

Comments to the Senate Committee on Finance Regarding the General Appropriations Act: Texas Education Agency & Teacher Retirement System

Submission from:
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TCTA appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the Texas Education Agency's and Teacher Retirement System's budgets. We are encouraged by TEA rider 82 that affirms the intent of the legislature is to provide increased compensation and benefits for classroom teachers. Additionally, we are grateful for TRS rider 21 that states the intent of the legislature is to provide a benefit enhancement to TRS retirees, contingent on the determination that the TRS Pension Trust Fund is actuarially sound. We look forward to working with the committee on these shared goals in addition to other objectives. Below are our recommendations.

Key Comments and Recommendations:

TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

TCTA recommends that lawmakers improve overall teacher compensation by providing a minimum investment of \$10,000 per teacher and require districts to use the money for that purpose. This is approximately the amount by which the average Texas teacher salary would increase if teachers had received a proportionate share of state funding increases over the past two decades. These salary increases should be implemented as follows:

- a. Increase the basic allotment.
- b. Add a provision to Section 21.402, Texas Education Code that guarantees a minimum increase to each covered educator above their local salary schedule step.
- c. Add a funding provision to provide flexible funding to districts that receive insufficient funding to pay for the required salary increases and provide for other needs.

TEA's budget should include provisions for increasing the state's contribution to employee health insurance from \$75 per month to \$225 per month and requiring districts to maintain a local contribution of at least \$225 per month. Indexing contributions to inflation in future years will provide a more permanent solution to rising health care costs.

TCTA requests the state restore funding for the TELL working conditions survey on an ongoing basis and ensure district participation in the survey.

TCTA recommends increasing the school safety allotment (and expanding its possible uses) to provide funding for campus behavioral specialists to assist classroom teachers, and increasing funding for disciplinary alternative education programs to enhance their quality.

TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM

A new rider to require TRS to collect certain data on TRS-ActiveCare from districts based on the change to regional pricing will help decision-makers determine the impact on districts and school employees and adjust accordingly. Specifically, TRS should determine:

- for each district experiencing a decrease in premiums, whether the district lowered its contribution; and if so, whether the savings went back into employee compensation such as salaries; and
- in future years, for each district that experiences an increase, whether the district makes up the difference in additional costs or passes it through to the employee.

TCTA recommends the state balance the responsibility to ensure the pension fund remains actuarially sound with the need to increase pension benefits due to the loss of purchasing power by retirees since 2004 and provide a meaningful COLA through the TRS pension fund and/or state funding of the benefit. The CPI catch-up increase could be provided over a period of time following precedent set by previous Texas legislatures. Also, the Legislature should begin setting aside money to pre-fund benefit increases.

Teacher Compensation

Teacher dissatisfaction is at an all-time high. In a 2021 RAND survey, 66% of teachers said they had seriously considered leaving their jobs in the past year; and among teachers planning to leave, 64% said their pay was not sufficient, making low teacher pay the #1 reason for staff departures. In 2022, the Merrimack College Teacher Survey found 74% of teachers do not think their salary is fair for the work that they do, and more than half of teachers said they likely would not advise their younger self to pursue a career in teaching.

The low satisfaction levels of teachers already in the classroom may impact the pipeline of future teachers. Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has declined by about a third over the past decade, and experts say that is likely in part due to the perception of teaching as a low-paid, thankless career (The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education 2022). According to an ACT survey, the top reasons high school and college students say they want to become teachers – but do not – are low pay and a lack of career advancement.ⁱ

High stress levels are causing teachers to leave the profession, which creates instability among staff, students, and the community.ⁱⁱ Indeed, Texas teachers are leaving the profession at rates not seen since the great recession, causing schools to face significant staffing shortages.

