moreover, with increased teacher turnover, especially novice or early-career teachers, school systems are increasingly reliant on uncertified and underprepared teachers.

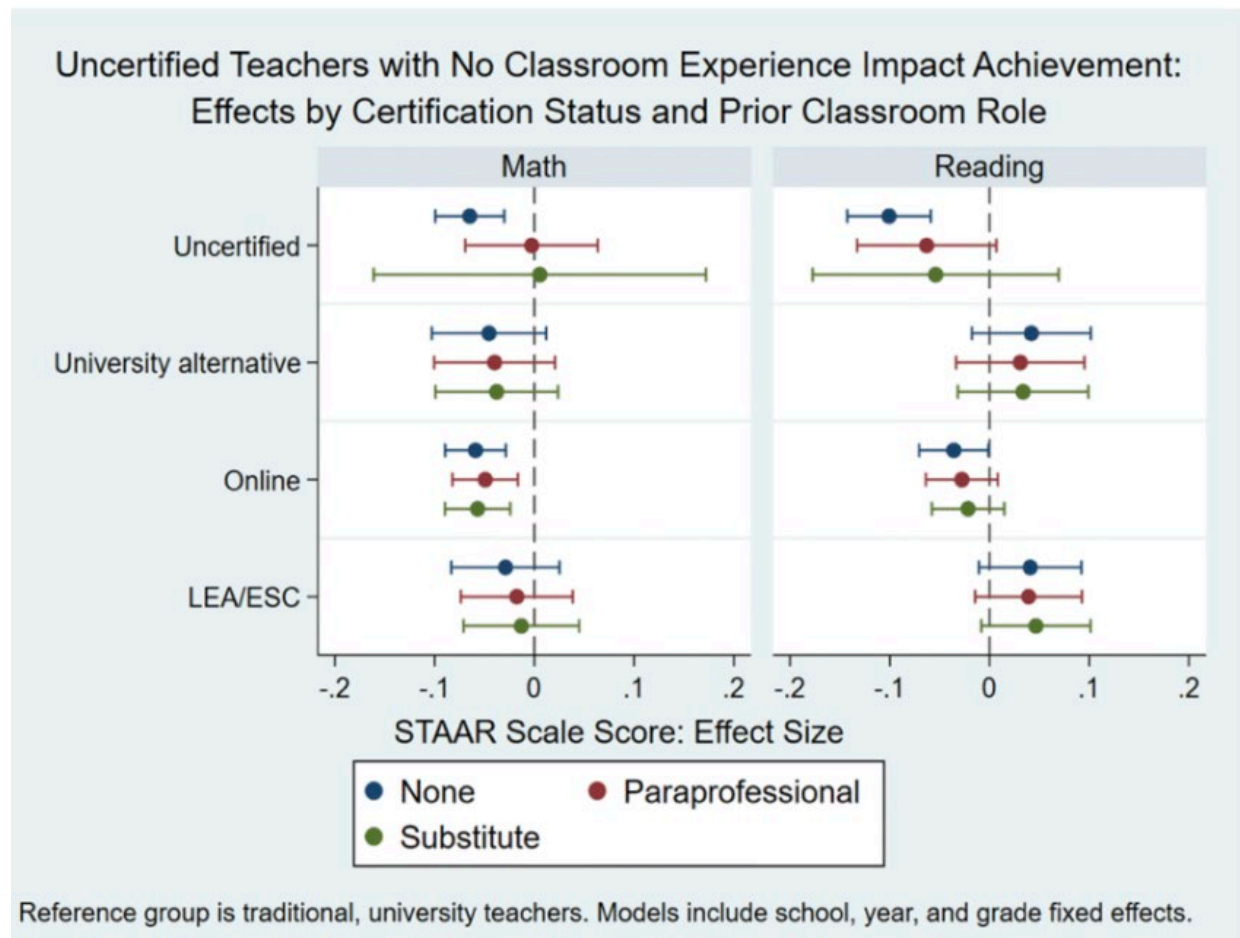
	Residency	Traditional Undergraduate University	Alt Cert Internship	Alt Cert Late Hire Internship	Uncertified
Classroom Practice	●●●● Early field-based experiences + Yearlong teacher residency	●●●○ Early field-based experiences + Semester-long student teaching	●○○○ Early field-based experiences	○○○○ None pre-teacher of record	○○○○ None
Content Knowledge	●●●○ Content demonstration for admission + content pedagogy exam pre-teacher or record, integrated content-specific coursework with yearlong practice	●●●○ Content demonstration for admission + content pedagogy exam pre-teacher or record, variable quality of content-specific coursework	●●●○ Content demonstration for admission + content pedagogy exam pre-teacher or record, variable quality of content-specific coursework	●●●○ Content demonstration for admission + content pedagogy exam pre-teacher or record, variable quality of content-specific coursework	○○○○ None
Mentoring and Coaching	●●●● Extensive coaching and placement under effective mentor during residency	●●○○ Some coaching and placement under effective mentor during student teaching	●●○○ Some coaching and mentorship support from assigned campus mentor	●●○○ Some coaching and mentorship support from assigned campus mentor	●○○○ Support from assigned campus mentor
	Most expensive and highest quality (variable tuition + lost potential salary during pre-service)		Variable Quality and Cost Higher Quality = \$6K - \$15K, Lower Quality = \$4K		\$0

