88TH INTERIM CHARGE RECOMMENDATIONS
PK-12 EDUCATION

<u>**Recommendation #1 - Strengthen and Diversify the Educator Workforce:**</u>
Evaluate opportunities to improve the recruitment, preparation, and retention of effective and diverse educators. Evaluate the impact of uncertified teachers in the classroom. Review the recommendations of the Teacher Vacancy Task Force and related legislative proposals from the 88th Regular Session and promising models like residency partnerships, apprenticeship pathways, and strategic staffing and compensation. Make recommendations to improve educator recruitment, preparation, and retention and to promote transparency for parents when schools employ uncertified teachers.

<u>**Recommendation #2 - Improve Performance and Close Widening Gaps in Early Literacy and Math:**</u>
Evaluate opportunities to improve students' foundational early literacy and math outcomes in grades K-3 and reduce gaps for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in mathematics. Monitor implementation of **HB 1605 (88R)**, intended to provide more students consistent access to high-quality instructional materials, as well as promising proposals from the 88th Regular Session, including **HB 2162 (88R)**. Study national best practices for identifying students requiring reading and math intervention and providing evidence-based intervention strategies. Recommend state policy changes and investments to increase the number of students achieving reading and math proficiency by the end of 3rd grade.

<u>**Recommendation #3 - Accelerate Learning and Access to Advanced Coursework:**</u>
Monitor the implementation of **SB 2124 (88R)**, aimed at increasing access to Algebra I in 8th grade, and identify additional opportunities to provide accelerated and advanced learning opportunities for high-achieving students across all grade levels. Evaluate best practices for identifying students eligible for Gifted & Talented services and study the impact of using multiple measures to determine readiness for college-level coursework.

<u>**Recommendation #4 - Align Systems to Improve Pathways to Postsecondary Success:**</u>
Monitor progress of the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative under **HB 3767 (87R)** and study available data to ensure alignment of postsecondary success outcomes across the PK-12, Higher Education and workforce continuum in pursuit of *Building a Talent Strong Texas* goals. Make recommendations to expand access to college and career pathways that lead to family-sustaining wages, including workforce credential programs in high school that preserve postsecondary opportunities.

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Rationale:
The classroom teacher is the most important in-school factor affecting student academic growth, and the demands on classroom teachers as well as the routes to the classroom have changed dramatically in recent years. Based on staffing challenges arising from the pandemic, both the House and Senate held hearings related to the teacher workforce last interim. Additionally, Governor Abbott established the Teacher Vacancy Task Force, which led to recommendations and proposed legislation during the 88th legislative session. Although this legislation did not pass both chambers, the issues remain urgent. While efforts are underway at the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and individual school systems and preparation programs to strengthen the educator pipeline, legislative action remains necessary to address these challenges at scale.

A growing number of Texas teachers are underprepared at the beginning of their careers, contributing to attrition rates that have outpaced the national average by about 25% over the past decade. In the 2022-2023 school year, nearly 30% of newly hired teachers held no teaching certificate.[1] This lack of preparation correlates with 41% of Texas teachers leaving the profession within their first five years.[2] Underprepared and uncertified teachers disproportionately teach our most underserved student populations, which exacerbates learning and achievement gaps.[3]

Created by House Bill 1842 (84th Legislative Session, 2015), a "District of Innovation" designation provides increased flexibility to traditional school districts allowing them to exempt themselves from requirements of the Texas Education Code, including for requirements related to educator certification. While the District of Innovation provisions permit flexibility for districts in staffing with uncertified teachers, it also allows districts to waive provisions of the Texas Education Code related to parental notification of educator certification, leaving parents in the dark about their children's teachers and their qualifications. As of 2021, 908 school districts in Texas (88.9% of the total 1,021 school districts) were recognized as Districts of Innovation.[4] Of those, 840 school districts (92.5%) have specifically authorized exemption from teacher certification requirements (TEC § 21.003), and 313 (34.5%) of those authorized waiving parental notification of certification status (TEC § 21.057).

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[1] Employed Teacher Attrition and New Hires, Texas Education Agency, 2011-12 through 2022-23.
[2] Teacher Retention by Preparation Route, Texas Education Agency, 2011-12 through 2021-22.
[3] Want More High-Quality Teachers in Texas? Focus on Teacher Diversity, EdTrust, 2023.
[4] Texas Classroom Teacher Certification 2022, University of Houston, 2022.