Replacing teachers is time-consuming, costly, and disruptive to student learning. Although the financial costs within a district or school can vary substantially – more than \$20,000 per teacher in an urban district – the most significant costs are those associated with separation, recruiting and

hiring new teachers, and training replacements.ⁱⁱⁱ

Teacher Pay

Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath, in announcing the Teacher Vacancy Task Force in March, declared that teachers are the “single most important school-based factor affecting student outcomes.”^{iv}

Teachers in Texas make an average of \$7,449 less than the national average teacher salary. Even when accounting for costs of living, teacher wages in Texas rank 29th out of the 50 states and Washington, D.C. (Every Texan Report 2022). In addition, when accounting for inflation the average salary for Texas teachers remained essentially unchanged in the past decade (2010-2021).

Texas teachers face what the Economic Policy Institute calls the “Teacher Pay Penalty,” which is “how much less, in percentage terms, public school teachers are paid in weekly wages relative to other college educated workers (after accounting for factors known to affect earnings such as education, experience, and state residence).” For the latest findings in 2019, the national average penalty was 19.2%, but these similar college graduates made 21.9% more than Texas teachers (Every Texan Report 2022).

The Texas Education Agency stated in its latest Legislative Appropriations Request that a recent increase in school funding “represents an investment first and foremost in teachers, where school systems spend the bulk of their funds.”^v Yet teachers have not been taking home their fair share of that investment, according to a TCTA analysis of school districts’ operating expenditures over the past two decades.

The analysis shows that teacher pay has not kept pace with overall increases in school funding. In 2001, teacher salaries accounted for 43.8 percent of school districts’ per-pupil operating expenditures. Two decades later, that figure has dropped to 38.1 percent.

If teacher pay had remained in line with increases in school expenditures over that same period, the average teacher salary would have been 15 percent higher in 2021 — lifting the average teacher salary of \$57,641 by an additional \$8,660. The TCTA analysis and chart showing the growing disparity in operational expenditures and teacher salaries per pupil follow:

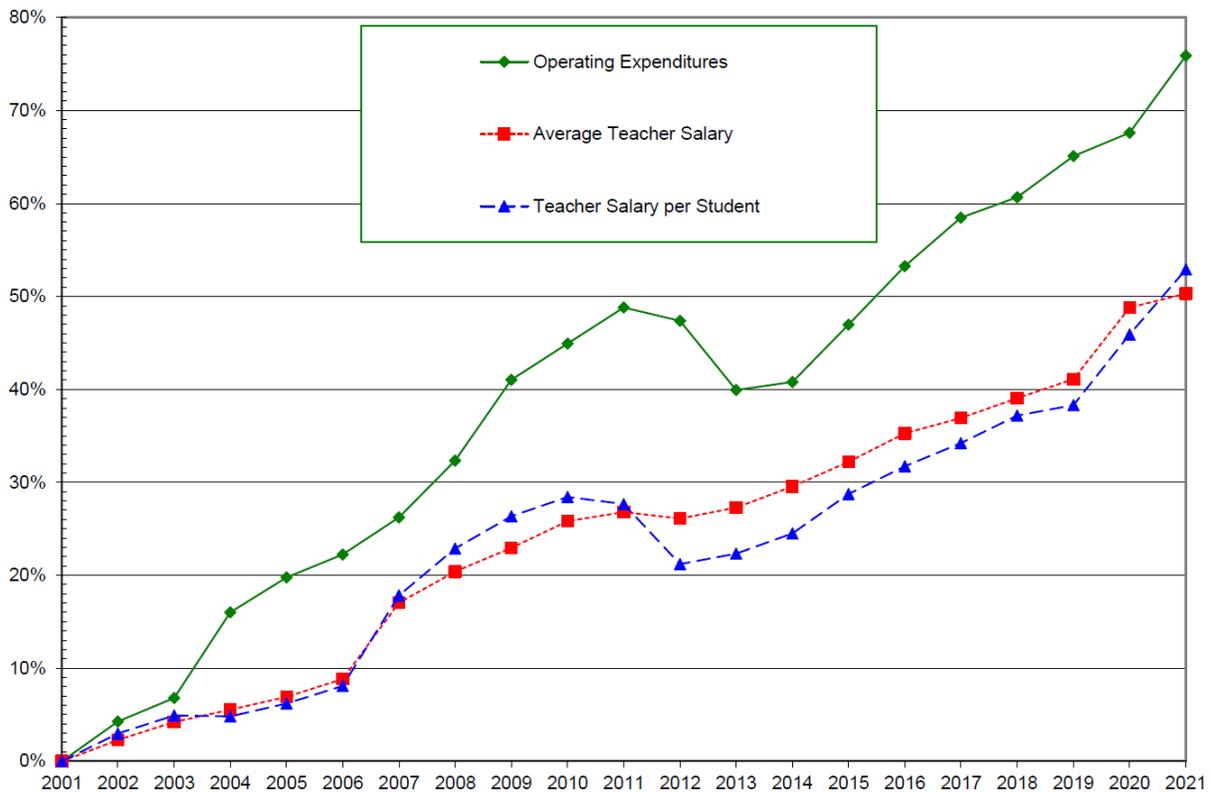
School Year	Operating Expenditures per Pupil	Teacher Salary per Pupil	Teacher salaries per pupil as a percentage of operating expenditures per pupil	Average Teacher Salary
2001	\$5,915	\$2,592	43.8%	38,361
2002	\$6,167	\$2,669	43.3%	39,232
2003	\$6,317	\$2,719	43.0%	39,974
2004	\$6,861	\$2,717	39.6%	40,478
2005	\$7,084	\$2,752	38.9%	41,011
2006	\$7,229	\$2,802	38.8%	41,744

