

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Education September 18, 2024

Submission from:
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INTERIM CHARGES

- **COVID-19 Funding Oversight:** Examine and report on COVID-19 how public schools spent federal funds since the beginning of the pandemic, including funds received under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), with a dual focus on demonstrated improved student outcomes and efficient use of taxpayer funds.
- **Monitoring:** Monitor the implementation of legislation addressed by the Senate Committee on Education passed by the 88th Legislature, as well as relevant agencies and programs under the committee's jurisdiction. Specifically, make recommendations for any legislation needed to improve, enhance, or complete implementation of the following: measures ensuring public school safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Substantially increase the basic allotment to continue to address COVID learning losses and to better ensure student achievement across all demographics.**
- **Make a significant investment in recruitment and retention of teachers and teacher salaries post-COVID. Fund a meaningful salary increase and require districts to use the money for that purpose. These salary increases should be implemented as follows:**
 - Increase the basic allotment.
 - 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.
 - 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.
- Invest in school safety measures, including behavioral interventionists.
- Strengthen school safety protocols and accountability. Require administrators to inform teachers if their specific campus is threatened. Hold administrators accountable if they do not take appropriate action when a teacher reports threatening student behavior.

The Texas Classroom Teachers Association appreciates this opportunity to provide input on COVID-19 funding and school safety.

COVID-19 FUNDING

TCTA is very concerned about the impact on students and teachers of the impending loss of federal ESSER funds. Thirty-nine percent of ESSER funds has been used by school districts on recurring costs that include among other things: hiring teachers, teacher pay, physical and behavioral health, tutoring, and teacher training/professional development. Per a new Rice University study that took data from the Texas Education Agency and paired it with the National School Finance Indicators database, more than 73% of Texas school districts face significant budget deficits, even after striving to improve efficiency. Despite a slight increase in per-student funding since 2020, inflation and recapture payments have effectively negated these gains and today's funding is equivalent to what it was in 2014. Significantly, the report also revealed that schools with larger funding gaps usually have lower student achievement ratings. Severely underfunded districts are strongly associated with TEA student achievement ratings of C or lower, which are graded on an A-F scale. The report concludes that addressing funding gaps in Texas' most severely underfunded districts could substantially boost their chances of achieving higher TEA student achievement ratings. Without adequate financial support, even the most effective teaching practices are unlikely to succeed. With proper funding, efforts to enhance student performance can become both effective and sustainable.

Per TEA data, teacher attrition in Texas is on the rise from 9% to 12% since the start of the pandemic, at the same time the number of uncertified teachers in the state's public schools has risen by 29%. Uncertified teachers, many of whom are in rural school districts, accounted for roughly 38% of newly hired teachers last year. Many districts have sought an exemption from the state's teacher certification requirements to help combat their teacher shortages. A recent Texas Tech University study highlighted that students lose up to about four months of learning in reading and three months in math when they have a new teacher who is both uncertified and lacks experience working in a public school.

The most direct and important way to meaningfully support educators is to provide a significant, sustainable, and ongoing increase in compensation to retain teachers and attract more students to the teaching profession. According to a July 2022 survey from the EdWeek Research Center, six out of 10 teachers say that the compensation strategy that would be the most effective in encouraging them to stay in the profession is a base salary increase that exceeds cost of living increases. According to the same survey, bonuses, unless they are substantially large, are not an effective way to keep teachers in the profession, with only 5% of teachers saying bonuses around \$2,000 or less would keep them in the profession. Additionally, 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).

Texas ranks 30th in the nation for average teacher pay, \$8,828 less than the national average, according to the Southern Regional Education Board.



