

September 1, 2020

To: Chairman Chris Turner

CC: Rep. Lynn Stucky, Rep. Lorraine Birabil, Rep. Angie Chen Button, Rep. John Frullo, Rep. Donna Howard, Rep. Leo Pacheco, Rep. Matt Schaefer, Rep. John T. Smithee, Rep. Armando Walle, Rep. Terry M. Wilson

RE: Texas House Higher Education Committee [Interim Charge #3](#) (Questions 1-3)

Dear Chair Turner and House Higher Education Committee Members,

Because teachers influence student learning more than any other in-school factor, especially for students who are behind, Texas cannot meet the goals of 60X30TX without a strong and diverse teacher workforce. We are heartened and supportive of the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative's charge to increase the supply of highly-qualified, racially diverse, and well-trained individuals entering the teaching profession - a task that will be even more critical and challenging given the impact of the pandemic.

The teaching profession in Texas is at a pivotal moment. Prior to the pandemic, participation in educator preparation programs (EPPs) has not recovered to pre-recession levels, dropping to a 20-year low in 2018.¹ This shortage of qualified and effective teachers in key subject areas and regions of our state has disproportionately impacted those who most need access to them: low-income students, students of color, English Learners and students with special needs. Despite the increasing diversity of the state's workforce and research demonstrating the positive benefits of a teacher workforce that reflects the student body, the certification of new Black and Latino educators has not substantially increased.

The pandemic will only exacerbate these challenges as the teacher pipeline gets further squeezed at both ends. Rising retirements, health concerns and financial insecurity are likely to fuel ongoing turnover among current educators and inequitable access to high-quality pathways for aspiring educators. At a time when Texas students will require even more support to make up for unfinished learning resulting from the pandemic, collective, bold, and creative action is needed to ensure every child in Texas has access to great teachers now and in the future.

We encourage the House Higher Education Committee to further explore the following two opportunities:

1. Expand the capacity of the current workforce with aspiring teachers

There are nearly 85,000 individuals enrolled in teacher-preparation programs across our state who can help provide critical defense against traditional 'summer melt' and the anticipated 'COVID-Slide,' while gaining experience to help prepare them to lead classrooms and create the workforce Texas needs.

¹ See <https://uh.edu/education/research/institutes-centers/erc/reports-publications/deans-report-epp-july-2020.pdf>

Aspiring teachers can provide tutoring and small group instruction to families that may not otherwise have access to this resource. These future teachers can potentially augment virtual and hybrid learning by providing essential academic support to students who are not physically in school. These aspiring teachers will not supplant existing full-time teachers, but will provide critical support to students and schools while gaining valuable, practice-based experience. By partnering with community-based organizations (CBOs), aspiring teachers can potentially provide socially distanced in-person instruction, which will have the additional benefit of providing parents with more hours of childcare. This targeted support can help stem the inequities that the pandemic is exacerbating. Without intervention, many resources and solutions, like creating learning pods and hiring private tutors and teachers, will be out of reach for low-income families.

Aspiring teachers nearing the completion of their pre-service development can partner with experienced, certified teachers to team teach, allowing vulnerable teachers to provide critical support, instruction and mentorship from home. These future teachers can provide additional capacity needed to maintain social distancing by providing instruction to small groups, or floating between classrooms.

2. Expand the pipeline of future Texas teachers

Just as every child deserves great teachers, so, too, do aspiring educators deserve preparation that is rigorous, coherent, aligned and evidence-based. For too long, institutional barriers have limited participation in these high-quality preparation experiences, especially for future teachers of color and individuals from low-income communities. The state should set clear and numeric goals at state, regional and district levels to increase access to strong and diverse teachers and then publicly report, monitor and track progress towards these goals.

To advance these goals and meet teacher workforce demand, the state should consider the establishment of regional consortiums to facilitate partnership between school districts, postsecondary institutions, high-quality EPPs and other community-based resources to design, implement and sustain impactful Grow Your Own strategies.² Public-private partnerships could help add the regional “backbone” capacity needed to strengthen recruiting, data sharing and evaluation, dual credit pathways, clinical experiences and mentoring to meet local teacher workforce needs.

Targeted financial aid and loan forgiveness for aspiring teachers is especially necessary during this challenging economic period. The state should be expanding, not limiting, funding and access to programs like the Teach for Texas Loan Repayment Assistance Program (TFTLRAP)³ designed to recruit and retain teachers in fields and communities that have a shortage of teachers. The state should also consider targeted investment in minority serving institutions that prepare a disproportionate number of aspiring teachers of color, along with those preparing teachers in rural areas and content shortage areas. In particular, the state should increase funding to public HBCUs to match or exceed its investment in public flagships,

² See <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED582731.pdf>

³ See <http://www.hhloans.com/index.cfm?objectid=A85B6795-9731-B000-C93CA1848B604DB8>

a gap of nearly \$2,500 per student,⁴ and explore funding opportunities to support the state's highest-producing Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

This moment also allows us to consider how to expand opportunities to existing pipelines of future educators like our paraprofessionals and teacher assistants. These individuals are often forced to forgo certification because of the financial strain and time constraints placed on traditionally prepared candidates in fulfilling their clinical teaching requirements. The state should consider how to create a pathway for this pool of possible teachers to continue serving - and being paid - in the classroom while being enrolled in a high-quality teacher-preparation program, especially in critical geographic and content areas such as Bilingual/Dual Language and Special Education.

By exploring these opportunities, Texas leaders can take the appropriate steps needed to ensure children, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, have access to caring, passionate adults equipped to address their social, emotional and academic needs. Simultaneously, they will be supporting diverse teacher candidates with access to the rich practice-based experiences with students that are needed to complete pre-service training now and for the foreseeable future.

Sincerely,

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⁴ See https://everytexan.org/images/2020_EO_CPPP_HBCU_Underfunding.pdf