2007	\$7,466	\$3,054	40.9%	44,897
2008	\$7,826	\$3,185	40.7%	46,179
2009	\$8,342	\$3,275	39.3%	47,159
2010	\$8,572	\$3,328	38.8%	48,263
2011	\$8,802	\$3,309	37.6%	48,638
2012	\$8,717	\$3,141	36.0%	48,375
2013	\$8,276	\$3,170	38.3%	48,821
2014	\$8,327	\$3,227	38.8%	49,692
2015	\$8,692	\$3,337	38.4%	50,715
2016	\$9,065	\$3,414	37.7%	51,891
2017	\$9,373	\$3,478	37.1%	52,525
2018	\$9,503	\$3,556	37.4%	53,334
2019	\$9,766	\$3,584	36.7%	54,122
2020	\$9,913	\$3,781	38.1%	57,091
2021	\$10,406	\$3,964	38.1%	57,641
Teacher salary if average teacher salary per pupil had kept up with increases in operating expenditures per pupil				\$66,301
Difference (amount by which teacher salaries have fallen behind due to insufficient dedication of revenues to salary increases)				\$8,660

The Texas Legislature has, at times, recognized the singular importance of teachers when crafting school finance legislation by explicitly directing school districts to raise teacher salaries. Going forward, **TCTA recommends that lawmakers fund a salary increase and require districts to use the money for that purpose.** Otherwise, history suggests that teachers will not get it. An appendix at the end of this testimony shows the history of significant teacher salary increases in the past two decades and the legislation through which those increases were accomplished.

Generally, although there has been an increase in funding invested in public education over the last decade, teacher salaries are not keeping pace. For this reason, **state law should include a provision that specifically and proportionately increases teacher salaries as funding for schools is increased.**

Percentage Increase in Operating Expenditures vs. Teacher Salaries



Health Insurance

Compensation is not limited to teacher pay. School employees are facing a crisis of health insurance unaffordability that must be recognized as a factor in low morale. An employee participating in the TRS-administered ActiveCare insurance plan who needs family coverage will pay a median premium of \$1,002/month in regional-based premiums for the LOWEST level of coverage. And that premium cost per month includes a \$5,000 family deductible in addition to co-pays, with most benefits not kicking in until after the deductible is met. The state’s \$75 monthly per-member contribution has not changed since the inception of the program two decades ago while prices for medical care in 2022 are 113.7% higher than in 2001 per the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Increasing the state’s contribution to active employee health insurance must be part of the teacher compensation discussion.

