

March 4, 2025

To: House Public Education Committee

Re: House Bill 2

Position: For

Honorable Chair Buckley, Vice Chair Bernal, and members of the House Public Education Committee,

On behalf of EdTrust, thank you for the invitation to testify today in support of House Bill 2. It cannot be repeated enough: teacher quality is the most significant in-school factor impacting student success. If our goal is to improve outcomes for students, there is no investment more necessary, strategic, or impactful than the quality and effectiveness of our state's teachers.

That starts by ensuring aspiring teachers are as prepared as possible to take on the awesome responsibility of educating children when they enter the classroom as teachers of record. Last year, nearly 1 in 10 Texas students was taught by a first-year teacher, more than half of whom were uncertified – meaning they had demonstrated neither mastery of their content nor the skills to effectively deliver instruction. And an even greater number of beginning teachers enter with little to no classroom training beforehand. We can see the impact in our student learning outcomes as a state and must change course.

Two primary policy drivers have led us to this tipping point:

First, we have failed to incentivize aspiring teachers to pursue high-quality teacher preparation. Over the last five years, Texas has experienced a 20 percent drop in the number of completers of educator preparation programs. There are plenty of people who want to become teachers – every year, our state replaces forty to fifty thousand teachers who exit the profession – but we are not reaching them early enough to signal the value of preparation that will equip them to succeed and stay in the profession.

Second, we have compounded the problem by allowing aspiring teachers to be hired and paid as a teacher of record without any preparation or certification. This isn't isolated to secondary or CTE courses by the way; last year a third of newly-hired uncertified teachers were in elementary grades. As a result, candidates are making rationale economic decisions, choosing the easiest and cheapest route into the classroom or skipping preparation altogether. Of course, these choices are not without consequence; nearly a third of uncertified teachers leave within the first year and only a third stay into their fifth year.

HB 2 addresses both root causes head on.

First, this legislation invests in proven and high-demand teacher preparation pathways that are underway across the state but that lack investment to scale. Currently, Texas provides almost no dedicated state funding for teacher preparation; through the PREP Allotment, HB 2 provides funding that flows directly to candidates as stipends, presenting them with a clear upfront incentive to pursue high-quality programs and needed financial support to successfully complete. This "earn and learn" approach has the potential to attract and expand access to high-quality programs that include hands-on

preservice training. The allotment is weighted specifically to attract and place candidates on rural and high-need campuses, as well as for those pursuing certification in high-need positions such as bilingual and special education.

Importantly, the PREP Allotment is structured to incentivize effective partnerships between school districts and preparation programs, flowing remaining funding to preservice programs contingent upon candidates' successful completion, certification, and first-year retention. It also ensures continued early career support by funding mentors for the first two years after candidates complete a preservice program, scaling the Mentor Program Allotment from House Bill 3 (2019) which has shown promising results in retaining teachers through their third year but has been capped by appropriation.

Finally, the PREP Allotment provides funding to scale Grow Your Own strategies that create clear on-ramps and pathways to and through high-quality programs for high school students and the 86,000 educational aides employed across the state, many of whom have some college but no degree. This investment is critical to cultivate local talent and sustain volume into these preservice programs.

While increasing the supply and retention of prepared teachers, HB 2 also takes a thoughtful and gradual approach to close the door on District of Innovation waivers that have allow aspiring teacher to reap the full rewards of compensation as teachers of record without preparation or certification. As proposed, systems and already-employed teachers would be granted time and funding to pursue certification over the next three years while phasing out waivers in a way that prioritizes elementary literacy and math and core subjects, preserving flexibility for CTE courses.

When I zoom out and look at Article II with the other components of HB 2, I can start to see a future where the teaching profession is rightfully restored as the most important job in Texas – where pathways to preparation are clear, accessible, and attractive; where early career support is abundant; and where compensation reflects the transformative impact teachers have on the lives of students.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Feinstein
State Director
The Education Trust in Texas

