



Teacher Certification in Texas

District Strategies to Recruit and Retain a Credentialed Workforce

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Executive Summary

Texas employs the largest teacher workforce of all states in the United States, and the state consistently posts teacher attrition rates higher than the national average. Texas schools have had to hire more than 40,000 teachers per year to replace those exiting. In the 2022–23 through 2024–25 school years, more than two thirds of these newly hired teachers entered the profession on emergency permits, while completing preparation (i.e., interns), or without any state certification (i.e., uncertified). While teachers entering through such pathways can fill classroom vacancies quickly, Texas-based research has found that they are less likely to stay in the profession and are less effective than other new teachers, on average.

Enacted in 2015, the state’s Districts of Innovation (DOI) policy allows participating districts to bypass certain state requirements, including regulations on curriculum, graduation requirements, and teacher certification. As of the 2025–26 school year, almost all traditional school districts were designated as DOIs and therefore could potentially hire uncertified teachers at the discretion of their school boards. Meanwhile, the number of teaching candidates prepared through university-based preparation programs has substantially declined.

As a result of high attrition, changes in certification policy, and declines in university-prepared teachers, Texas has experienced rapid growth in the number of uncertified teachers. Overall, the share of uncertified teachers in the Texas teacher workforce more than tripled between 2019–20 and 2024–25, increasing from 3.8% to 12%. As of 2024–25, there were 42,103 uncertified teachers across the state, with more than half teaching foundational subjects (English language arts and reading, math, science, and social studies).

As explored in this report, Texas districts varied widely in how much they relied on uncertified teachers to fill open positions. Given the average lower retention and effectiveness of uncertified teachers, this study identified districts with higher certification rates to understand their local context and policies. This study analyzed district-level data from the 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years to examine whether students have equitable access to certified teachers and to identify contextual factors associated with higher certification rates. To illustrate how district policies, practices, and partnerships can support certification, this report then presents findings from interviews with district leaders in six districts with noted success in maintaining high certification rates and/or supporting their uncertified teachers to become certified.

Texas Teacher Certification and Preparation Policies

Over the past 2 decades, there have been significant shifts in Texas state policy that have allowed more teachers to enter the profession with little to no training. These changes, including the DOI policy and regulatory changes related to educator preparation programs, enabled the rapid increase in the number of uncertified teachers as well as the increasing share of new teachers trained through for-profit preparation providers that primarily rely on asynchronous, online instruction with little clinical practice or support. To counter these trends, the state has made recent investments in the teacher pipeline to incentivize high-quality preparation and increase the pool of fully prepared and certified new teachers.

House Bill 2, landmark legislation passed in 2025, included over \$400 million annually for statewide investments in recruitment, preparation, certification, and mentoring, and an estimated \$4 billion for teacher and staff pay raises aimed at retaining teachers in the classroom. The legislation established

the Preparing and Retaining Educators through Partnership (PREP) Program Allotment, which will provide ongoing funding to support teacher preparation and mentoring programs for new teachers. House Bill 2 also revised some of the certification flexibilities enabled by the DOI policy. By 2027–28, all teachers in all foundational subjects must be certified unless their districts have applied for and been granted an extension. As of March 2026, just over half of traditional school districts have been granted an extension, postponing meaningful implementation of these new certification requirements.

Teacher Certification Rates Across Texas

While 12% of all Texas teachers were uncertified in the 2024–25 school year, teacher certification rates (i.e., the percentage of teachers in a district with any state certification) varied tremendously across the state’s nearly 1,200 districts. Charter schools are often exempt from state certification policies, and only teachers teaching in bilingual, English as a Second Language (ESL), and special education programs are required to be certified. In 2024–25, the average certification rate in charter school districts was 52%, much lower than the 87% average certification rate in traditional public school districts. Despite the large statewide increase in the number of uncertified teachers, a subset of districts has maintained very high teacher certification rates. Overall, just over 250 Texas districts, including 243 traditional school districts and 9 charter school districts, had teacher certification rates over 95% in 2024–25.

Certification rates were typically higher in larger, more urban districts compared to smaller, more rural districts. Geographically, school districts in North and Central Texas had higher certification rates, on average, while districts in West Texas tended to have the lowest certification rates. Districts serving more Black students, more Hispanic/Latino students, and more economically disadvantaged students also tended to have lower certification rates. These differences reflect underlying inequities in district resources and local access to certified teachers, as well as differences in district approaches to recruitment and hiring.

How District Policies Prioritize Certification

Despite the challenges in the supply of new teachers statewide, interviewed Texas district leaders identified different approaches to support certification in their recruitment, hiring, and support structures for new teachers. The six districts participating in this study were identified for having relatively higher certification rates and/or effective district strategies to prioritize certification and to support their uncertified teachers through the certification process.

Increasing the Pipeline of Certified Teachers. All six participating districts have partnerships with at least one teacher residency program and at least one Grow Your Own program targeting high school students and/or paraprofessionals. Teacher residency programs, developed in partnership between school districts and teacher preparation programs, typically include a yearlong clinical experience in which a resident works alongside an expert mentor teacher while receiving financial support. Grow Your Own programs create a new pool of teacher candidates who have already been learning, working, and/or training in the district. Interviewed leaders emphasized the value of having multiple partnership programs and preparation options to bring certified teachers into the district and noted the value of varied program models that may appeal to different types of teacher candidates.

Prioritizing Certification Through Recruitment and Hiring. All six districts use candidate screening and/or hiring requirements that prioritize certified teachers. The districts also limit the hiring of uncertified teachers to those with prior experience in schools or who have already begun the certification process (e.g., by being enrolled in preparation or having taken certain certification exams).

Incentivizing and Tracking Certification. All participating districts set time limits that require their uncertified teachers to get certified, and two districts incentivize certification through significant salary differentials for uncertified teachers (with commensurate increases when they become eligible for intern credentials). District leaders emphasized the value of having designated staff to track and support certification, such as certification specialists in the district office or new teacher mentors knowledgeable about certification.

Supporting and Retaining New Teachers. District leaders emphasized the importance of retention, with one leader explaining that “our best recruiting method is going to be retention.” Leaders highlighted how mentoring and induction programs—along with specific supports around certification exams and preparation costs—can improve retention of their districts’ new teachers. The quantitative analysis reinforced this finding, with districts’ teacher turnover in the previous year negatively associated with certification rates. District leaders also identified salaries as an important lever to support retention, and certification rates tend to be higher in districts with higher beginning teacher salaries, once accounting for other district characteristics.

Policy Considerations

The findings from this report offer some key considerations for school districts and preparation programs to address pervasive teacher staffing challenges, especially in light of the certification changes and significant investments in the teacher pipeline and preparation that were enacted in House Bill 2. Districts are facing notable short-term constraints as they work to help uncertified teachers in foundational subjects become certified within the next few years. Given these upcoming deadlines and the day-to-day workload of any new teacher, uncertified teachers may opt for preparation programs that offer the shortest and least onerous route to certification. However, a growing body of Texas-based research suggests that teachers trained through online, for-profit preparation programs—often relying on asynchronous, online instruction with little clinical training or support—are less effective and more likely to leave the profession than those trained in other preparation models.