TEA data indicate that higher quality preparation routes enhance teacher retention rates: 64% of teachers from traditional undergraduate programs remain in the classroom after five years,



compared to 58% from alternatively certified and 39% from non-certified routes. More than 30% of uncertified teachers leave after just their first year of teaching, creating a "revolving door" that burdens schools and mentors with repeatedly training unprepared teachers, disrupting operational consistency.

The pathway by which teacher candidates are prepared impacts both retention and student learning. Effective teachers are crucial for student success, and recent research from Texas Tech reveals that students with new uncertified teachers face significant learning losses—about four months in reading and three months in math—unless those teachers have prior public school experience. Alarming, 72% of new uncertified teachers lack such experience.



Given that different preparation routes lead to different outcomes for teachers and students, if current trends persist, student outcomes will likely continue to decline, as evidenced by the 2024 STAAR results. With only 53% of students at grade level in reading and 41% in math, more work is necessary to support a high-quality educator workforce in Texas.

The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) which oversees Texas' EPP programs is currently working to address and improve the number of incoming teachers from quality preparation routes via regulatory action. Recent SBEC initiatives have included increasing supports for teacher candidates through additional early field-based experiences, observations,

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coaching, and mentoring; creating a Residency Pathway in which candidates can teach alongside a mentor for a full school year before becoming the lead teacher; and working to streamlining certification exams to decrease the number candidates must take.

## **LEGISLATIVE DISCUSSION**

Members of the Committee heard testimony from various stakeholders including state policymakers, researchers, educator preparation program leaders, school system leaders, classroom teachers, and advocates.

Members asked questions about current requirements concerning educator preparation and district hiring, as well as the ability to accelerate certification for candidates from high-quality pathways or who have demonstrated necessary skills and/or experience. Concerns were raised by the Committee about the lack of content knowledge or subject-matter expertise and the difficulty to train and staff certain grades and subjects, including special education, secondary math, and Career & Technical Education. Several members expressed interest in better understanding the characteristics of effective educators and their preparation pathways.

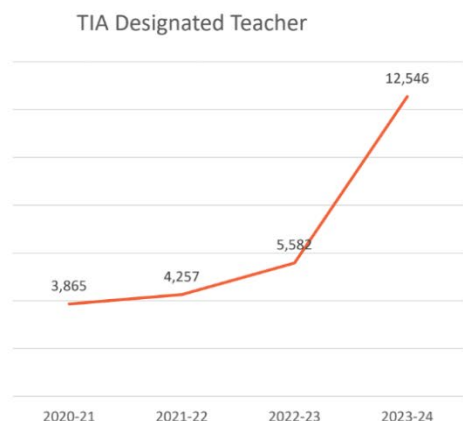
Witnesses and members discussed policy solutions to improve outcomes for students and teachers across a variety of themes: recruitment, preparation, compensation, and novice teacher support.