DASHBOARD HOME



STATE PROFILES



SALARY



HEALTHCARE



RETIREMENT



TAKE-HOME PAY



Texas Teacher Compensation and Benefits Summary

Average Teacher Salary, 2022-23



Cost of Living Index

96.5%

Teacher Wage Penalty

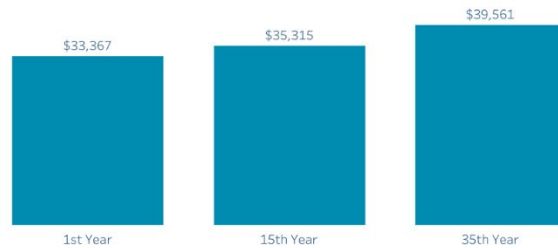
Healthcare Benefits, 2023

Number of Healthcare Plans:	5
Individual Premium Range:	\$159 - \$788
Individual Deductible Range:	\$1,000 - \$3,000
Individual Out-of-Pocket Max:	\$6,900 - \$8,150
Family Premium Range:	\$1,073 - \$2,616
Family Deductible Range:	\$3,000 - \$6,000
Family Out-of-Pocket Max:	\$13,800 - \$16,300

Retirement Benefits, 2022-23

Number of Pension Plans/Tiers:	6
Number of Investment or Hybrid Plans:	0
Social Security:	Varies by District
Average Vesting Period (Years):	5
Average Contribution to Benefit:	8.3%
Average Contrib. to Unfunded Liabilities:	5.4%
Potential Gross Annual Pension Benefit:	\$45,168

Average Take Home Pay, 2023



Source: Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). Data updated August 2024 from the 2022-23 school year. Texas: [Teacher Retirement System of Texas](#). The state has moved to a region-based health care plan benefit cost structure. The state was divided into 20 regions in 2023 and each region has an adjusted premium, deductible and out of pocket cost differentiation. SREB averaged the figures across the state to reach the sums provided in the health benefits section for 2023. You may find exact figures in each of the 20 regions here for the following school years [2022-2023](#) and [2024-2025](#).

Typical Teacher Take Home Pay: What the average first-year teacher, mid-career or 15th year teacher, and 35th year teacher brings home in their paycheck after deducting their required retirement contribution, their health insurance premium costs and taxes, as calculated by SREB.

The Texas Education Agency stated in its 2023 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.” 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 TCTA analysis of expenditures excludes increases in federal funding attributable to ESSER.

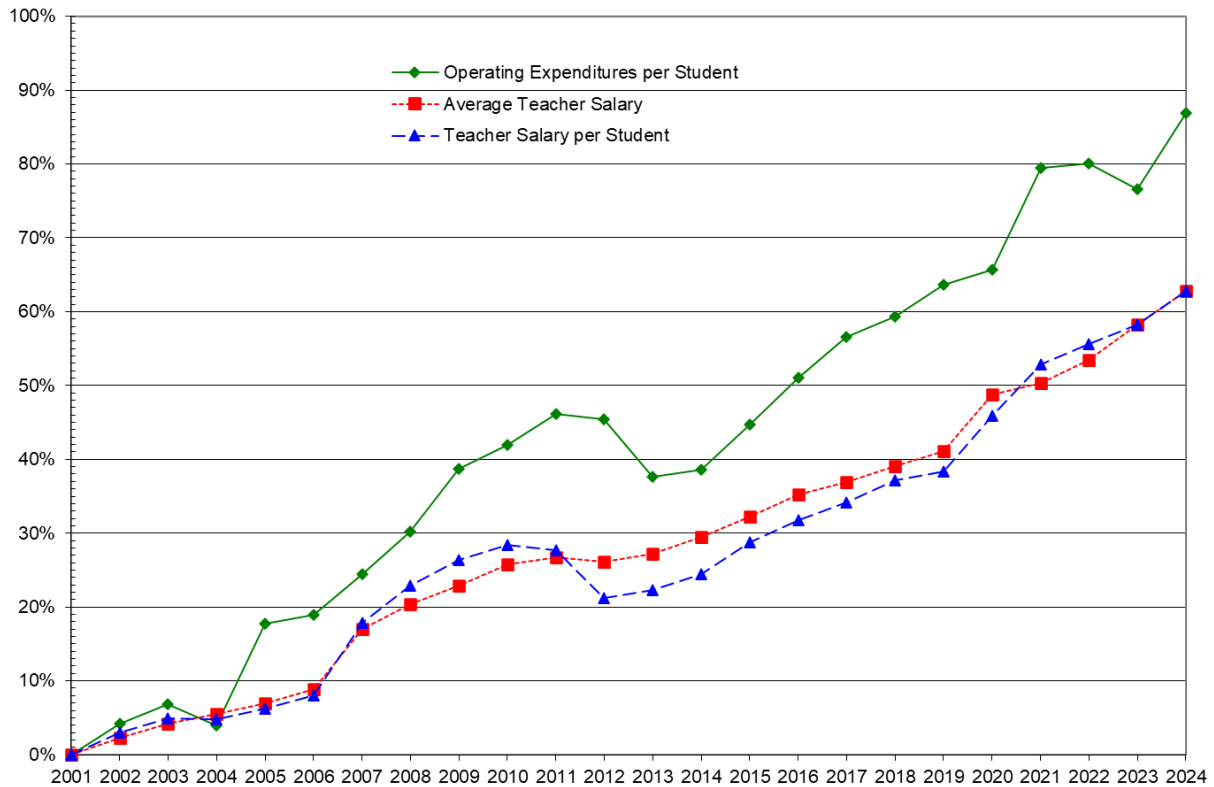
COMPARISON OF INCREASES IN TEACHER SALARIES TO INCREASES IN STATE AND LOCAL EXPENDITURES PER PUPIL