Districts can try to manage these short-term constraints while working to connect uncertified teachers with preparation experiences most likely to support their success by:

- strengthening certification pathways in collaboration with partners that offer high-quality training and meaningful support;
- building district capacity and allocating district staff to support certification efforts;
- communicating expectations and incentivizing certification through district practices and policies; and
- improving district hiring practices and personnel management.

Education preparation partners can also support certification efforts by:

- providing more targeted supports to help uncertified teachers earn certification; and
- communicating candidate progress with relevant district staff to ensure shared tracking of individual timelines.

In the long term, districts can benefit from building a sustainable pool of well-prepared and certified teachers in partnership with preparation providers. Across Texas, a range of efforts have been underway to build sustainable pathways into the profession. This includes the state's investments in sustainable teacher residencies fueled by strategic staffing models and, more recently, efforts to seed and scale registered teacher apprenticeships. Building on these successes, districts and educator preparation programs can now leverage new state funds available through the PREP Program Allotment introduced in House Bill 2. These new state funds can support districts to build a more sustainable pipeline of well-prepared and fully certified teachers that can help reverse the trends in certification and preparation seen across the state in the past 2 decades.

Importantly, the PREP Program Allotment establishes state funding that is accessible to all interested districts, with funds from some portions of the allotment to be disbursed in the 2026–27 school year and funds from other portions coming in the 2027–28 school year. Early feedback from leaders in the state indicates strong interest from districts in applying for all available portions of the PREP Allotment to build local teacher pipelines. As of March 2026, more than 600 Texas districts had applied for at least one of the three PREP Allotment programs available for the 2026–27 school year. Districts can strengthen their broader preparation and professional learning infrastructure, especially if they leverage multiple allotments. A growing number of tools and technical assistance supports are available to districts for strategic planning. Ultimately, Texas districts can support teacher certification through their policies and practices by balancing high-leverage, short-term strategies to support uncertified teachers with longer-term investments in building their teacher pipeline and improving retention through mentoring and other supports for beginning teachers.

Introduction

If we truly value getting teachers and keeping teachers in our district, and in the profession, then what we say [must be] reflected in policies that value teachers, support teachers, [and] grow teachers. Our money, our resources, and our time [must] really validate the fact that we believe those things. ... District leaders, superintendents, [and] school boards have to stand firm and say this is important, this is a non-negotiable. We are now at a time and a place where we can't afford to lose teachers, because there aren't teacher candidates out there. So, we're going to prioritize these things because we're at a critical place of getting teachers and keeping teachers.

— District leader from Mesquite Independent School District

Texas employs more than 370,000 public school teachers, making its teacher workforce the largest among all states in the nation.¹ Over the past decade, Texas's teacher attrition rates have been consistently higher than the annual national rate of 7%.² More than 10% of teachers have left Texas schools almost every year, with attrition rates above 12% between 2022–23 and 2024–25.³ As a result, Texas schools have had to hire more than 40,000 teachers per year, most of them replacing those who exited the profession the prior year. In recent years, two thirds of newly hired teachers (not including rehires returning to the workforce) entered the profession on emergency permits, while completing preparation, or—in a growing trend—without any state certification (i.e., uncertified).⁴

While teachers entering through such pathways can fill classroom vacancies quickly, prior research has found that they are less likely to stay in the profession and tend to be less effective.⁵ Given the growing rates of uncertified teachers across Texas, this study sought to identify districts with higher rates of certified teachers and understand the local contexts that might encourage certification.

States set certification requirements for their teachers and determine the circumstances under which districts are allowed to hire teachers who are not fully certified. In Texas, there are multiple routes to obtaining standard teacher certification. Preservice routes into the profession require an individual to complete a state-approved educator preparation program and pass the required Texas certification exams in either an undergraduate or postbaccalaureate program. Individuals can also work as a teacher of record under an intern certification while simultaneously completing an alternative certification program. As in many other states, Texas also allows teachers to work on emergency permits—1-year, temporary permits—under certain circumstances.⁶

In addition, the Texas legislature enacted the Districts of Innovation (DOI) policy in 2015, which allows participating districts to bypass certain state requirements, including regulations on curriculum, graduation requirements, and teacher certification.⁷ As of the 2025–26 school year, 95% of all school districts were designated as DOIs and therefore could create their own local certification standards and potentially hire uncertified teachers at the discretion of their school boards.

Meanwhile, the number of teaching candidates prepared through university-based preparation programs declined by 37% between 2012–13 and 2022–23.⁸ District leaders in Texas, interviewed as part of this study, described a steep decline in enrollment across their preservice preparation partners, even among institutions that had historically supplied large numbers of certified new teachers. As one leader explained, their district has seen a rapidly declining pool of teacher candidates:

The universities that we have partnered with or that we generally get a lot of [teaching] candidates from ... their enrollment for teacher programs has lowered so drastically. There's just not a lot of education candidates out there. It's not just lack of high-quality candidates, just lack of candidates in general.

The vast majority of preservice, university-based teaching candidates in Texas are enrolled in undergraduate programs. New teachers trained through these programs have higher retention rates and higher performance, as measured by their students' academic growth, than those entering through any other preparation route.⁹

