



April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Education K - 16

Re: SB 2253

Position: For

Honorable Chair Creighton, Vice Chair Campbell, and members of the Senate Committee on Education K – 16,

On behalf of Dallas College, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 2253. My name is Sara DeLano and I have the honor of serving as the dean for the School of Education. Dallas College is the first community college in Texas to offer a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and teaching. The mission of our institution is to transform lives and communities through higher education. One way we are living out this mission is by offering an incredibly affordable, “earn while you learn” bachelor's degree for aspiring educators.

The high-quality preparation pathway at Dallas College begins as a Grow Your Own pathway for high school students and for paraprofessionals already employed in school systems. Through this pathway, we partner with local ISDs to recruit promising aspiring educators and then to provide them with high-quality teacher preparation that includes structured on-the-job learning, release time, and mentorship. Our program culminates in a yearlong, paid teacher residency under the tutelage of an expert cooperating teacher. Developing our pathway in partnership with school system partners ensures that our students know how to effectively teach rigorous, standards-aligned instruction on their very first day as teacher of record. The results speak for themselves: our four-year bachelor's degree graduation rate of 69 percent far exceeds the statewide average, more than 80 percent of our graduates are now certified teachers of record in partner school systems, and the semester-to-semester persistence rate of our paraprofessionals in our Grow Your Own cohorts is 95 percent. According to a 2024 TEA analysis, only 6 percent of the approximately 86,000 people who held an educational aide certificate obtained a standard teaching certificate over a 10-year period.

More than half of our students are paraprofessionals in local school systems. They have wanted to become teachers for years, but did not have a pathway that met their needs. We built that pathway and our enrollment has grown by 56 percent in three years.

Behind these quantitative measures are the stories of aspiring educators. Ramia Dawes was a bus driver for 11 years and always wanted to be a teacher. She is a mother of two children and must work. Ramia jumped at the chance to participate in the paid teacher residency we co-designed with Richardson ISD. She is now a teacher of record and credits her residency for preparing her to effectively serve her students from day one. Graciela Diaz has been a paraprofessional with Lewisville ISD for five years. She has also always wanted to be a teacher, but her previous attempts to get a bachelor's degree were unsuccessful because the financial burdens and program structures did not allow her to work while continuing her education. Graciela was



selected by Lewisville to participate in our jointly developed Grow Your Own Program. She is now in her second semester – has made all As – and cannot wait to be a teacher.

While we are proud of our success with our school system partners, we can do so much more. SB 2253 provides critical investments to expand high-quality preparation pathways like ours that recruit new talent into the teaching profession, provide stipends for students to receive job-embedded training, and compensate cooperating teachers.

This fall we will enroll more than 200 students who will be ready to participate in paid, yearlong residencies. However, our local school district partners are only currently able to provide paid slots for 100 of them. This means that many of our students may stop out. The PREP allotment in SB 2253 includes targeted funding for school systems willing to invest in proven residency models like ours.

We are receiving interest from paraprofessionals throughout our region who want to participate in our program. However, these paraprofessionals - many of whom serve students with disabilities and could be amazing special education teachers - make between \$20k and \$25k. This means that higher education is often financially out of reach. SB 2253 includes funding for Grow Your Own programs that can offer tuition support for paraprofessionals and high school students completing education coursework to realize their dream of becoming teachers. A large percentage of these individuals will serve in Texas' highest-need certification areas and move to a self-sustaining wage by becoming a teacher of record.

Investing in high-quality teacher preparation matters for all Texans. It matters for passionate and aspiring educators like Ramia and Graciela, but especially for the students across the state in desperate need of well-prepared and effective teachers.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of SB 2253 and would be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Sara DeLano

Dean, School of Education

Dallas College