With respect to compensation, the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA; HB 3, 86R) provides school systems the opportunity to develop local designation programs to reward top-performing teachers. Witnesses acknowledged that given early outcomes data over the past few years of implementation, expanding TIA (currently 597 school systems are participating in the program and over 25,000 teachers have been designated drawing down \$292 million from the allotment) would likely lead to improved teacher retention rates and support student outcomes by retaining and supporting Texas' most effective educators. TEA's 2024 TIA annual report reflects that TIA-designated teachers were retained in their district and in a teacher role 8.1% points higher than their non-designated peers.

## TIA Provides Targeted Teacher Compensation Increases, and the number of TIA teachers is Rapidly Increasing



### TIA provides teachers \$11,397 of additional pay on average



Approximately 25K TIA-Designated Teachers expected for 2024-25

Total TIA funding is on pace to exceed \$1B annually in 3-4 years, up from \$260M in 2023-24.

23

Members learned that flexibilities under the state's District of Innovation (DOI) policy (HB 1842, 84R) have enabled the rise in uncertified teachers given that DOI plans allow for exemptions from certain requirements. Currently, 982 districts have a DOI plan, with 950 exempt from certain Educator Certification requirements (TEC 21.003) and 418 exempt from parental notification regarding students being placed in a class with an uncertified teacher (TEC 21.057).

Witnesses discussed the current policy structure that allows uncertified teachers in the classroom and results in teacher candidates dropping out or not completing their certification programs. This poses challenges for certification programs to fully support candidates as they transition into school full time. For those who do receive certification, completion tends to be attained via lower-quality online programs, which research has shown are linked to poorer student outcomes.

Witnesses highlighted that in order to increase access to high-quality preparation routes, the state should maintain high expectations for teacher preparation (including certification exams), while better resourcing and incentivizing more rigorous pathways such as residencies and Grow Your Own programs. Clint ISD and Hutto ISD are two school systems across the state employing a paid Residency program to address teacher absenteeism and vacancy concerns in their districts. These year-long clinical experiences with financial support result in the majority of residents matriculating into teaching positions in the district and more seamless transitions into being the lead teacher of record. These programs, combined with other initiatives such as TIA and apprenticeships, significantly reduce vacancies and decrease attrition rates. Given that these residency or apprenticeship programs have been largely funded through the Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports (TCLAS) grant, sustained funding from the Legislature could continue high-quality teacher candidates via the evidence-based pathway. Educator preparation program leaders also commented on the benefits of Residencies, explaining the meaningful

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processes they undertake to ensure high-quality mentoring throughout the candidates' residency year. Given that teacher candidates often choose their preparation route by considering the cost and time of the program, providing financial resources would support incoming teachers in selecting higher quality certification routes early on.

Finally, the Committee discussed not only how to bolster the future supply of Texas teachers but also strategies to ensure districts can develop a high-quality workforce given the characteristics of their current workforce. Witnesses pointed to the need to support novice teachers early on in their careers, proposing increasing resources for high-quality induction, expanding mentor programs and new teacher support, and strengthening subject-area content training (e.g., math) for all incoming teachers regardless of certification pathways.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Pass the recommendations of the Teacher Vacancy Task Force and proposals considered in HB 11 during the 88th regular session to decrease teacher attrition and build the supply of quality educators in Texas classrooms.
2. Strategically increase compensation for educators through expansion of the Teacher Incentive Allotment to retain the best teachers. Establish technical assistance to support strategic staffing to maximize the impact of effective teachers.
3. Invest in and incentivize high-quality certification pathways such as Residencies, Grow Your Own, and apprenticeships. Lower barriers to entry for rigorous preparation pathways by establishing a residency allotment to fund stipends for resident teachers and reimbursing or waiving certification and exam fees.
4. Enhance transparency to ensure parents and stakeholders are informed about school district hiring practices by eliminating the option to waive parental notification for uncertified teachers in DOI designated school systems, directing TEA to create an improved certification look up platform, and collecting additional recruitment and retention data to inform hiring decisions.
5. Consider strategies to mitigate the impact of DOI exemptions, including timelines, conditions, or certification support to drive hiring practices that emphasize recruitment from higher-quality pathways, and early career support such as mentorship and professional development.