Increases are aggregate percentage increases above the 2001 school year.

(Prepared by Texas Classroom Teachers Association)

School Year	Average Teacher Salary ¹	% Increase from 2000	Teacher Salary per Pupil	% Increase from 2000-01	Operating Expenditures without ESSER	Operating Expenditures per Student without ESSER	% Increase from 2000	Per pupil teacher salary as % of op exp per student w/o ESSER
2001	38,361	0.0%	\$2,592	0.0%	\$24,010,804,383	5,915	0.0%	45.2%
2002	39,232	2.3%	\$2,669	3.0%	\$25,570,630,521	6,167	4.3%	44.6%
2003	39,974	4.2%	\$2,719	4.9%	\$26,785,133,012	6,317	6.8%	44.4%
2004	40,478	5.5%	\$2,717	4.8%	\$26,520,548,538	6,151	4.0%	48.5%
2005	41,011	6.9%	\$2,752	6.2%	\$30,539,587,274	6,967	17.8%	43.9%
2006	41,744	8.8%	\$2,802	8.1%	\$31,684,439,697	7,032	18.9%	44.8%
2007	44,897	17.0%	\$3,054	17.8%	\$33,632,935,147	7,363	24.5%	47.1%
2008	46,179	20.4%	\$3,185	22.9%	\$35,817,918,654	7,700	30.2%	46.0%
2009	47,159	22.9%	\$3,275	26.3%	\$38,800,772,656	8,206	38.7%	44.3%
2010	48,263	25.8%	\$3,328	28.4%	\$40,525,145,922	8,399	42.0%	44.0%
2011	48,638	26.8%	\$3,309	27.7%	\$42,460,695,640	8,644	46.1%	43.5%
2012	48,375	26.1%	\$3,141	21.2%	\$42,804,942,407	8,599	45.4%	41.5%
2013	48,821	27.3%	\$3,170	22.3%	\$41,199,344,944	8,144	37.7%	44.4%
2014	49,692	29.5%	\$3,227	24.5%	\$42,115,353,056	8,200	38.6%	44.3%
2015	50,715	32.2%	\$3,337	28.7%	\$44,633,165,100	8,558	44.7%	43.6%
2016	51,891	35.3%	\$3,414	31.7%	\$47,227,940,856	8,937	51.1%	42.6%
2017	52,525	36.9%	\$3,478	34.2%	\$49,499,494,032	9,263	56.6%	41.8%
2018	53,334	39.0%	\$3,556	37.2%	\$50,754,340,223	9,425	59.4%	42.0%
2019	54,122	41.1%	\$3,584	38.3%	\$52,435,381,781	9,681	63.7%	42.1%
2020	57,091	48.8%	\$3,781	45.9%	\$53,692,440,166	9,799	65.7%	44.0%
2021	57,641	50.3%	\$3,964	52.9%	\$56,890,359,635	10,616	79.5%	42.2%
2022	58,887	53.5%	\$4,033	55.6%	\$57,550,021,970	10,652	80.1%	42.8%
2023	60,716	58.3%	\$4,102	58.3%	\$57,637,758,690	10,445	76.6%	44.4%
2024	62,463	62.8%	\$4,220	62.8%	\$61,146,848,872	11,055	86.9%	42.8%
Teacher salary if average teacher salary per pupil had kept up with increases in operating expenditures per pupil								\$71,700
Difference (amount by which teacher salaries have fallen behind due to insufficient dedication of revenues to salary increases)								\$9,237
Source, Texas Education Agency								
¹ Average teacher base salary	² Actual data for previous year							