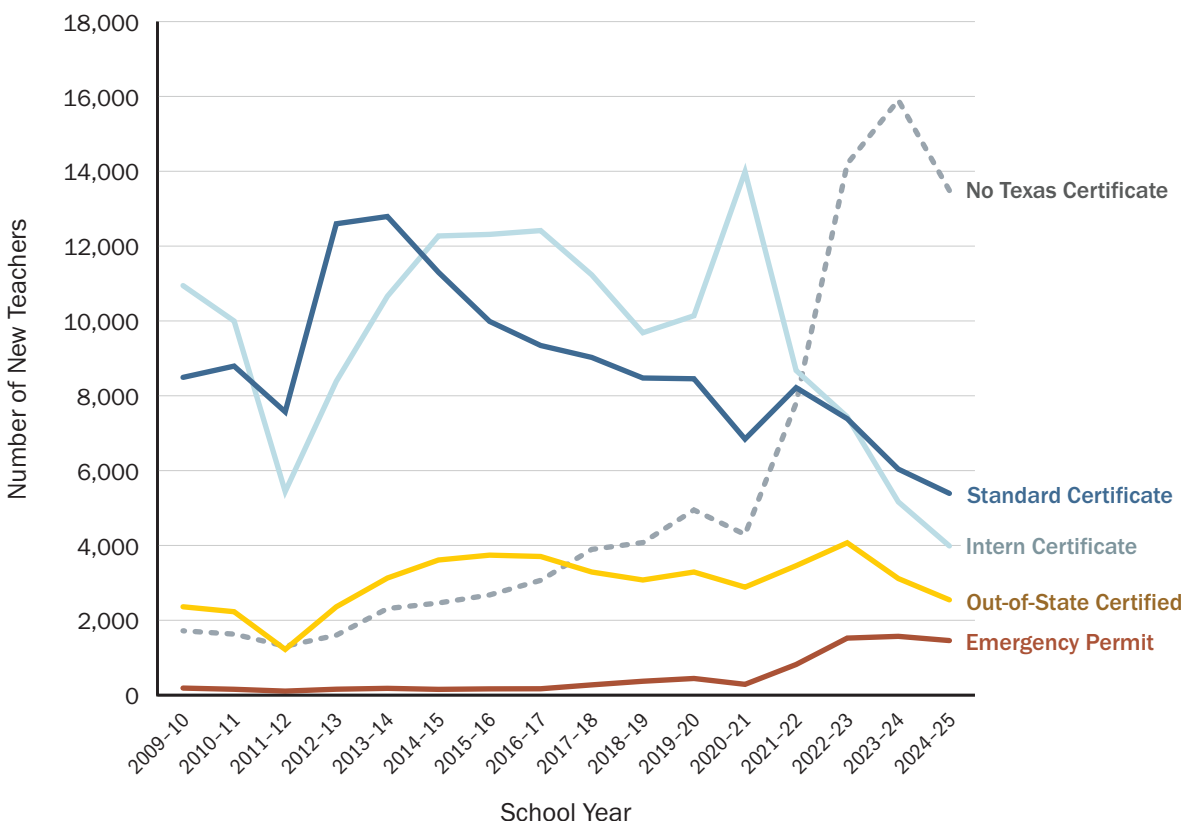
Due to the high demand for teachers, changes in certification policy, and decline in university-prepared teachers, Texas has experienced rapid growth in the number of uncertified teachers. The share of uncertified teachers in the overall Texas teacher workforce more than tripled between 2019–20 and 2024–25, increasing from 3.8% to 12% of all teachers.¹⁰ As of 2024–25, there were more than 42,000 uncertified teachers serving students across grade levels and subject areas statewide.¹¹

Due to the high demand for teachers, changes in certification policy, and decline in university-prepared teachers, Texas has experienced rapid growth in the number of uncertified teachers.

This increase in uncertified teachers coincides with a decline in the share of new teachers entering the workforce with standard certification (i.e., those completing preservice preparation) or an intern certificate. As shown in [Figure 1](#), the number of newly hired teachers holding a standard certificate has dropped by more than half over the past decade, falling from 11,300 in 2014–15 to 5,391 in 2024–25. The number of new hires on intern certificates has fallen even more drastically, from 12,271 in 2014–15 to 3,987 in 2024–25, despite spiking during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, the number of newly hired teachers with no Texas certificate (i.e., uncertified) has increased sharply. Following the 2021–22 school year, uncertified teachers surpassed all other certification categories among newly hired teachers. Since 2022–23, the number of uncertified new hires annually has been more than double the number of new hires with standard certificates.

As explored in this report, while all Texas districts face this challenging hiring environment, they vary widely in the extent to which they rely on uncertified teachers to fill open teaching positions. Given the lower retention and effectiveness of uncertified teachers, this study identified districts or regions with higher certification rates to understand their local policies, priorities, and supports for teacher recruitment and retention.

Figure 1. Newly Hired Texas Teachers by Certification, 2009–10 through 2024–25



Note: Figure includes newly hired teachers who were new to the profession in the respective school year. It excludes newly hired teachers reentering the workforce and those who were previously working part-time.
 Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency newly certified and new teacher hire data. (2026).

This Study

Statewide patterns in teacher certification and preparation have been well documented by other studies of the Texas teacher workforce.¹² This study explored variation in teacher certification rates across Texas districts to better understand the local contextual factors that may increase reliance on certified teachers. This sequential mixed methods study used statewide administrative data and interviews with district leaders to address the following two questions:

1. What local contextual factors are associated with higher rates of teacher certification in Texas?
2. How can district policies, practices, and partnerships support certification?

To answer the first question, the quantitative component of this study used district-level data provided by the Texas Education Agency and the U.S. Department of Education. For all districts in Texas, we connected data on teacher certification with state and federal data, capturing contextual characteristics from prior years. These predictors capture student characteristics to measure equitable access (e.g., percentage

of English learners, percentage of economically disadvantaged students); labor market conditions (e.g., average beginning teacher salary, local unemployment rate); working conditions and resources (e.g., student–teacher ratio, average principal tenure in school); and policy indicators (e.g., participation in the Teacher Incentive Allotment, residency partnership). We examine associations between district-level teacher certification rates and these contextual factors through a series of regression analyses. The initial results from this descriptive analysis informed the sampling for the qualitative component of the study.

To answer the second question, we identified six districts through purposeful sampling to learn more about district policies and practices in districts that have had success in (1) maintaining high certification rates, and/or (2) supporting uncertified teachers to become certified. These districts were identified through quantitative analyses identifying districts with relatively higher certification rates, along with expert recommendations.

We conducted interviews with district leaders in charge of their district's hiring, recruitment, and development efforts. These interviews included questions about each district's approach to teacher hiring, recruitment practices and challenges, district engagement with education preparation programs, regional and state initiatives to support teacher hiring and recruitment, and strategies to support uncertified teachers to become certified. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then coded to better identify and describe district practices and policies and to explore how local context shapes these approaches. Importantly, in selecting our six districts for interviews, we limited our sample to districts with at least 5,000 students and located in suburban or urban areas. Our qualitative findings are therefore not broadly representative of all districts in Texas and likely do not reflect the experiences of district leaders in the state's smaller and more rural districts.

More details on the data and analysis for each part of our study can be found in the [Technical Appendix](#). Before introducing the key findings, the following section places our study within the context of broader policy shifts in Texas.

Texas Teacher Certification and Preparation Policies

Over the past 2 decades, there have been significant shifts in Texas state policy and investments around teacher certification and preparation. To contextualize our findings, we first describe multiple state policies that have enabled deregulation and have allowed more teachers to enter the profession with little to no training. These changes enabled the rapid increase in uncertified teachers as well as the increasing share of new teachers trained through for-profit providers that primarily rely on asynchronous, online instruction. Next, we explore significant state investments in the teacher pipeline that are meant to incentivize high-quality preparation and grow the size of the teaching candidate pool. These more recent investments offer financial supports enabling districts to bring in fully prepared and certified new teachers.

Districts of Innovation Policy

In 2015, the Texas legislature passed the DOI policy, under which eligible districts can submit local plans to become a state-designated DOI. Designated districts can adopt policies to hire teachers without state certification upon approval of their local school board and can be exempted from parental notification requirements, in which parents must be informed if their child is taught by an uncertified teacher. The number of districts designated as DOIs rapidly increased after the policy was implemented, from 178 in

the 2016–17 school year to 864 by the end of the 2019–20 school year.¹³ As of the 2025–26 school year, 990 districts across the state—over 95% of all traditional school districts (i.e., non-charter districts)—were designated as DOIs.¹⁴ One analysis of district DOI plans found that 87% of the plans included exemptions for teacher certification, allowing the district to hire uncertified teachers.¹⁵

Under the DOI policy, local school boards—rather than state agencies—determine the circumstances under which uncertified teachers may be hired.¹⁶ As a result, school boards and designated district leaders can determine whether and under what circumstances schools can hire uncertified teachers, often referred to as “DOI teachers.” As described later in this report, districts also determine whether uncertified teachers can work indefinitely without certification or if uncertified teachers must become certified within a given time frame. In contrast, state-level certification policies, in Texas and other states, typically include specific time frames by which teaching candidates or teachers must fulfill certain certification requirements.