Though TEA bears no responsibility for the implementation of the active employee insurance program administered through TRS, the funding applies to all eligible employees in all districts and is included in the school finance formulas.

Although TRS administers a specific health insurance plan, it has no involvement with or relationship to the funding aspect of the plan, which applies regardless of a district’s participation. There is no appropriate way for TRS to include a budget item regarding active employee insurance. Therefore, any increase needs to be included in the TEA budget.

Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA)

Since its inception in 2019, the rollout of the TIA program has been slow. As of September 26, 2022, there are only 57 participating districts with approved local designation systems, out of roughly 1,200

school districts in Texas. (In total, 157 districts are participating; the 100 districts that do not have approved local designation systems are receiving funds for “inherited” teachers or National Board Certified teachers.) Per TEA, the TIA program currently only covers 1.6% (6,205) of teachers and by fiscal year 2025 the program is anticipated to only include approximately 5% (19,757) of teachers.

If the goal of the committee is to attract and retain teachers, prospective employees need assurances, not “chances.” Minimum salaries need to be raised to competitive levels, as do benefits. The data show that fewer people are willing to make the choice to be in a profession that puts them at a financial disadvantage.^{vi} Incentive pay is simply not a substitute for overall compensation increases.

TELL Survey and Working Conditions

A large body of evidence shows there is a strong link between teacher working conditions and teacher turnover and attrition.^{vii} There is also a significant link between teaching and learning conditions and school performance.^{viii}

The six facets of working conditions that appear to be the driving factors behind teachers’ decisions to stay in or leave the profession are: support for new teachers, generous salary schedules, fewer student discipline problems, adequate resources and classroom supplies, effective school leadership, and enhanced faculty input into school decision-making.^{ix}

Although many facets of teacher working conditions may be under the control of local school districts and administrators, the state still has a significant role to play. First, the state should engage in comprehensive and systematic data collection regarding teacher working conditions. This step is foundational to enabling state policymakers as well as local school district leadership to develop an understanding of the facets of teacher working conditions that impact teacher job satisfaction and retention. Many states engage in this kind of data collection via a routinely administered survey of teachers.^x

Texas TELL survey: Texas’s own version of a climate survey (for educators) was established when the Texas legislature passed a law several sessions ago which included provisions requiring the commissioner of education to administer a biennial statewide survey to certified educators regarding teaching and learning conditions (TEC Sec. 7.065). The results were to be made public and used to inform district and campus improvement plans, and at the state level to inform state teacher retention and professional development initiatives, and standards for principals and superintendents. The idea behind the survey was that the results would serve as a useful tool for the state and local districts to inform teacher quality, support policies, and initiatives. Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, among other states have been administering surveys like this with success for a number of years. In Texas, Austin ISD has administered the survey successfully for several years now. For a good example of how the survey has been used successfully in Colorado, visit <https://www.cde.state.co.us/tlcc>.

Texas contracted with the chief architect of a widely used, validated teaching and learning conditions survey, and adapted it to Texas standards. The Texas Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) survey was administered online to Texas educators in April 2014.

However, the 84th Legislature discontinued funding for the survey, and it has not been administered again. Given the importance of data collection on school climate to inform state

and local district policy, we recommend that policymakers reinstate funding for the TELL survey, which is still in law but was only funded for one biennium at a cost of \$300,000.

Increase the School Safety Allotment and expand allowable uses of the money

Teachers consistently cite student discipline problems as a top reason for leaving the teaching profession, as noted by Commissioner Morath in his PowerPoint presentation to the Senate Education Committee during its May 24, 2022, hearing, as well as numerous studies which have examined this issue. One study found that of the 50% of teachers who leave the field permanently, almost 35% report the reason is related to problems with student discipline. Researchers find that “Those schools that do a far better job of managing and coping with and responding to student behavioral issues have far better teacher retention.”

