



## *Texas Teaching Commission: Recommendations for the Next Generation of Teaching Policy in Texas*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National and state research confirms what we know intuitively — the single most important variable in student achievement is the quality of the individual teacher in the classroom. Fortunately, Texas already is focusing on teacher recruitment, training, development and retention through a range of district and state initiatives, legislative and administrative policies, grant programs and local traditional and non-traditional K-12 and higher education efforts. However, there is room to improve. Many existing programs, policies and initiatives operate in isolation with little alignment or cohesion between state policies and investments and local district implementation, investments and quality control. Looking ahead, the challenge of ensuring quality teaching is magnified by the pending retirement of a generation of baby-boomer teachers in the next decade, as well as a shortage of teachers in high-need areas such as math, science and bilingual education.

With this in mind, Educate Texas, a public-private initiative of the Communities Foundation of Texas, endeavors to advance new information, strategies and ideas on how the Lone Star State can better align various state policies and local programs with the comprehensive goal of better training, supporting, evaluating and compensating our state's teachers. Beginning in 2011, Educate Texas convened stakeholders from across the public and private sectors — including leaders in K-12 and higher education, business and philanthropy — to launch the Texas Teaching Commission. The Commission's singular charge: Take a holistic look at the teaching continuum in Texas and recommend strategies for improvement. What emerged was a thoughtful, generative dialogue on how to improve and align various programs and practices already in place and proffer next-generation policy recommendations that can promote dramatic improvements in teaching and learning.

Through dialogue with experts and the support of current research — and an examination of national, state and local trends within the Texas context — the Commission looked at key policy gaps within specific segments of the teaching continuum and developed a coherent, aligned set of recommendations for improvement in seven areas:

- Recruitment and Preparation
- Hiring
- Inducting
- Evaluating
- Developing
- Strategic Compensation
- Retention

### Foundational Recommendation

Our premise is straightforward: Effective teaching is a student-centered process that occurs when a teacher engages all students in learning that leads to growth in student knowledge, skills and overall well-being. As a result, members of the Commission believe that every part of the teaching continuum, as well as recommendations designed to improve it, must be anchored in quality standards for teaching practice. These standards provide the foundation for a quality human capital system and define a common and comprehensive understanding of what teachers should know and be able to do in order to facilitate student learning. This includes a focus on pedagogical knowledge, the skills needed to teach specific content to a diverse population of students and continuous professional learning. High-quality standards for teaching practice also speak to topics such as: building a safe and equitable learning environment for students; communicating and collaborating with students, families, administrators and colleagues; and modeling personal integrity, ethics and professionalism.

**With all this in mind, the Texas Teaching Commission offers a comprehensive series of recommendations under the following seven areas of the teaching continuum:**

## **Recruitment and Preparation**

Based on a review of research and trends within the Texas context, the Commission identified several opportunities to better ensure a high-quality and cohesive teacher recruitment and preparation system, including but not limited to a renewed focus on standards and approaches for alternative certification strategies.

**The Commission believes:**

- **The state should hold all teacher preparation programs to the same high-quality standards (outcomes-based), regardless of the type of program (traditional, alternative, etc.).**
- All programs should provide practical experiences that truly prepare candidates to meet high-quality standards and contribute to K-12 student learning immediately upon placement in initial teaching assignments. Programs also should provide transition support for new teachers during their first three years in the classroom.
- Preparation programs should review the performance of their graduates in the classroom and then use findings from these reviews to refine and improve their programs as well as provide support to individual graduates.

## **Hiring**

The Commission believes making informed and timely hiring decisions — as early as possible in the process — is critical in ensuring the placement of qualified and effective teaching candidates. With this in mind, local districts should provide transparent information to candidates on the school culture and climate in the buildings where they will work. **Emphasizing early hiring-date opportunities is key to developing the highest quality pool of applicants.**

## **Inducting**

**The Commission believes induction — with an emphasis on strengthening standards for teacher mentors — is important for ensuring a smooth transition into the classroom for new teachers.** A successful transition increases the likelihood that new teachers will remain in the profession for longer periods of time. To achieve this goal, the state and local districts should better align supports and incentives for new teachers as well as the experienced educators who help lead the induction process. Finally, quality induction programs should encompass at least the first three years of teachers' time in the classroom and the state should provide funding to allow districts to provide these programs with fidelity.