Building from the recommendations offered by the Teacher Vacancy Task Force and interim committee hearings, the 88th Texas Legislature proposed rigorous and relevant educator preparation routes such as teacher residencies, strategic staffing, differentiated compensation to reward our most effective educators (including expanding and strengthening the Teacher Incentive Allotment (88R)), and additional supports and benefits to improve teacher working conditions. Recent research in Texas indicates that teachers prepared through paid, yearlong residencies have higher retention rates, improve student achievement at higher rates than other program models, and are more diverse.[5] These strategies deserve continued attention and consideration this interim to ensure meaningful action is taken in the next legislative session.

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Evaluate opportunities to improve students' foundational early literacy and math outcomes in grades K-3 and reduce gaps for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in mathematics. Monitor implementation of **HB 1605 (88R)**, intended to provide more students consistent access to high-quality instructional materials, as well as promising proposals from the 88th Regular Session, including **HB 2162 (88R)**. Study national best practices for identifying students requiring reading and math intervention and providing evidence-based intervention strategies. Recommend state policy changes and investments to increase the number of students achieving reading and math proficiency by the end of 3rd grade.

Rationale:
Statewide results from the 2023 administration of STAAR show that after facing a historic decades' worth loss of academic gains, some students were able to recover some but proficiency rates remain low: just 52% of students are at or above grade level in Reading and only 43% in Math. For students of color and students from low-income backgrounds representing the majority of today's student population, the gaps that existed before the pandemic have only grown wider. For example, only 36% of economically disadvantaged students met grade-level standards in Algebra I, compared to 61% of their more affluent peers; and the gap between Hispanic and White students has more than doubled, from 10% before the pandemic to 21% in 2023. These figures represent math skills that are critical to postsecondary success.

Texas has historically struggled to accelerate learning and catch up students who fall behind academically. The 88th Legislature recognized the need to strengthen early foundations by passing HB 1605 to ensure more students have access to on-grade-level materials through the creation and resourcing of Texas-specific High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM). Along with active oversight of all associated rulemaking, data collection, and other governmental actions concerning HB 1605, further

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[5] Texas Tech University, "Innovations in University-Based Teacher Preparation: Comparing the 'Grow Your Own' Alternative to the Traditional Program at Texas Tech University", November 2022; University of Texas, "The Tipping Point", June 2022.

work must be done by policymakers to support each student's ability to reach grade level reading and math.

HB 3 (86R) solidified the development of foundational literacy skills through the Early Education Allotment, Reading Academies to train educators in the Science of Teaching Reading, and requiring local school boards to adopt goals to improve students' 3rd grade reading proficiency. Despite these strides, only 48% of 3rd graders in the state met grade level reading expectations in 2023 and, as of the latest administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Texas ranked 33rd in the nation in 4th grade reading proficiency.[6]

Policies proposed in HB 2162 (88R) offer a promising path to improve student proficiency by ensuring schools utilize evidence-based screening instruments to monitor student's development of foundational literacy skills in Kindergarten through 3rd grade; equipping parents with reliable information about their child's reading progress and high-quality resources that can be used at home; requiring schools to provide targeted reading intervention, such as high-quality tutoring for students who consecutively demonstrate literacy skill gaps; and providing greater public transparency and data to know how well our schools are implementing the Science of Teaching Reading.

By revisiting these proposed policies and studying national best practices to evaluate opportunities to introduce other data-driven elements of comprehensive early literacy state policy frameworks[7] – including regional coaching infrastructures and robust family engagement tools to reinforce instructional quality – legislators can ensure additional Texas students are on track to meet key foundational academic milestones.

Recommendation #3 - Accelerate Learning and Access to Advanced Coursework:
Monitor the implementation of **SB 2124 (88R)**, aimed at increasing access to Algebra I in 8th grade, and identify additional opportunities to provide accelerated and advanced learning opportunities for high-achieving students across all grade levels. Evaluate best practices for identifying students eligible for Gifted & Talented services and study the impact of using multiple measures to determine readiness for college-level coursework.