Given the increases in student behavior problems, a key investment that the Legislature should make is in behavior interventionists. Campus behavior coordinators are not behavior intervention experts, nor are teachers, and these experts would ideally be employed on every campus and in DAEPs. The school safety allotment should be increased, and a portion dedicated to funding the hiring of behavior intervention specialists.

Reducing lost instructional time due to removals

One key concern about removing students from the classroom is lost instructional time for the student. A system that provides for temporary, short-term removals that allow for a student’s needs and behavior to be addressed so they can return to the classroom can help address this concern. For removals that are longer, in-school placements for students in which the district provides a designated space where the student can continue to receive educational instruction while getting help for behavioral issues is imperative.

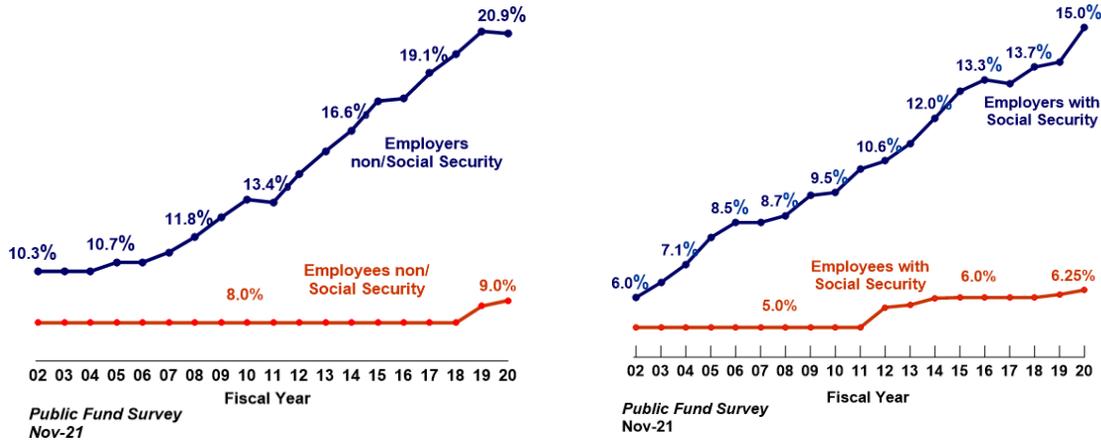
TCTA recommends that the Texas School Safety Allotment be increased and be used in part to fund behavioral intervention specialists to support teachers at the campus level and improve the quality of disciplinary alternative education programs.

Retirement benefits

Retirees are having difficulties with everyday costs such as housing, groceries, gas, medications, and other daily expenses due to recent economic pressures. The TRS annuity is essential for retirees and is often their only source of retirement income, especially since the vast majority of school employees do not receive Social Security benefits. Texas is one of 18 states that do not require teachers to be enrolled in Social Security.

Texas still lags other states in contribution rates to the pension fund. Per the NASRA Public Funds Survey the median contribution rate for non-Social Security employers is around 21% while the median employer rate for Social Security employers is 16%. The state and district combined employer contribution in Texas for the 2022-23 school year is 10.15%.

National Association of State Retirement Administrators FY 2020



Texas teachers’ pensions average only \$2,118 per month even though the fund is healthy and could remain viable with increased benefits to annuitants. Retired teachers in Texas have not received a cost-of-living increase since 2013 (which only affected those retiring before August 31, 2004, and was capped at \$100) and some have never seen such an increase, while 60% of states have an automatic COLA. Additionally, the dollar had an average inflation rate of 2.7% per year between 2013 and today, producing a cumulative price increase of 27.14%. This means that today's prices are 1.27 times higher than average prices since 2013, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics consumer price index. In 2022 alone, the inflation rate has increased by 8.3%.

The legislature has successful precedent in providing cost of living increases over a period of several years to restore retirees to the purchasing power of their original pensions. In 1993, a four-phase Consumer Price Index catch-up plan was designed to increase annuities for TRS members whose incomes were 15% to 115% below the CPI. The 73rd Legislature passed legislation to implement the plan. The second, third and fourth phases were signed into law in 1995, 1997 and 1999 respectively.