Percentage Increase in Operating Expenditures without ESSER vs. Teacher Salaries



Per Comptroller Hegar, lawmakers are projected to have approximately **\$21.3 billion in available revenue and 23.8 billion in the ESF at the end of 2024**. The 89th Legislature should increase the basic allotment in addition to providing a meaningful salary increase to teachers, especially with the impending loss of federal funds.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Safe working conditions are a priority for educators, and teachers consistently cite student discipline problems as a top reason for leaving the teaching profession, as noted by Commissioner Morath in his presentation to the 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.”

Teachers need to be able to fully exercise their right to remove unruly, disruptive, threatening or violent students from the classroom to maintain order. Chapter 37 of the Education Code comprises the laws governing student discipline. It is comprehensive and has been revised over the years to move away from more punitive disciplinary provisions to more leniency regarding how student behavior issues can be addressed. Even so, from the teacher’s perspective, these existing provisions are too often not followed or enforced, resulting in revolving door situations in which a teacher sends a student to the principal’s office and the student is sent directly back to the classroom with no intervention actions taken.

As noted in a 2021 report by Sam Houston State University, after conducting a comprehensive assessment of Texas educators' needs pertaining to safety in partnership with the Office of the Governor's Public Safety Office, initial findings suggest "considerable reflection on relationships and discipline laws, policies, and procedures are needed. In this regard, participants seemed to recognize that discipline policies were not adequately or equitably enforced. Many educators bemoaned instances in which a student was removed from a classroom for threatening or disruptive behaviors only to return to the classroom moments later with little or no discipline. This specific occurrence was very prevalent in this code and theme. Educational leaders should feel empowered in disciplining students to ensure effective and safe operations." The authors of the report summarized the findings with a recommendation that "Policies reinforcing teachers/professors and administrators' authority in disciplining children and taking preventative action should be reviewed or developed."

State initiatives should not directly or indirectly limit teachers' ability to remove students from the classroom under TEC Section 37.002 and these students should not be returned to the classroom until appropriate intervention measures have been taken by someone other than the teacher, preferably someone who specializes in addressing the student's identified needs. Given the increases in student behavior problems, a key investment that the legislature should make is in behavior interventionists. Teachers and campus behavior coordinators are not behavior intervention experts, and these experts would ideally be employed on every campus and in DAEPs.

Many districts have reported an increase in the number of threats and more violence in schools since the pandemic. An analysis by Education Week has found that school shootings have risen. Nearly half of teachers who responded to a Pew Research Center survey said their sense of safety has decreased since 2019. To ensure teachers are better prepared and vigilant, administrators should be required to inform teachers if their specific campus is threatened. Teachers are losing confidence in their administrators when threatening student behavior is not taken seriously and/or addressed. Teachers are uncertain of their recourse when their reports are ignored. Consequently, administrators should be held accountable if they do not take appropriate measures when a teacher reports threatening student behavior.

To conclude, education in Texas is at a critical junction; with no real increase in the basic allotment for districts since 2019, a widespread teacher shortage, COVID learning losses, and threats to school safety, Texas educators have more on their plate than ever before. We continue to look forward to working with the Committee on strengthening our existing public schools. Providing increased funding for schools, raising teacher salaries, and improving working conditions and safety will ensure that Texas students receive the best education possible from high-quality, experienced, and certified teachers at schools that are the pride of their communities.