



# Modernizing Educator Preparation in Texas

*Robust in-school clinical experiences and integrated coursework are key.*

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Texas has by far the largest teacher workforce of any state, with over 380,000 teachers employed during the 2024–25 school year. The state also accounts for just under one-fifth of the nearly 590,000 aspiring teachers enrolled in teacher preparation programs across the nation.<sup>1</sup> Yet Texas schools, as in every state, face shortages of qualified and diverse teachers. These shortages are particularly acute in high-need subject areas such as STEM, special education, and multilingual education and in rural and low-income communities.<sup>2</sup>

Ensuring that classrooms are adequately staffed has also been a longstanding and growing challenge in Texas. Teacher attrition rose to 12.9 percent in 2024–25, significantly higher than national rates, and coincided

with a decrease in certifications of new teachers.<sup>3</sup> Between 2017 and 2022, Texas experienced a 20.4 percent decline in the number of completers of educator preparation programs.<sup>4</sup> In response to the shortage of certified teachers and increased teacher turnover, districts across Texas—particularly in rural communities—have increasingly hired uncertified teachers, with detrimental impacts on student learning. More than half of all first-time, full-time new teachers hired in 2023–24 were uncertified. Of these, 72 percent had no prior classroom experience, resulting in an estimated loss of three to four months of learning in reading and math for their students.<sup>5</sup>

The state's teacher workforce is also less racially and linguistically diverse than the student population. However,



Black and Latino teachers in Texas are significantly more likely to stay in the profession than their White counterparts.<sup>6</sup> In 2022, teachers of color made up 47 percent of Texas's educator workforce; students of color represented around 73 percent of the population.<sup>7</sup> According to the Texas Education Agency, one-fifth of current Texas students are multilingual learners, and the shortage of teachers of English as a second language is leading to less individualized support.<sup>8</sup> Students of color constitute a sizable percentage of Texas's student population, and their access to effective educators is crucial to the effectiveness of the state's public education system and future workforce.

To produce and retain more effective, diverse, and multilingual educators, Texas policymakers must expand aspiring teachers' access to pathways that meet local needs and offer robust in-school clinical experience and integrated coursework. The following recommendations were developed by EdTrust, Teach Plus, and Latinos for Education based on knowledge gained from educators across the state, findings produced by the governor-established Teacher Vacancy Task Force,<sup>9</sup> and insights gathered while producing a 50-state scan of registered teacher apprenticeship programs (RTAPs).<sup>10</sup>

## Investing in Paid Residencies

By 2023, the Texas Education Agency had used approximately \$90 million of federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds to provide grants and technical assistance to 85 districts that partnered with 37 vetted teacher residency programs, all of which paired teacher candidates with experienced mentors for a full year of in-school clinical training.<sup>11</sup> Residents received stipends during this year.

An evaluation by researchers at the Education Policy Initiative at Carolina found that nearly nine in ten candidates completing these yearlong residency programs remain in Texas classrooms into their third year, and they are more likely to work in high-need schools.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, first-year teachers who completed a paid residency program were as effective as fifth-year teachers in reading instruction.<sup>13</sup>

Informed by these results, the Texas State Board of Education recently approved a distinct "enhanced certification" for candidates who complete a high-quality residency.<sup>14</sup> State legislators can sustain and scale access to this proven model by establishing a teacher residency allotment in the school finance formula to cover stipends for resident teachers, mentor teachers, and the educator preparation programs that support them. This allotment should be weighted

toward aspiring teachers entering high-need subject areas and schools.

## Supporting Transfer Candidates

To grow the pipeline of aspiring educators entering high-quality preparation programs, Texas must also support teacher candidates who begin at community colleges.<sup>15</sup> Compared with peers entering four-year institutions right after high school, transfer candidates tend to have more extensive work experience and place greater value on credit transfer, course availability, job placement, and the ability to stay close to home when choosing a college.<sup>16</sup> They also face greater financial barriers to staying enrolled. For this reason, strong support services and paid clinical opportunities are particularly important for these aspiring educators.

Notably, 70 percent of students enrolled in the state's community colleges are people of color.<sup>17</sup> Thus, community colleges can play a significant role in strengthening and diversifying the teacher pipeline. Texas legislators should increase access to financial aid for students transferring from community colleges and enforce transparency and accountability to ensure transfer students can apply credit hours for lower-division courses toward their bachelor's programs.

## Scaling High-Quality Teacher Apprenticeship Programs

RTAPs have garnered significant federal and state-level attention in recent years. Teacher apprentices earn salaries while gaining hands-on training under mentor teachers as they work toward licensure and, when necessary, completion of bachelor's degrees.

Texas has long encouraged local education and workforce partnerships. RTAPs build on this tradition by providing aspiring teachers—especially those with some college credit but no degree—free or low-cost pathways into the profession while ensuring that schools are staffed with qualified individuals who are deeply rooted in their communities. Learning from innovative local models like those at Dallas College and Brazosport Independent School District, state agencies should provide clear guidelines and aligned resources to expand the application of best practices.

In coordination with the state's Higher Education Coordinating Board and Workforce Commission, the Texas Education Agency should first develop a state-level framework

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and a structure for providing technical assistance to preparation programs and districts that partner to create RTAPs. The state agency, with input and oversight from the State Board for Educator Certification, should also create guidance to help districts, especially those in rural and underresourced communities, braid funding streams and align other grow-your-own and mentoring initiatives with apprenticeship programs that meet their local workforce needs.

### Prioritizing Educational Aides and Paraprofessionals

RTAPs can serve candidates ranging from high school students to career changers but are typically tailored for nonteacher school staff. Many programs explicitly require apprentices to be employed as educational aides or paraprofessionals. Texas currently has 86,000 educational aides earning an average annual base pay of \$24,000. They are also far more diverse than traditional teacher candidates, yet state data shows only 6 percent obtain certification within 10 years.<sup>18</sup> Because paraprofessionals often aspire to be teachers, have classroom experience, and are rooted in a school community, state investments targeted toward these staff are more likely to diversify the workforce, increase the pipeline of new teachers, and increase teacher effectiveness.

The Texas Education Agency, in partnership with the State Board for Educator Certification and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, can support paraprofessionals by ensuring the credentials earned through their apprenticeships are stackable and portable. Additionally, agency and state boards can clearly define pathways for aides to progress toward certification through increasing wage tiers based on coursework completion, on-the-job learning hours, and demonstrated competencies.

State legislators should also establish or expand tuition exemptions for paraprofessionals. By reducing the cost of higher education coursework for apprentices, expanded tuition exemptions can increase the viability and sustainability of apprenticeship programs.

### Waiving Certification Fees and Consolidating Exams

Especially for those pursuing certification in bilingual education and special education, certification and exam fees pose a significant barrier, totaling up to \$1,000. These fees hit candidates from low-income backgrounds hardest, just as they near the end of their preparation. State legislators should alleviate this burden and make the profession more accessible by waiving certification and exam fees. Given the time, stress, and costs associated with certification exams, state boards should also consider opportunities to consolidate them while upholding rigorous, comprehensive standards.

### Strengthening Data Collection and Reporting Practices

State agency staff, state board members, legislators, district leaders, and the public lack data indicating which educator preparation programs are most successful in producing teachers from underrepresented demographics. State agencies should collect and make public data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, and family income status. Collecting better data on educator preparation programs and connecting that data with preK-20 data systems for students participating in pathway programs would help Texas leaders identify which program characteristics are most correlated with success. Better data would also help districts determine which programs are best suited to help them meet their local teacher workforce goals.

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## Notes

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