



Focus Teacher Pay on Teacher Excellence

Testimony before the Texas Senate Committee on Education

by Emily Sass, Policy Analyst

Chairman Taylor and Members of the Committee:

My name is Emily Sass, and I represent the Texas Public Policy Foundation, where I serve as the K-12 education policy analyst. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today.

Texans can all agree that the focus of our education resources, from the state to the local level, should be the good of Texas students. What results in better outcomes for Texas students in academic achievement and life beyond high school should constitute success for Texas education. While Texas ranks at the top nationally when our student population is split out by racial attainment, we trail the nation in overall performance. Closing that gap is critical to the future success of our economy. That task will require attracting and retaining excellent teachers for Texas students.

We suggest a simple strategy: untethering teacher compensation from teacher longevity. It doesn't matter to kids whether their teacher has been teaching for two years or twenty, or has a bachelor's degree or a doctorate. What matters to students is how effectively that teacher can help them progress and max out their potential.

Research has consistently shown that years of teaching experience (beyond the first few) and advanced degrees held by teachers bear no correlation with the actual value that teachers bring to a classroom. According to Dr. Lori Taylor of the Bush School at Texas A&M, there have been over 100 studies examining whether a master's degree makes a difference in academic performance; "only nine...say anything positive at all."

Districts as diverse as Dallas, Lubbock, and Bloomberg ISDs have pioneered pay systems that reward their best teachers for their effort. But currently Texas has a very different approach as its standard. The minimum pay scale sets a default pay system that communicates to current and potential teachers that the state of Texas values simple time spent over quality achieved.

Tying teacher pay to the value they bring to their classrooms and districts could be as simple as setting the teacher salary schedule to expire by the end of the 2020-21 school year. To ensure a smooth transition, the Legislature could add a hold-harmless provision for individual educator compensation through 2021-22, and a hold-harmless provision for collective educator compensation through 2022-23. This approach expands local control and allows principals and districts to work together to develop their own pay system based on their district's characteristics, rather than instituting a single statewide policy in a state as diverse as Texas. The recent House Select Committee on Economic Competitiveness report noted that "the importance of local control for school districts was stressed with the explanation that local control granted from the state is important for hiring staff and providing a safe campus for students."

The current salary schedule implies that time spent is Texas' chief priority to be rewarded, rather than value added. We must reverse that statement. Texas students deserve a focus on excellence, not acceptance of average.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.



Emily Sass is a policy analyst with the Texas Public Policy Foundation's Center for Education Freedom. Before coming to the Foundation, Emily was on Senator Ted Cruz's state staff as deputy regional director for North Texas, serving as the senator's liaison on all policy topics to a fourteen-county region. Previously, she has worked as staff in the Texas House of Representatives and on multiple campaigns. A classically trained musician and former teacher, Emily holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music from Thomas Edison State University. While in college, she served on the leadership team for Patriot Academy, a national conference in conservative policy and leadership for high school, college, and graduate students.