History of TRS COLA	
1993	TRS Members who retired prior to 9/1/91 received an inflation adjustment ranging from 5%– 15% depending on the member’s retirement date. This was the first in a series of “catchups,” for retirees whose annuity-purchasing power lagged behind the Consumer Price Index.
1995	TRS Members who retired before 9/1/93 were paid the greater of two options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current annuity with an inflation adjustment ranging from 2% 17% depending on the member’s retirement date; or • Re-computation of the annuity using the current minimum annual salary (\$18,500) for a classroom teacher or full-time librarian if the actual average salary was less than the current minimum.
1997	TRS Members who retired prior to 9/1/96 received an inflation adjustment ranging from 2%–14% based upon the member’s retirement date.

1999	TRS Members who retired between 9/1/98 and 8/31/99 received a 10% increase in their annuities, which was equivalent to the multiplier increase.
	Members who retired prior to 9/1/98 received an inflation adjustment between 2%–7% based upon the member’s retirement date and the 10% multiplier equivalent.
2001	TRS Members who retired between 9/1/00 and 8/31/01 received a 4.5% increase in their annuities, which was equivalent to the multiplier increase. Members who retired prior to 9/1/00 received a 6% inflation adjustment plus the 4.5% multiplier equivalent.
2013	Members who retired prior to 9/1/04 received a 3% COLA (capped at \$100 per month).

**Information provided by TRS*

The most effective way to focus benefit increases on the neediest retirees is to direct the greatest increases to those who retired earliest; but more recent retirees cannot be left out, given current inflationary pressures. Granting retirees a pension increase based on inflation would help all retirees regain purchasing power lost to inflation.

While the costs of providing benefit increases must be taken into consideration, the purpose of the retirement fund is not simply to grow, but to provide retirement security for Texas’ retired school employees. **The state must prioritize spending to increase benefits, and we suggest setting aside funding each session to begin prefunding future enhancements, as TRS data clearly shows that this is a cost-effective way to fund benefit increases.**

Endnotes

ⁱ Encouraging More High School Students to Consider Teaching By: Michelle Croft, Gretchen Guffy, and Dan Vitale, June 2018, <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/pdfs/Encouraging-More-HS-Students-to-Consider-Teaching.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Greenberg, M. T., Brown J. L., Abenavoli, R.M. (2016). “Teacher Stress and Health Effects on Teachers, Students, and Schools.” Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University. https://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2016/rwjf430428)

ⁱⁱⁱ Barnes, G., Crowe, E., & Schaefer, B. (2007). *The cost of teacher turnover in five school districts: A pilot study*. Washington, DC: National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b4ab/6eaa2ac83f4721044e5de193e3e2dec07ac0.pdf>

^{iv} Texas Education Agency. (March 10, 2022). *TEA establishes Teacher Vacancy Task Force to address ongoing staffing challenges in public education*. <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/news-and-multimedia/news-releases/news-2022/tea-establishes-teacher-vacancy-task-force-to-address-ongoing-staffing-challenges-in-public-education>

^v Texas Education Agency. (September 2022) *Texas Education Agency Legislative Appropriations Request*. <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/agency-finances/legislative-appropriations-request>

^{vi} *Low relative pay and high incidence of moonlighting play a role in the teacher shortage, particularly in high-poverty schools*, Emma García, Elaine Weiss, Economic Policy Institute, May 9, 2019 <https://files.epi.org/pdf/161908.pdf>: Paying adequate overall salaries is critical to each district’s being able to recruit and retain a quality teacher in every classroom, despite the school’s location, education challenges it presents, or subjects that must be taught. In short, teacher wage levels need to be competitive.

REWARDING TEACHER EXCELLENCE A teacher compensation handbook for state and local policymakers,

Allan Odden and Marc Wallace, Consortium for Policy Research in Education Wisconsin Center for Education Research University of Wisconsin February 2007, <http://picusodden.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/tcomp-handbook-feb-28-07-final-3-05-07.pdf>: “Average salaries are critical for retention; average teacher salaries should be set at some competitive level to enable the education system to retain teachers that have entered teaching and at some point decide whether or not they want to remain in the profession.”