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## CHARGE IV: EARLY LITERACY AND NUMERACY OUTCOMES

*Evaluate opportunities to improve students' foundational early literacy and numeracy outcomes in Pre-Kindergarten through the third grade. Study best practices for identifying students requiring reading and math intervention and providing evidence-based intervention strategies. Recommend changes and evaluate investments to increase the number of students achieving reading and math proficiency by the end of third grade.*

Registered witnesses are listed in alphabetical order by charge:

### Early Literacy & Numeracy Outcomes

- Aughinbaugh, Stephanie (Self; Uplift Education)
- Baray, Sarah (Self; Pre-K 4 SA)
- Feigen, David (Texans Care for Children)
- Frazier, Janell (Central Texas 4C Inc)
- Garner, Erin (Leander ISD)
- Grantham, Gabriel (Texas 2036)
- Latham Sikes, Chloe (IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association))
- Mata, Beatris (Ector County ISD)
- Paz, Edna (IDEA Public Schools)
- Schimank, Janet (Self)
- Shields, Amber (The Commit Partnership)
- Taylor, Casey (ExcelinEd)
- Trejo, Shannon (Texas Education Agency)
- Trevino Garcia, Claudia (Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE))
- Volk, Maia (Disability Rights Texas)
- Waddell, Kara (Child Care Associates)
- Williams, Michelle (Self; Houston Education Association)
- Wright, Cary (Good Reason Houston)
- *Registered, but did not testify*
  - Chapa, Karina (Texas Association for Bilingual Education)
  - Clark, Laura (Self)
  - Holubec, Bryan (Self)
  - Martinez, Monica (Texas Education Agency)
  - McHenry, Kathlyn (Early Care & Education Consortium)

### BACKGROUND

STAAR results from the most recent 2024 administration reflect that although Texas has made some strides in improving student outcomes there is still great room to better support the nearly 1.8 million PK-3 students enrolled in Texas public schools.

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Although steadily increasing over the past three years, just half of students (52%) are entering Kindergarten Ready. Moreover, despite literacy scores rebounding post-COVID, currently just 46% of all 3rd grade students and 36% of those experiencing economic disadvantage are on grade-level in reading – both indicators dropping 2% points from 2023. Texas also saw similar declines in 3rd grade math performance, where overall subject-specific proficiency rates remain far below pre-pandemic levels: currently just 43% of all 3rd graders and 30% of those experiencing economic disadvantage are meeting grade level standards.

Early academic progress is predictive of later opportunities and student performance. Students who learn to read by 3rd grade are four times more likely to graduate high school and as students transition in 3rd grade from learning to read to reading to learn, early literacy proficiency becomes an essential academic building block. Students’ early development of foundational math skills also enables them to access the higher-level STEM coursework serving as a gateway to postsecondary success and increasingly high-wage, high-demand jobs. Unfortunately, current math performance indicates that by the time Texas students reach high school, less than half are prepared for college-level math coursework as indicated by SAT/ACT/TSIA exams.

In light of this, the Texas Legislature has taken many steps over the past several legislative sessions to support foundational literacy and numeracy, including:

- Required reading instruments (SB 1, 75R)
- Instituting high-quality pre-K standards (HB 4, 84R)
- Introducing Math Academies (HB 4, 84R)
- Reducing class sizes (SB 2081, 87R)
- Supporting pre-K partnerships (HB 3, 86R; HB 2607, 87R; HB 1615, 88R)
- Expanding pre-K to full day and increasing funding for early education through the establishing of the Early Education Allotment (HB 3, 86R)
- Reconstituting Reading Academies to ensure elementary teachers and administrators are trained in the Science of Reading and introducing the Science of Teaching Reading (STR) exam for teacher candidates (HB 3, 86R)
- Requiring local school boards to adopt goals to improve students 3rd grade reading proficiency (HB 3, 86R)
- Expanding Reading and Math Academies (SB 1267, 87R)
- Establishing the Strong Foundations Grant Program (HB 4545, 87R)
- Improving access to high-quality instructional materials, directing TEA to develop state-owned textbooks and teacher training, creating vocabulary and book lists, and prohibiting three-cueing (HB 1605, 88R)

These policies have likely contributed to Texas’ improved national rankings: since 2019 Texas has moved up 9 spots in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) rankings in 4th grade reading (from 42nd to 33rd). Texas’ 8th grade reading and 8th grade math rankings have also increased by 5 and 7 spots respectively between 2019 and 2022. That Texas remains in the bottom half of states across the nation in both subjects, that less than one fourth of Texas 8th graders are considered “proficient” in Math according to this national comparison, and that achievement gaps across student groups persist, however, all warrant further legislative attention.

