



Their Fair Share:

How Teacher Salary Gaps Shortchange Poor Children in Texas

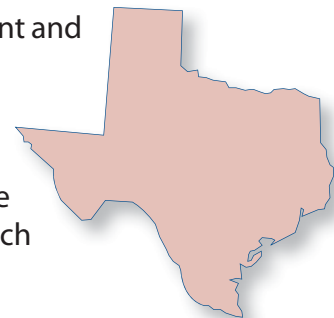
Over the last 20 years, Texans have worked hard to improve their public schools. And those efforts have paid off in higher student achievement.

Still, there are too many Texas children who aren't mastering the skills they need. Gaps separating the state's large population of Latino, Black and low-income children from other young Texans remain wide, hobbling their ability to contribute to the state's future. Only about four in 10 low-income 10th-graders met the state's math standards last year, compared to nearly seven in 10 of their wealthier peers.

Many Texans believe that these students aren't achieving well mostly because of who they are — for example, poor or non-English speaking. But the truth is many Texas school districts are not giving these children a fair opportunity to succeed.

Teachers, for example, matter a lot. But in almost every one of the 50 biggest school districts in Texas, low-income and minority students don't get their fair share of the best teachers. Even when the same school board hires and assigns the teachers, schools serving mostly poor and minority kids get the least-experienced, least-educated teachers. Meanwhile, across town, the most experienced and highest-paid teachers are concentrated in the most affluent and White schools.

How is this allowed to happen? As teachers gain experience and credentials, they get paid more. They also gain the option to choose where they teach. Knowing that they'll earn the same salary no matter where they transfer, teachers often choose to teach



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children they believe to be “easier.” This forces schools with more poor and minority students to hire novice teachers, year after year.

These inequalities add up to serious dollars. Across the 50 biggest school districts in Texas, teachers in the highest-poverty elementary schools make an average of \$975 less annually than teachers in the lowest-poverty schools.‡ At the high school level, the average teachers salary gap equals nearly \$1,100 per teacher. In some districts, these differences can be more than \$2,000, \$3,000, or even \$4,000 per teacher per year. The chart shows how this plays out in the 10 largest districts in the state.

Within the very same school districts, these differences can result in hundreds of thousands, even millions of dollars, being directed away from poor kids to subsidize higher teacher salaries in the most affluent schools. The sidebar on the next page shows how this affects two schools within the

Austin Independent School District. If teachers in Austin’s highest-poverty elementary schools were paid as much as teachers in the “better,” low-poverty schools, the high-poverty schools would have an additional \$2.5 million in teacher salaries.

This system is badly broken. It encourages strong teachers, with higher status and pay, to get as far away as they can from the students and schools who most need their help. It hurts kids, and it hurts the state’s future.

What can we do? We can start by acknowledging what well-run businesses and organizations have always known: Lock-step salary schedules don’t provide incentives to take on the biggest challenges and they don’t encourage improvement. Like professionals in other fields, teachers should be paid more if they are especially effective — and effective teachers should be paid more to take on

Average Teacher Salary Gaps Between Highest- and Lowest-Poverty Schools

District Name	Elementary Gap	High School Gap
Arlington	\$3,109.37	\$2,691.03*
Austin	\$3,101.38	\$3,590.33
Cypress-Fairbanks	\$1,321.48	\$3,834.08*
Dallas	\$857.08	\$928.43
El Paso	-\$929.80	-\$1,331.45*
Fort Bend	\$435.26	\$2,413.22*
Fort Worth	\$1,251.96	\$1,915.56
Houston	\$756.26	\$682.15
Northside	\$544.23	-\$3,260.55*
San Antonio	\$725.06	\$889.48*
50-District Average	\$975.86	\$1,089.53

* In these districts, we compared the highest-poverty high school in the district to the lowest-poverty high school in the district because of the small number of high schools in these districts.

‡ Analysis of publicly available data from the Texas Education Agency’s Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) by Dr. Ed Fuller, University of Texas at Austin. Highest- and lowest-poverty schools analysis compares highest and lowest quartiles. Quartiles were determined by ranking schools within districts by the percentage of low-income students. The quartiles were weighted to ensure approximately the same number of students in each.

the biggest challenges.

Right now, with the exception of a new policy in Houston, Texas teachers typically are paid based on experience and credentials alone. The best teachers with 10 years of experience and a master's degree make exactly the same salary as the worst teachers in their districts with the same education and experience. This is demeaning to the teachers who work so hard to achieve outstanding results for their students, and support is building in Texas to pay those teachers more.

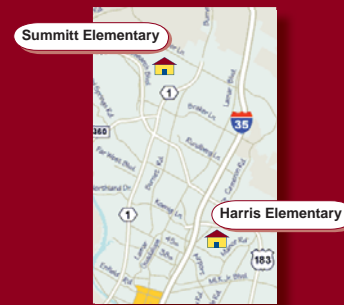
But as the move for performance pay picks up steam, it's important to understand how the incentives work right now. In effect, we're rewarding teachers with higher pay—even as they walk away from our most challenging students and schools.

This has got to change.

There are many things that Texas school districts can do right now to achieve a fairer distribution of teachers, including putting strong principals in high-poverty and high-minority schools and limiting the ability of high-income schools to "buy" more than their share of experienced teachers. Local school districts should move in this direction. They can also learn from districts like El Paso that are bucking the trend and distributing teachers in a way that doesn't cluster the lowest-paid teachers in the highest-poverty schools.

But the Legislature needs to act, too, by demanding a fair distribution of teachers and providing dollars that can be used for salary incentives. The State's very future depends on it.

TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS



Harris Elementary and Summitt Elementary schools are both in the Austin Independent School District. But they serve very different neighborhoods. Almost all the

students in Harris (97 percent) qualify for the free or reduced-price lunch program. Summitt serves far fewer (38 percent) low-income students. For many people, this may explain why Summitt has earned a "recognized" designation from the state, while Harris is rated only as "academically acceptable." But this ignores an important fact: Teachers at Harris are paid an average of \$6,000 less than teachers at Summitt.

If Harris spent as much on teacher salaries as Summitt did, the Harris budget would grow by more than \$260,000 a year – money that could go a long way toward improving instruction. These schools are not alone. Looking across the city, teachers in Austin's highest-poverty elementary schools earn roughly \$3,000 less on average than the teachers who work at the schools serving the lowest numbers of poor kids.

These widespread salary gaps in Austin may help explain why more than 80 percent of the city's lowest-poverty elementary schools have earned high marks for student academic performance – rating as "recognized" or "exemplary" – yet not a single one of its high-poverty schools has attained this achievement.



ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST

The Education Trust, Inc. was created to promote high-academic achievement for all students, at all levels – pre-kindergarten through college. While we know that all schools and colleges could better serve their students, our work focuses on the schools and colleges most often left behind in plans to improve education: those serving African-American, Latino, Native American and low-income students.

The Education Trust works side by side with policymakers, parents, education professionals, community and business leaders – in cities and towns across the country – who are trying to transform their schools and colleges into institutions that genuinely serve all students. We also bring lessons learned in local communities back to Washington to help inform national policy debates.

202-293-1217 • 1250 H Street, NW • Suite 700 • Washington, D.C. 20005 • www.edtrust.org