Educator Preparation Providers

As in other states, Texas sets the standards for education preparation programs (EPPs) and determines the process by which programs are approved. More than 2 decades ago, the Texas legislature created the State Board for Educator Certification and gave this new agency the authority to set teacher certification standards and approve EPPs.¹⁷ This legislation also allowed for-profit entities to offer EPPs.¹⁸ In 2001, regulatory changes eliminated many of the clinical experience requirements for teacher training (i.e., opportunities for teaching candidates to observe classrooms, practice teaching, and otherwise work with students as part of their training). These regulatory changes allowed many for-profit providers, especially those providing training online with minimal field-based experiences, to become approved EPPs in Texas, providing alternative certification programs.¹⁹

Compared to other states, Texas has, by far, the largest share of EPPs that are not run by universities and the highest number of for-profit providers.²⁰ Enrollment in these programs has rapidly grown across time, while enrollment in preservice, university-based programs has declined.²¹ Since 2019–20, 70% of all teaching candidates in Texas have been enrolled in for-profit alternative certification pathways.²² Texas Teachers of Tomorrow, now called A+ Texas Teachers, is the state’s largest for-profit provider and enrolls more than twice the number of teaching candidates enrolled across all Texas universities.²³ Recent research has found that Texas teachers trained through online programs with minimal clinical experiences or for-profit programs tend to have lower retention and are less effective than those trained in university-based preservice preparation.²⁴

Taken together, these changes in certification policy and preparation program standards enabled the sharp rise in the number of new Texas teachers entering the classroom with little to no training. In contrast, the more recent state investments described below are meant to financially support pathways with more intensive preservice training and certification.

Teacher Residency Funding and Certificate

Leveraging federal relief funds during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Texas Education Agency launched a set of statewide supports and financial investments in the teacher pipeline in 2020. As part of the \$1.4 billion Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports (TCLAS) initiative, there were two streams of funding to strengthen the teacher pipeline.²⁵ The first focused on funding for Grow Your Own programs that

support paraprofessionals to become certified teachers or high school students interested in the teaching profession.²⁶ The second focused on funding for teacher residency programs, intensive clinical training programs created in partnership between state-approved EPPs and local education agencies.

Between 2021 and 2024, TCLAS funded more than 2,000 paid teacher residents training across 85 residency programs. As federal relief funding wound down, the Texas Education Agency implemented multiple rounds of competitive grant funding to fund the creation and sustainability of teacher residency programs and technical assistance meant to support these programs.²⁷

To officially recognize teacher residencies in the state's teacher certification framework, the Texas State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) adopted changes to the Texas Administrative Code in April 2024. These changes created a formally recognized teacher residency preparation pathway leading to a new state teaching certificate, the Enhanced Standard Certificate. Similar to the approval process for teacher residency programs under TCLAS, SBEC adopted a set of program standards for EPPs to be approved as residency programs.²⁸

Landmark Legislation in House Bill 2

Passed in 2025, House Bill 2 (HB 2) is a comprehensive school funding package providing \$8.5 billion in new funding. HB 2 allocated more than \$400 million annually for statewide investments in educator recruitment, preparation, certification, and mentoring, and an estimated \$3.7 to \$4.2 billion for teacher and staff pay raises aimed at retaining teachers in the classroom.²⁹ The legislation established the new Preparing and Retaining Educators through Partnership (PREP) Program Allotment, which will provide ongoing funding for districts across multiple different allotments and altogether could support up to 200 candidates annually per district with paid clinical training and early-career mentoring.

Under the PREP Program Allotment, for example, yearlong teacher residency partnerships can receive up to \$39,500 per candidate serving in high-need schools and high-need subject areas.³⁰ This includes dedicated funding for candidates and cooperating teacher stipends. The funding aimed at supporting clinical placements for residents under the legislation will flow initially to districts but eventually also to educator preparation programs—up to \$10,000 per teacher—based on resident employment in Texas schools. HB 2 also expands early-career mentoring and includes funding for Grow Your Own pathways, allocating up to \$12,000 for a paraprofessional or other district employee to complete their college coursework while receiving on-the-job training.³¹

The legislation also adds new limitations to a district's ability to waive certification requirements. Districts are no longer given exemptions from the parental notification requirements and are no longer able to assign uncertified teachers for foundational curriculum courses under DOI plans. Starting in the 2026–27 school year, school districts can no longer hire uncertified K–5 reading and math teachers under the DOI exemption.³² By 2027–28, all teachers in all foundational subjects (i.e., English language arts and reading, math, science, social studies, and self-contained) must be certified, with an option for districts to apply for an extension until the 2029–30 school year.

As of March 2026, 553 districts have been approved by the Texas Education Agency to delay implementation of the teacher certification requirements until 2029–30.³³ This widespread uptake of extensions—covering just over half of all traditional school districts in Texas—may reflect district leaders’ concerns about their capacity to support their current uncertified teachers in becoming certified or about whether the supply of certified teachers is sufficient to cover open positions in foundational subjects.

For uncertified teachers already working in Texas schools, HB 2 offers a \$1,000 one-time incentive paid to the district for each uncertified teacher hired in 2022–23 or 2023–24 who earns a standard teaching certificate by the end of the 2026–27 school year.³⁴ In addition, the legislation includes provisions that require districts to differentiate salary schedules based on certification pathway, necessitating lower pay for uncertified staff.³⁵ As explored in the following sections, districts vary considerably in the extent to which they are currently relying on uncertified teachers. Certain types of districts may find it much more difficult to comply with the new certification requirements in HB 2, but all districts can benefit from the broad investments in the teacher pipeline now available through the various components of the PREP Allotment.

Teacher Certification Rates Across Texas

Not all Texas students have equal access to certified teachers. As described earlier, 12% of all Texas teachers were uncertified in the 2024–25 school year.³⁶ However, teacher certification rates (i.e., the percentage of teachers in a district who have any state certification) varied tremendously across the state’s nearly 1,200 districts.³⁷

In this study, we examined differences in district-level teacher certification rates for the 2024–25 school year. We were interested in understanding whether any contextual factors were associated with higher certification rates. In the following sections, we describe key findings from this analysis and highlight which students and districts were most likely to be served by certified or uncertified teachers.