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## LEGISLATIVE DISCUSSION

Throughout the hearing the Committee heard from TEA, educators, school system leaders and education providers, and advocates who spoke to the data-driven case for prioritizing legislative efforts prior to 3rd grade and specific policy solutions for consideration to improve student outcomes in the crucial early academic milestones. Overall, witnesses stressed that early investments and focus in a child's academic career not only provide students with a strong academic foundation, but also save the state and families from expensive remediation and acceleration efforts later on.

Data was shared that Texas school systems historically struggle to catch up academically behind students. Specifically, of students who did not meet grade-level reading expectations in 3rd grade in 2019, only 1 in 5 (18%) caught up to perform at grade level in 3 years by 6th grade, and with respect to math roughly 1 in 10 (13%) caught up over the same time period. Witnesses underscored that this data emphasizes the need to focus policy conversations on the years prior to 3rd grade.

Given that 90% of the brain develops before the age of five, witnesses testified that high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs – leading up to and including PreK – are an essential component in setting students up for positive academic and lifetime outcomes. Specifically, data shared with the Committee reflects that eligible TX students who attend PreK are nearly twice as likely to be Kindergarten Ready than peers who do not attend, highlighting the critical need for supporting high-quality early learning programs. Testimony from select school systems as well as regional and statewide data also reflects PreK's ability to not only reduce overall achievement gaps, but support special education and emergent bilingual needs by providing services earlier on. Members asked questions about the efficacy of various early learning programs and heard about the hurdles to Texas families' accessing affordable high-quality options for their children, including among others a lack of adequate supply and sufficient resourcing as well as systemic barriers to PreK partnerships. Witnesses suggested looking at approaches to the entire ECE ecosystem, while expanding resources to school systems to provide high-quality PreK programs designed to boost early achievement.

Witnesses voiced to the Committee that to realize the academic benefits of early learning, it is paramount that high-quality ECE/PreK participation be followed and complemented by strong elementary instruction in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. The TEA outlined that quality elementary instruction to establish foundational literacy and numeracy must focus on effective instructional materials, well trained and well supported teachers to deliver effective instruction, aligned progress monitoring and diagnostic assessments (also referred to throughout the hearing as screeners), and effective interventions.




Several witnesses echoed the TEA, speaking to the need to improve Texas' progress monitoring and diagnostics policies. Members discussed how the state's current early screening policies could be further developed and refined to support student success in reading and math, removing critical blind spots that currently hinder educators, families, and policymakers from understanding student progress and making informed decisions ahead of 3rd grade STAAR. Testimony reflected that without reliable progress monitoring at the state level for 1st and 2nd

graders, this means there are nearly 800,000 students (as of SY23-24) that Texas does not have insight on how best to support to reach grade level standards in 3rd grade.

### Current statutory & administrative framework

	Literacy	Numeracy
Pre-K	<b>Approved Tools:</b> 7 options vetted, but none focused on vocabulary <b>Instrument Results:</b> Available at State Level (BOY and EOY for growth)	
Kinder	<b>Approved Tools:</b> 2 options (excl vocab) vetted <b>Instrument Results:</b> State level (BOY)	
First	<b>Approved Tools:</b> 3 options (excl vocab) vetted <b>Instrument Results:</b> Available at District Level	
Second	<b>Approved Tools:</b> 3 options (excl vocab) vetted <b>Instrument Results:</b> Available at District Level	
Third	<b>Approved Tools:</b> Interims for breadth of TEKS but not foundational skills <b>Instrument Results:</b> Available at District Level	