Rationale:
Data suggest that taking advanced math in middle school puts students on a track to take more college-ready courses and significantly increases students' likelihood of postsecondary success, including attaining a postsecondary credential and earning higher wages in the workplace (a boost of 8% overall

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[6] STAAR, Texas Education Agency, 2023; National Assessment of Educational Progress, The Nation's Report Card. 2022.
[7] "Comprehensive Early Literacy Policy: A State-by-State Analysis of Fundamental Principles," ExcelinEd, 2022.

and 16% for rural students).[8] Wide variation in middle school math policies, however, with 36% of Texas school systems not currently offering Algebra I in 7th or 8th grades,[9] acts as a barrier to Algebra I completion in middle school, resulting in many capable students missing out on higher-level coursework. To improve early access to Algebra I, the 88th Legislature passed SB 2124 and scaled to all school systems the evidence-based practice of an opt-out placement policy in advanced middle school math programs as previously implemented in several districts across Texas (e.g., Dallas ISD and Central Texas).

Along with active oversight of all associated rulemaking, data collection, and other governmental actions concerning SB 2124, further work must be done by policymakers to identify and address similar gaps that may exist for high-achieving students to access advanced coursework across in other subjects and grade levels. Most directly, longitudinal data exploring patterns in math coursework enrollment in high school shows that students of color and students from low-income backgrounds who take and pass Algebra I in 8th grade still end up taking advanced math courses in high school at lower rates than their peers.[10]

Data suggest similar gaps may exist for high-achieving students who are under-identified for participation in Gifted & Talented programming, and therefore miss out on opportunities to accelerate their learning earlier in their academic journey.[11] This is particularly deserving of attention and consideration following the reinstatement of the Gifted and Talented Allotment in HB 1525 (87R).

To be eligible to enroll in dual credit courses, students must show readiness by meeting Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSI-A) score requirements. During pandemic-related testing challenges, Texas was one of many states that allowed greater flexibility for students to demonstrate readiness for dual credit enrollment using multiple measures. Policymakers should examine recent data and studies to evaluate the impact of using multiple measures on dual credit access and the correlation of various measures, including high school GPA, with students' course performance and future postsecondary success. This is especially important as HB 8 (88R) seeks to expand access to traditional and more flexible forms of dual enrollment courses through Financial Aid for Swift Transfer (FAST) and the College Connect program.

Recommendation #4 - Align Systems to Improve Pathways to Postsecondary Success:
Monitor progress of the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative under **HB 3767 (87R)** and study available data to ensure alignment of postsecondary readiness and success outcomes across the PK-12, Higher Education and workforce continuum in pursuit of *Building a Talent Strong Texas* goals. Make recommendations to

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[8] *Bold Action for a Prosperous Future: Evaluation of the Foundation High School Program and Academic and Career Trajectories of Texas High School Graduates*, Texas Tech University. February 2023.
[9] Advanced Coursetaking Dashboard, Texas 2036.
[10] Opportunities Denied: High-Achieving Black and Latino Students Lack Access to Advanced Math, EdTrust, 2023.
[11] The Gifted & Talented Gap, Commit Partnership, 2021.

expand access to college and career pathways that lead to family-sustaining wages, including workforce credential programs in high school that preserve postsecondary opportunities.

Rationale:

Just 65% of students graduate college, career or military ready (CCMR) and 78% do not receive a postsecondary degree or credential within six years of high school graduation.[12] This leaves the majority of young adults in Texas with only a 12% chance of earning a self-sustaining wage and ranks our state 36th in the country in postsecondary attainment levels.[13]

The 87th Legislature passed HB 3767, also known as the Texas Education and Workforce Alignment Act, to coordinate information and resources across agencies in pursuit of state workforce development goals, including attainment of jobs that pay a "self-sufficient" wage. Following passage of HB 8 (88R) and with emergency rules now in place codifying credentials of value and high-demand fields for community colleges, along with ongoing implementation of CCMR accountability and outcomes-based funding introduced by HB 3 (86R), policymakers should study the progress of the the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative. Specific attention should be given to existing definitions and opportunities for students to earn credentials of value in high-wage, high-demand fields during high school that are transferable and stackable in order to streamline career pathways and expand, not limit, postsecondary opportunities.

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[12] Student readiness: Texas parents are worried. Texas 2036, 2023.
[13] Jumpstarts: High School Pathways that Predict Postsecondary Success, E3 Alliance, 2022.