In Texas, there are traditional public school districts ($N = 1,019$) and charter school districts ($N = 176$). Charter schools are often exempt from state certification policies, and only teachers teaching in special education and bilingual programs are required to be certified.³⁸ In 2024–25, the average certification rate in charter school districts was 52%, much lower than the 87% average certification rate in traditional public school districts. About 400,000 students, roughly 7% of all public school students, attended charter schools in that year, and charters served a higher share of historically disadvantaged groups, including Black students, Hispanic/Latino students, English learners, and economically disadvantaged students (see [Technical Appendix](#) for more details on the difference between traditional public and charter school districts). Because of these differences, some analyses included all districts while others focused specifically on traditional public school districts.

Overall, just over 250 Texas districts, including 243 traditional school districts and 9 charter school districts, had teacher certification rates over 95% in 2024–25. In contrast, 260 districts had certification rates below 75%, and these districts were almost evenly split between traditional school districts (125) and charter school districts (135). In the following sections, we examine what characterizes districts with relatively higher or lower certification rates.

Regional and Geographic Variation

Across the state, certification rates were typically higher in larger, more urban districts compared to smaller, more rural districts. The Texas Education Agency categorizes traditional school districts by the population of the county where the district is located, as well as the relative and absolute enrollment size of the district.³⁹ As shown in [Table 1](#), average teacher certification rates were typically higher in urban and suburban districts and lower, on average, in rural and non-metropolitan areas. In analyses controlling for many district characteristics, such as student demographics, per-pupil expenditures, and local labor market conditions, urban and suburban districts still had significantly higher certification rates than rural districts (see [Table A3](#) in [Technical Appendix](#)).

Average teacher certification rates were typically higher in urban and suburban districts and lower, on average, in rural and non-metropolitan areas.

Table 1. Average Teacher Certification Rates in 2024–25 by District Geographic Type

Geographic type	Avg. certification rate
Major urban (N = 11)	94.4%
Major suburban (N = 75)	92.5%
Other central city (N = 35)	90.0%
Other central city suburban (N = 164)	90.8%
Independent town (N = 51)	82.4%
Non-metropolitan, fast-growing (N = 27)	87.8%
Non-metropolitan, stable (N = 164)	85.1%
Rural (N = 471)	85.3%

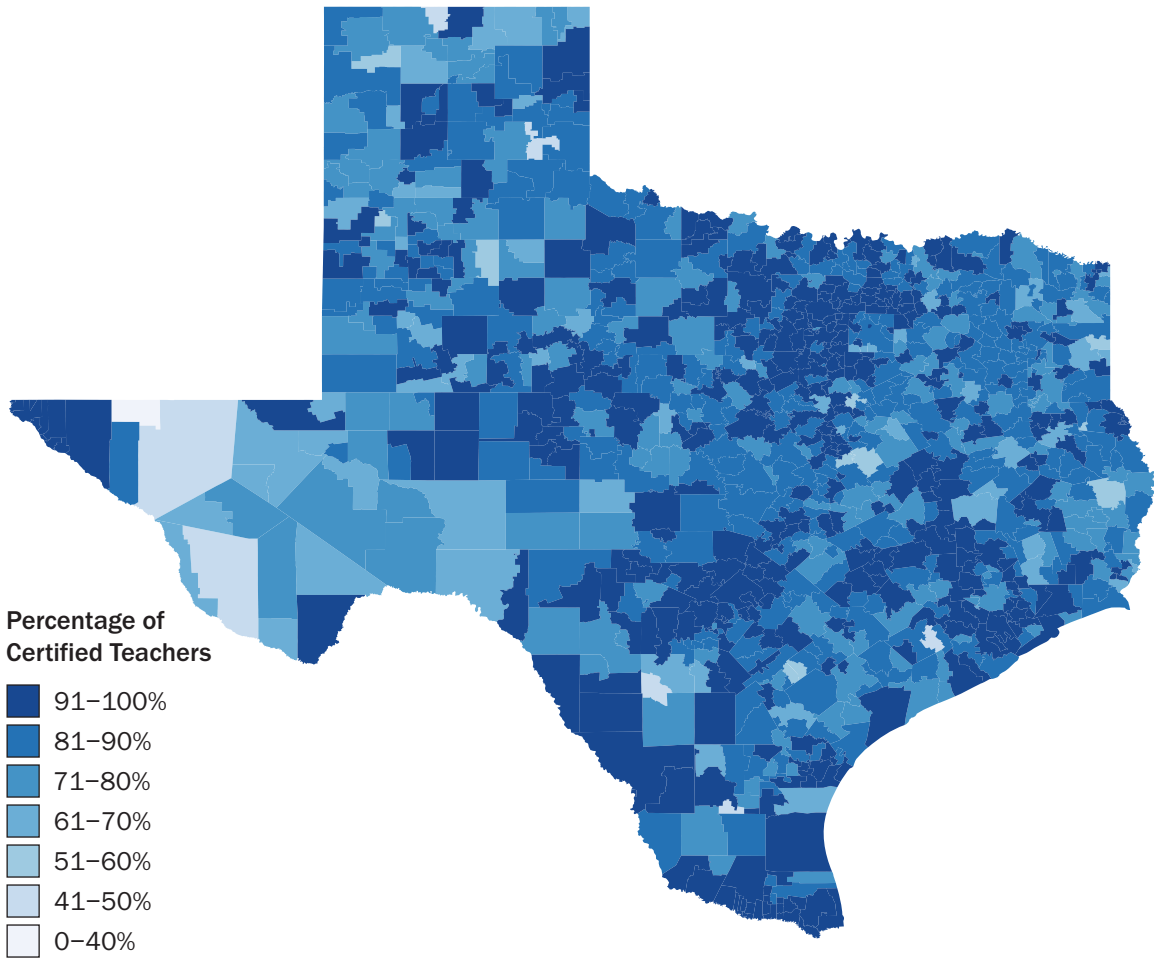
Note: These geographic types are developed by the Texas Education Agency based on the population of the county in which a district is located, along with the absolute and relative enrollment of the district. This analysis excluded charter school districts.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency uncertified teacher data. (2026).

Certification rates also varied across and within geographic regions in Texas. [Figure 2](#) illustrates the certification rate for each traditional school district. As indicated by darker shading, there were higher teacher certification rates in major metropolitan areas, especially those located in North and Central Texas. Lower certification rates, as indicated by lighter shading, were more common in the state’s rural areas, most notably in West Texas. Even within geographic regions, there was substantial variation in certification rates across districts.

Average district certification rates also differed across Education Service Center (ESC) regions. In Texas, ESCs serve as regional intermediary organizations that provide shared support and technical assistance to districts in their region. As shown in [Table 2](#), average teacher certification rates for all districts (Panel A) in the ESC regions ranged from 67% in Houston to 90% in Wichita Falls. As already noted, charter school districts had much lower teacher certification rates, on average, than traditional public school districts. Panel B in [Table 2](#) shows the average certification rates for traditional public school districts within each ESC region, while Panel C shows the average certification rates for charter school districts. In all but two regions with charter school districts, the average certification rate in traditional public schools far exceeded the average rate among charter school districts. When including all school districts (Panel A), Wichita Falls (90% average certification rate), Fort Worth (89%), Edinburg (87%), and Kilgore (87%) had the highest average certification rates.