## **Evaluating**

Texas has an unprecedented opportunity to lead the nation in the development of a statewide model for teacher evaluation. The Commission set out to articulate design principles for the evaluation of teachers and **lay out a framework for a quality system** that is more robust and holistic than the current system. **Among the recommendations, the Commission determined that annual evaluations are a necessity and that student growth (as expressed through multiple measures) must be considered as a significant factor in this work and should account for between 25% and 50% of a teacher's evaluation.** The primary purpose for teacher evaluation must be to strengthen instructional practice in the classroom so that every child receives effective instruction.

### The Commission believes:

- The state should require each district’s evaluation system to include three components: classroom observation and feedback; student growth and learning; and professional engagement and growth.
- The state should develop multiple measures *within* each component to ensure fairness and reliability as well as *within* certain elements (see the evaluation section of the main report).
- The state should pilot, validate and refine any new evaluation model prior to wide-scale deployment.
- The state and local districts should recognize that honoring both the state framework and local innovation is critical and, at all levels, acknowledge that collaboration between local administrators and teachers is essential to building trust and developing a platform for long-term sustainability.

“I am a teacher. I have answered my nation’s call to redefine the future. I have been entrusted to nurture and develop our countries most precious resource: our children.”

– Daniel Leija, former Texas Teacher of the Year

## Developing

A high-quality professional development system should connect the needs of teachers directly to a range of supports focused on improving knowledge, skills and practice so that all students can reach their highest potential. Done well, such a system can produce effective teacher leaders, foster collective responsibility and drive high student achievement and success. **To begin the process, we must first determine — through effectiveness audits or other research — what constitutes the most-effective professional development.**

### Regardless of results, the Commission believes:

- A top-notch professional development system should engage teachers in planning their activities. The key objective: To develop a system that promotes alignment of a teacher’s identified area(s) of need, linked to the teacher’s evaluation, embedded in the work the teacher does and led by people in the profession.
- An effective system should build on the strengths and address the challenges of all teachers, not just low-performing ones.
- The system should view teachers as professionals and owners of their learning and recognize the value of professional development and teacher learning during the day — even if that requires additional investments.

## Strategic Compensation

Teacher voice and collaboration at the local level is crucial in all decisions regarding strategic compensation systems — especially conversations around removing the state-mandated salary schedule.

- **The legislature should eliminate the required minimum state salary schedule.** This will encourage local compensation systems to provide an adequate and respectful competitive base salary and allow for differentiation that accounts for labor market forces. The state must recognize districts’ need to collaboratively determine with their teachers how to recognize excellence in order to retain and reward great performers and teams.
- **The legislature should create a compensation allotment in the Foundation School Program (FSP) that districts can access to drive funding directly to teacher salaries and incentivize districts to develop strategic compensation models.** Similarly, the state and districts should recognize that across-the-board salary raises do not result in better outcomes. Raises — outside of cost-of-living adjustments or allowances — should be based on teacher effectiveness.
- Combined, a competitive salary, quality health benefits and a reliable pension system should form the basis of any comprehensive compensation system.

## Retention

**Retaining great teachers must be a high priority for Texas — starting with surveying current working conditions in our schools and making recommendations for improvement.** Looking ahead, retention can be improved only by making thoughtful adjustments across the teaching continuum — including previously discussed segments such as induction, evaluation, compensation and professional development. Recommendations on retention are found throughout the Commission’s final report. But fundamentally, the Commission believes the state and local districts must remember that climate and working conditions matter for teachers and are directly connected to student growth and learning.

## Conclusion

The Texas Teaching Commission developed its final report ***Supporting Students, Honoring Teachers: Recommendations for the Next Generation of Teaching Policy in Texas*** in order to identify the challenges and opportunities facing our state in each phase of the teaching continuum. The report offers a wide-range of suggestions for developing a new set of interrelated statutory, administrative and regulatory and district-level recommendations designed to improve both policy and practice. **We hope these recommendations guide the state and local districts toward a more coherent and aligned teaching continuum. Taken as a whole, the Commission believes these recommendations will move Texas to improve the quality of the teaching and learning across our great state.**

The executive summary, full report and table of recommendations are available at <http://www.edtx.org/human-capital-strategies/teaching-commission>.



**EDUCATE TEXAS**

*a public-private initiative of Communities Foundation of Texas*

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