^{vii} Geiger, T., & Pivovarova, M. (2018). The effects of working conditions on teacher retention. *Teachers and Teaching*, 24(6), 604–625

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https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/2021-01/TTPSynthesis_Report_March2013.pdf;

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f Allensworth, E., Ponisciak, S., & Mazzeo, C. (2009). *The schools teachers leave: Teacher mobility in Chicago Public Schools*. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research—University of Chicago

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https://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR164.html.

^{viii} Berry, B., Bastian, K. C., Darling-Hammond, L., & Kini, T. (2021). *The importance of teaching and learning conditions: Influences on teacher retention and school performance in North Carolina*. Learning Policy Institute.

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/leandro-teaching-and-learning-conditions-brief>

^{ix} *The Mathematics and Science Teacher Shortage: Fact and Myth*, By Richard M. Ingersoll and David Perda, University of Pennsylvania, March, 2009, CPRE Research Report #RR-62

https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1027&context=cpre_researchreports

^x *ON THE PATH TO EQUITY: IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BEGINNING TEACHERS*, Alliance for Excellent

Education, July, 2014 (pg 10) <https://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/PathToEquity.pdf>; Ohio:

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^{xi} Note: The bill that passed (“similar legislation”) was HB 2012;

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/83R/billtext/pdf/HB02012F.pdf#navpanes=0>

Appendix

Past teacher salary increases

SB 4, 76th Regular Session had a \$3000 salary increase using the following language:

(c-1) Notwithstanding Subsection (a), for the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years, a classroom teacher, full-time librarian, full-time counselor certified under Subchapter B, or full-time school nurse is entitled to a monthly salary that is at least equal to the greater of:

(1) the sum of:

(A) the monthly salary the employee would have received for the 1999-2000 or 2000-2001 school year, as applicable under the district's salary schedule for the 1998-1999 school year, if that schedule had been in effect for the 1999-2000 or 2000-2001 school year, including any local supplement and any money representing a career ladder supplement the employee would have received in the 1999-2000 or 2000-2001 school year; and

(B) \$300; or

(2) the salary to which the employee is entitled under Subsection (a). (c-2) Subsection (c-1) and this subsection expire September 1, 2001.

(d) A classroom teacher, full-time librarian, full-time counselor certified under Subchapter B, or full-time school nurse employed by a school district in the 2000-2001 school year is, as long as the employee is employed by the same district, entitled to a salary that is at least equal to the salary the employee received for the 2000-2001 school year.

The salary increase was funded by an increase in the basic allotment, guaranteed wealth level and Tier 2 guaranteed yield and by additional state aid through the following provision:

Sec. 42.2512. ADDITIONAL STATE AID FOR PROFESSIONAL STAFF SALARIES. (a) A school district,

including a school district that is otherwise ineligible for state aid under this chapter, is entitled to state aid in an amount, as determined by the commissioner, equal to the difference, if any, between:

(1) an amount equal to the product of \$3,000 multiplied by the number of classroom teachers, full-time librarians, full-time counselors certified under Subchapter B, Chapter 21, and full-time school nurses employed by the district and entitled to a minimum salary under Section 21.402; and

(2) an amount equal to 80 percent of the amount of additional funds to which the district is entitled due to the increases made by S.B. No. 4, Acts of the 76th Legislature, Regular Session, 1999, to:

(A) the equalized wealth level under Section 41.002; (B) the basic allotment under Section 42.101; and

(C) the guaranteed level of state and local funds per weighted student per cent of tax effort under Section 42.302.

(b) A determination by the commissioner under this section is final and may not be appealed. (c) The commissioner may adopt rules to implement this section.

A similar funding mechanism was used to establish state support for health care in H.B. 3343, 77th Regular Session. This funding has not been increased since this time.