Figure 2. Teacher Certification Rates Across Texas Districts in 2024–25



Note: The map includes 1,017 traditional public school districts and excludes charters that do not have geographic boundaries.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency uncertified teacher data. (2026).

Table 2. Average District Teacher Certification Rates in 2024–25 by Texas Education Service Center Regions

Texas Education Service Center (ESC) regions	Panel A: All public school districts		Panel B: Traditional public school districts		Panel C: Charter school districts	
	Total teachers	Avg. certification rate	Total teachers	Avg. certification rate	Total teachers	Avg. certification rate
01-Edinburg	27,925	87%	22,934	93%	4,991	51%
02-Corpus Christi	6,007	85%	5,941	88%	66	58%
03-Victoria	3,428	83%	3,428	83%	N/A	N/A
04-Houston	76,292	67%	70,844	90%	5,448	41%
05-Beaumont	5,581	77%	5,375	81%	206	31%
06-Huntsville	13,992	85%	13,898	87%	94	64%
07-Kilgore	12,682	87%	12,329	87%	353	86%
08-Mount Pleasant	4,555	85%	4,555	85%	N/A	N/A
09-Wichita Falls	8,574	90%	8,574	90%	N/A	N/A
10-Richardson	56,582	79%	51,070	89%	5,512	54%
11-Fort Worth	38,684	89%	37,739	93%	945	68%
12-Waco	12,181	85%	11,291	86%	890	61%
13-Austin	25,822	80%	24,418	90%	1,404	54%
14-Abilene	4,344	85%	3,335	86%	1,009	43%
15-San Angelo	3,534	84%	3,268	85%	266	36%
16-Amarillo	6,329	81%	6,329	81%	N/A	N/A
17-Lubbock	6,153	82%	6,114	84%	39	33%
18-Midland	5,465	77%	5,347	76%	118	86%
19-El Paso	9,996	73%	9,450	90%	546	43%
20-San Antonio	24,144	77%	21,211	90%	2,933	50%
All regions	352,270	82%	327,450	87%	24,820	52%

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency uncertified teacher data. (2026).

Equitable Access by Student Characteristics

District certification rates also varied by the student composition of the district, with higher average certification rates in districts serving more historically advantaged student populations. As shown in Panel A of [Figure 3](#), traditional districts with the lowest certification rates served higher average shares of Black and Hispanic/Latino students and had higher average shares of economically disadvantaged students compared to districts with the highest certification rates.

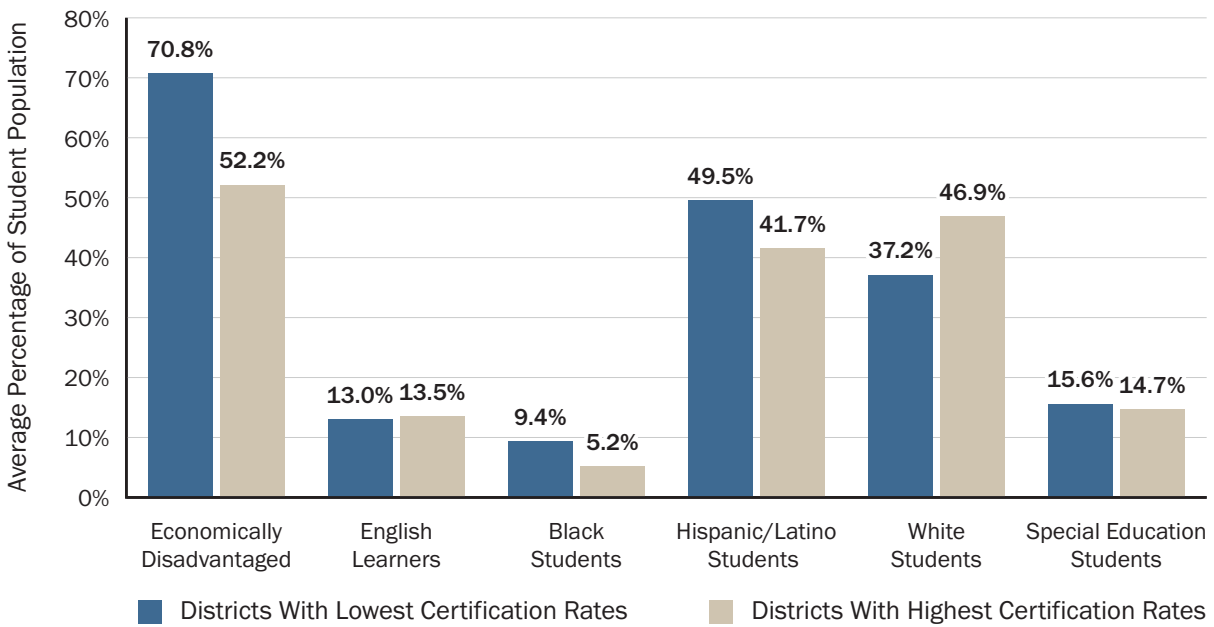
As shown in Panel B of [Figure 3](#), charter school districts with the lowest certification rates had much higher average shares of Black students and higher average shares of economically disadvantaged students. The differences for charter school districts are especially stark when it comes to Black and White student enrollment. As shown in Panel B of [Figure 3](#), there were more than 3 times the share of Black students in charter school districts with the lowest certification rates (40% Black student population) compared to charter school districts with the highest certification rates (13% Black student population), and, conversely, the share of White students in the charter school with the highest certification rates is more than 3 times higher than the share in districts with the lowest certification rates (32% versus 9%).

As previously shown in [Table 1](#), teacher certification rates varied substantially by district geographic type. It is also the case that student demographic composition varied across geographic types (see [Table A2](#) in Technical Appendix). These differences raise important equity questions regarding whether particular student groups are more or less likely to be taught by certified teachers because of the schools they attend. Given the growing research base that students of uncertified teachers exhibit lower achievement growth, on average, than students of teachers with higher levels of preparation, disproportionate exposure to uncertified teachers may contribute to achievement gaps among student groups.