### Current State-Approved Diagnostic Instruments

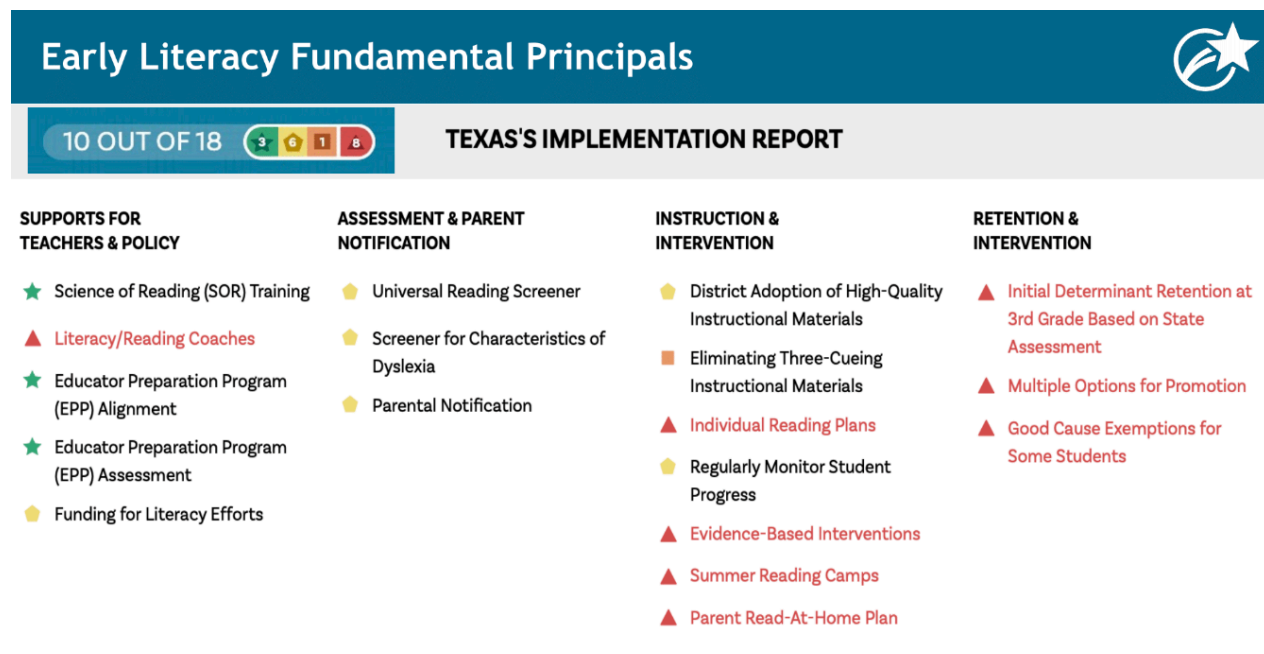
<p style="text-align: center; background-color: orange; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>Prekindergarten</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circle Progress Monitoring System</li> <li>COR Advantage</li> <li>CPALLS+STEM</li> <li>Frog Street Assessment – Criterion Referenced Assessment</li> <li>GOLD®</li> <li>LION for Prekindergarten</li> <li>READY, SET, K!</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Multiple Domains</b>  19 TAC §102.1003</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: purple; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>Kindergarten</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TX-KEA</li> <li>mCLASS Texas</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: red; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>Grade 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TPRI</li> <li>Tejas LEE</li> <li>mCLASS Texas</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p style="text-align: center;">an instrument selected by a district-level committee</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: orange; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>Grade 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TPRI</li> <li>Tejas LEE</li> <li>mCLASS Texas</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p style="text-align: center;">an instrument selected by a district-level committee</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: green; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>Grade 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>STAAR RLA</li> <li>STAAR Math</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Reading Only</b>  TEC §28.006</p>			<p><b>Reading and Math</b>  TEC §39.023</p>

Specifically, the TEA provided testimony that an effective screener policy would include the



administration in the early elementary grades three times per year of a valid, reliable, and easy-to-administer tool aligned to foundational academic skills (literacy: phonics/fluency, vocabulary, writing/spelling, dyslexia screening; math: math fact automaticity, number sense). Additional testimony underscored the need to provide resulting information to parents in an accessible and timely manner to address the current disconnect between how many parents believe their child is performing on grade level when this is not the case. Furthermore, testimony highlighted the need to train educators and administrators in assessment literacy to ensure student results lead to effective intervention and support.