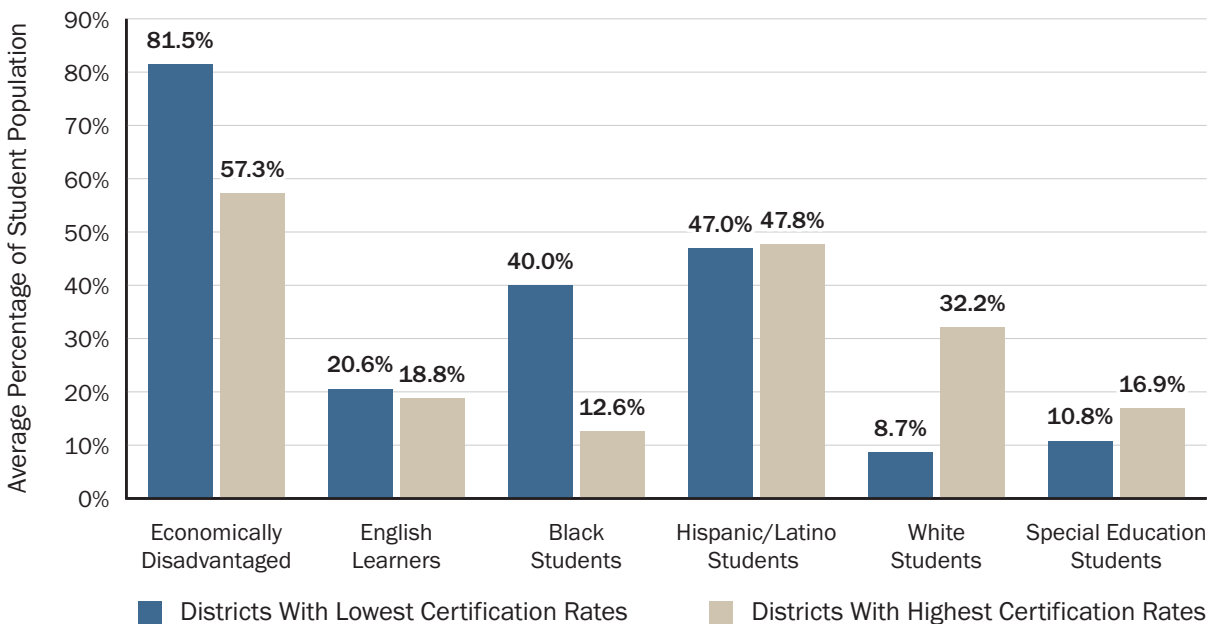
Charter school districts stand out for their low teacher certification rates alongside high concentrations of Hispanic/Latino students (on average, 53% of their students are Hispanic/Latino), Black students (22%), English learners (24%), and economically disadvantaged students (69%). In particular, these historically marginalized groups are overrepresented in charter school districts, which have dramatically lower certification rates. Even among traditional public schools, there are notable differences in average teacher certification rates based on the student composition. In regression analyses controlling for district enrollment, student demographic composition, educator labor market characteristics, and district policy context, districts serving higher shares of Black, Hispanic/Latino, and economically disadvantaged students had significantly lower teacher certification rates, and these relationships hold for all districts and only among traditional public school districts (see [Table A3](#) in Technical Appendix).

Figure 3. Student Demographic Composition by District Teacher Certification Rates

Panel A: Traditional School Districts



Panel B: Charter School Districts



Note: For Panel A, traditional districts were grouped into quartiles based on their 2024–25 teacher certification rate. The average student composition is shown for the lowest quartile (i.e., districts with the lowest certification rates, $N = 255$ districts) and highest quartile (i.e., districts with the highest certification rates, $N = 249$ districts) in Panel A. For Panel B, charter school districts were grouped into quartiles based on their 2024–25 teacher certification rate. The average student composition is shown for the lowest quartile (i.e., districts with the lowest certification rates, $N = 44$ districts) and highest quartile (i.e., districts with the highest certification rates, $N = 44$ districts) in Panel B. Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency uncertified teacher and district data. (2026).

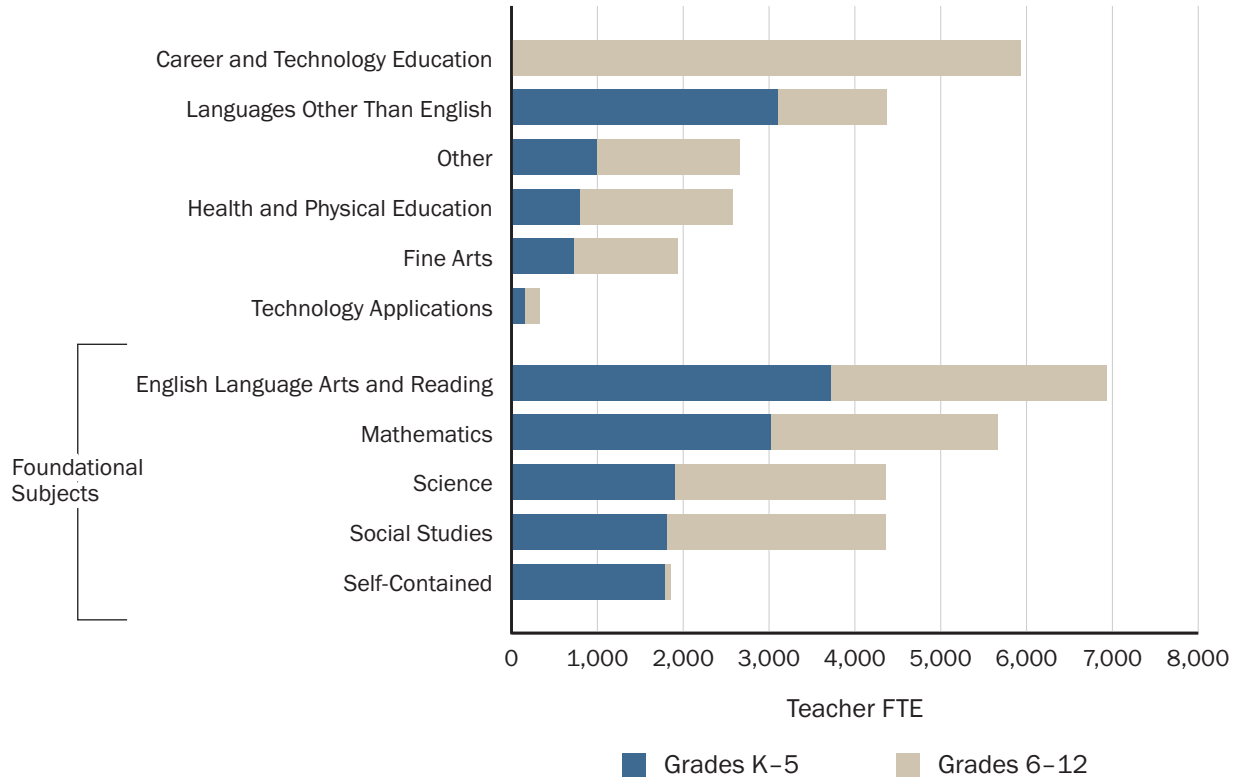
Differences Across Subject Areas

Districts may be more likely to rely on uncertified teachers in certain high-need fields because there are fewer certified candidates available or greater demand. Among the six districts participating in interviews for this study, district leaders unanimously identified special education and bilingual education as the two most challenging categories of teaching positions to fill. For example, a district leader in Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District (ISD) specified, “Special education is our biggest challenge by far. ... Forty-two percent of our teacher vacancies are in special education.” Similarly, a district leader in Denton ISD explained that bilingual education candidates are “hard to come by” and that their bilingual campuses have the hardest time finding certified teachers. While the Texas Education Agency does not publicly report the number of uncertified teachers assigned to special education and bilingual education positions, prior statewide analysis reported that approximately 8% of new uncertified teachers in the 2022–23 school year were teaching special education.