Fortunately, national and Texas-based research have shown that once student learning gaps are identified, targeted intervention can work to accelerate their outcomes in combination with other best practices. With respect to early literacy, however, witnesses shared that this is an aspect currently missing in Texas’ policy framework. As of 2024, Texas meets just 10 out of the 18 early literacy policy principles as outlined by the leading national organization, ExcelinEd.



Mississippi on the other hand has seen outsized performance gains (leading to their number 1 ranking in the country in 4th grade reading between 2011-2022) given their comprehensive policy approach which included not only educator training and teacher coaching, but also early identification, targeted interventions and individual student reading plans, as well as robust parent communication.

Specifically, members learned that when a North Texas school system provided K-2 students regular, developmentally appropriate early literacy interventions focused on phonics and reading fluency, a rigorous evaluation study found the program resulted in significant impact on student learning. Notably, students who were the furthest behind grew the most and students who received the intervention in the earlier grades (for example, kindergarten versus 2nd) saw the

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greatest academic growth. Testimony shared that with the proper state statutory framework and resources, this approach could be scaled statewide to set students up for success and improve Texas' academic standing. Members expressed interest in learning more about what literacy screeners look like in practice as well as the characteristics of quality interventions.

With respect to math, ensuring early screening and intervention as well as equipping parents with the information and tools needed to support learning at-home, are also best practices seen in other states. Testimony raised that since there is currently no statewide requirement to screen math deficiencies in young children, the state may be at a disadvantage in meeting student needs and letting students fall through the cracks as early gaps expand into long-term academic struggles. Additionally, Texas must address the current lack of content knowledge in its teacher workforce: a recent RAND study found that only 36% of elementary and middle school principals in Texas report that all or almost all of their math teachers demonstrate deep knowledge of math pedagogy, and only 41% have a deep knowledge of math. Following the models of other leading states, witnesses shared that Texas can better provide robust professional development opportunities in math content and continuous support through coaching to improve proficiency rates through quality intervention and reverse the state's downward trend in math achievement.

Additional conversations took place regarding the impact of bilingual education in the early elementary years with members curious about the necessary training for bilingual education educators.

Overall, members agreed on a desire to focus on the foundational grades and intervene early to set students on a trajectory for success. There was discussion about targeted investments that would realize the greatest returns as opposed to appropriating additional funds that may simply perpetuate current trends. The Committee expressed a strong commitment to build off past legislation and maintain adherence to the Science of Reading and research-backed practices while considering additional policy changes in the upcoming legislative session to support young Texans' acquisition of foundational skills in both reading and math.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Expand the Early Education Allotment so that PreK 3 & 4 students generate the weight, strengthening access to critical quality early education and providing school systems more resources to provide evidence-based acceleration strategies prior to 3rd grade.
2. Bolster and leverage a mixed-delivery system of high-quality early learning options such as child care, Head Start, and state PreK to meet family needs and accelerate student learning ahead of Kindergarten. Maximize current programming and investments by eliminating barriers to PreK partnerships, improving the incentive and delivery system structures to ensure expanded access to quality PreK for eligible students.
3. Strengthen early screening & intervention statutory framework to ensure schools utilize evidence-based progress monitoring and diagnostic instruments aligned to best practice to

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detect foundational learning gaps. Provide data literacy to school systems to adequately inform classroom instruction, and provide targeted, research-based support for students to get back on track. Additionally, provide parents with reliable information on their student's progress and resources to effectively support at-home learning tailored to their student's needs.

4. Increase the weights for the State Compensatory Education Allotment to provide school systems with resources to prioritize and fund high-impact tutoring and other interventions that accelerate student learning. In addition, LEAs should use Outcome-Based Contracts when using third-party providers to ensure students are receiving the best quality services.
5. Expand access to high-quality, curriculum-aligned professional development for math teachers. Consider scaling or providing appropriate incentives for participation in Math Academies, pending the TEA's efficacy study.
6. In both Reading and Math, consider providing teachers with additional supports – such as instructional coaching – focused on campuses with the greatest percentage of academically behind students.
7. Adjust the Additional Days School Year Program's base calendar requirement to 175 days and incentivize more learning time to allow more school systems to participate in extended instruction time, reversing learning loss, and closing achievement gaps early on.
8. Pass policies to fulfill the recommendations of Texas's Emergent Bilingual Strategic Plan (2023): <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/special-education/sb-560-emergent-bilingual-strategic-plan.pdf>

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# Appendix A



GINA HINOJOSA



STATE REPRESENTATIVE • DISTRICT 49  
November 18th, 2024

The Honorable Brad Buckley  
Chairman, House Committee on Public Education  
Room E1.324, Capitol Extension  
Austin, TX 78701

Dear Chairman Buckley:

I appreciate the vast amount of work that has been put into the hearings and recommendations of the House Committee on Public Education, Interim Report 2024. Unfortunately, most of the recommendations are based on questionable data with an emphasis on testing in early grades which I reject as a mother and as a representative of constituents who are opposed to a testing regime that dictates the daily experience of our children in public schools. Instead, I support a back-to-basics approach that invests in the classroom, primarily in professional teachers with manageable class sizes, rather than products sold by private or for-profit vendors.

The Speaker's Interim Recommendations appropriately identify "teacher certification" as a goal of our work. According to the Interim Report the number of uncertified teachers in Texas has tripled in the last 10 years and 1 in 5 uncertified teachers do not hold a bachelor's degree. The Interim Report cites that "Commissioner Morath underscored how teachers remain the number one in-school factor in student learning." *Interim Report*, p.9. Given this universally held, data-based understanding, reversing the alarming, precipitous decline of certified teachers in Texas public schools should be the priority of the upcoming legislative session. Texas Teachers are paid about \$10K below the national average. Compensation is a key element in attracting and retaining the best professionals in any profession—teaching is no different. But compensation that is dependent in large part on testing performance is problematic because of the many problems with standardized testing in Texas as detailed below. All Texas teachers should be paid a competitive salary.

A qualified, professional teacher in the classroom is foundational to a quality education. As such, no amount of "innovation" money-can-buy will adequately prepare our students for success if this most basic problem is not fixed. A conservative approach to public education would precisely target the foundational problem that afflicts our schools, i.e., the loss of qualified teachers, before imposing more dictates on neighborhood schools and spending more taxpayer money on the latest product pitch.



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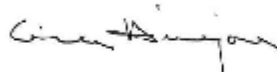
In recent years the Texas House has repeatedly voted for a de-emphasis on testing. Yet, the Governor Abbott Administration has been doubling down on testing. The Interim Recommendations adopt this testing-focused approach to public education. And never has the adopted standardized test used by Texas, STAAR, been more in doubt. Currently, Texas has been blocked from releasing "accountability" ratings for schools based mostly on the STAAR test because over 30 school districts are challenging them in court. At this point neither educators or lawmakers understand the criteria under which STAAR is evaluated or what it measures. Whereas the TEA testified last year that the STAAR test does not measure mastery of grade level but rather whether a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader who takes it will be college ready when they graduate, the Interim Report seemingly mischaracterizes even passing STAAR grades as being below grade level. See *Interim Report pp. 38-39*.

The lack of basic agreement and understanding about what we are measuring with the STAAR test coupled with the "black box," lack of transparency regarding grading has greatly undermined confidence in testing. Additionally, many, if not most, parents, teachers, and students yearn for a school day that is not focused on "teaching to a test" but rather on creating a rich learning environment. For all these reasons, I reject the addition of more standardized testing for our students, especially our youngest students, as recommended by the Interim Report. Instead, Texas needs a more reliable and more wholistic approach to evaluating our schools.

Finally, public schools are and will always be the choice for the vast majority of Texas parents. With such a glaring deficit of the most important input the state can make in a child's education, quality teachers, it is irresponsible for the state to expend time and resources on anything else until this problem is fixed. It is beyond irresponsible, and in fact antagonistic to our neighborhood public schools to take money out of public schools for investment into private schools under any proposed taxpayer-funded voucher as contemplated by this Interim Report.

Because the recommendations in the Interim Report are scatter shot and internally conflicting, with insufficient attention paid to the crisis of obtaining and retaining sufficient qualified teachers, I cannot support the Interim Report Recommendations.

Sincerely,



Gina Hinojosa  
Texas State Representative, HD 49