As shown in [Figure 4](#), the Texas Education Agency does report on the number of uncertified full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers by subject area and grade level. Thousands of uncertified teachers are currently teaching in foundational subjects (i.e., English language arts and reading, math, science, and social studies). At the K–5 level, certification rates by subject area ranged from 88% to 90% for the foundational subjects. At the secondary level (grades 6–12), certification rates were lowest for career and technical education teachers and ranged from 88% to 90% for foundational subjects.

As the certification requirements of House Bill 2 (HB 2) begin to phase in, districts that have filled these foundational subject positions with uncertified teachers will face increased staffing pressures. By the 2026–27 school year, districts are no longer permitted to staff K–5 English language arts and math positions with uncertified teachers unless they receive a waiver from the Texas Education Agency. As shown in [Figure 4](#), there were more than 8,500 uncertified FTE teachers in K–5 positions teaching English language arts and math, including self-contained teachers, as of 2024–25. HB 2 further requires that, by the 2027–28 school year, all foundational subjects in any grade level must be taught by certified teachers (approximately 23,000 uncertified FTE teachers were in these positions as of 2024–25). Uncertified teachers who are currently in these positions must either become certified or be replaced by certified teachers. Districts were given the option to apply for a waiver from the Texas Education Agency to delay these certification requirements until the 2029–30 school year, and 553 districts (54% of all traditional school districts in the state) had been approved for these extensions as of March 2026.

Figure 4. Uncertified Teacher Full-Time Equivalent in 2024–25 by Subject Area and Grade Level



Notes: Career and Technology Education is not offered to students in grades K–5. Self-contained is defined as a class in which one teacher teaches all or most subjects to one class of students in grades K–8 but excludes those teaching special education for all grade levels.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency uncertified teacher data. (2026).

How District Policies Prioritize Certification

Despite the challenges in the supply of new teachers statewide, Texas district leaders identified different approaches prioritizing certification in their recruitment, hiring, and support structures for new teachers. In this section, we describe how districts invested in partnerships to increase the pipeline of certified new teachers, incentivized certification through their policies and structures, and began planning for the implementation of the preparation and certification policies in House Bill 2 (HB 2). Six districts participated in this study: Channelview Independent School District (ISD), Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Dallas ISD, Denton ISD, Hutto ISD, and Mesquite ISD. These districts were identified because they had higher certification rates relative to other similar districts and/or were nominated for having maintained high certification rates or created effective strategies to get their uncertified teachers through the certification process.

Increasing the Pipeline of Certified Teachers

District partnerships with different types of teacher preparation programs increase the pipeline of certified teachers. Interviewed district leaders cited multiple preparation partnerships as important sources of certified teachers. All six participating districts have a partnership with at least one teacher residency program, and all have at least one Grow Your Own program targeting high school students and/or paraprofessionals. Multiple districts had registered teacher apprenticeship programs, and others leveraged visa programs to bring in certified international teachers. This section briefly describes the features of these programs and how they support a pipeline of certified teachers.

Residency Partnerships

Teacher residency programs, developed in partnership between school districts and teacher preparation programs, typically include a yearlong clinical experience in which a resident works alongside an expert mentor teacher while receiving financial support through a stipend.⁴⁰ As of 2023–24, the Texas Education Agency reported that there were 146 local education agencies that had at least one residency partnership with a state-approved teacher residency preparation program.⁴¹ Our analysis found that districts with residency partnerships had higher average certification rates in 2024–25 (84.9%) compared to districts without residencies (81.3%). Residency districts were more likely to be in urban or suburban areas, had higher average student enrollment, and were more likely to serve Hispanic/Latino students.⁴²

For example, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD has invested district funds in its teacher residency initiative since 2023, in partnership with four teacher preparation partners and the Region 4 Education Service Center. This residency partnership offered a \$25,000 stipend and, as of 2024–25, enrolled about 75 residents per year.⁴³ As described by one district leader, the district’s residency partnerships have allowed it to better compete for university-trained teacher candidates and have created an important pipeline of new teachers:

We have been proactive and investing a significant amount of money, not just on the resident, but also the teacher who’s supporting that resident, and a coordinator to manage all of this. That [investment]’s intentional. When a teacher retires, we have somebody who can go in, and we have a pipeline.

The district received a Strategic Staffing Grant from the Texas Education Agency to initially fund the residency coordinator position and mentor stipends,⁴⁴ and district leadership has been deliberate about primarily funding the program through district funds to support sustainability.

Denton ISD similarly invested in teacher residency partnerships after an initial grant investment from the University of North Texas funded a pilot program in fall 2023. The district hosted about 20 residents per year for the 2024–25 and 2025–26 school years through partnerships with the University of North Texas and Texas Woman’s University. Multiple residents were Denton ISD alumni who participated in Teach Denton, the district’s Grow Your Own program for high school students (see [From High School Student to Certified Teacher](#) for more details).

Grow Your Own Programs

Grow Your Own programs create a new pool of teacher candidates who have already been learning, working, and/or training in the district. As a district leader from Mesquite ISD explained, these programs can tap into talent already in the community and build on candidates’ existing knowledge of district practices:

The beauty of our Grow Your Own program is that the majority of those candidates, they were paraprofessionals here, and they live in this community. Their children go to this school district. ... They already were learning the Mesquite Way before, and then continue learning that in our program because of the way that it’s designed.

To support its teacher pipeline, Mesquite ISD developed the Pathway to Certification (PACE) program for paraprofessionals to earn their bachelor’s degree and teacher certification while filling important instructional roles in the district. PACE candidates work under the supervision of a mentor teacher for the first 2 years of the program and then become teachers of record once they are eligible for their intern credential. The district had about 85 candidates in the program in 2025–26. The district directly pays for preparation and certification for its PACE candidates, who make a lower salary than other teachers while enrolled in the program. PACE candidates receive additional guidance and training from their mentors, who are strategically chosen based on their teaching assignment and instructional effectiveness and are compensated for their mentorship role.

Hutto ISD has developed a registered teaching apprenticeship program.⁴⁵ Apprentices work as paraprofessionals while earning their bachelor’s degree and a teacher credential. Hutto had about 60 apprentices in 2025–26, evenly spaced at different points in the program, ensuring the district will have a steady stream of apprentices completing their degree and ready to start as teachers. The apprenticeship program is funded primarily through Hutto’s local workforce board, and the program requires apprentices to commit to staying in the district as teachers of record for at least 3 years after becoming fully certified. Hutto has also begun recruiting apprentices from among the graduating seniors who were enrolled in the district’s Career and Technical Education pathway for human development.

Importantly, interviewed leaders emphasized the value of having multiple partnership programs and preparation options to bring certified teachers into the district and noted the value of different program models that may appeal to different types of teacher candidates. Multiple districts also intentionally use their Grow Your Own programs targeting high school students to create a pipeline into their residency or apprenticeship programs.

Leaders emphasized the value of having multiple partnership programs and preparation options to bring certified teachers into the district.

From High School Student to Certified Teacher

All six participating districts have developed teacher pipeline programs targeting high school students. Dallas Independent School District (ISD) offers a [teacher education pathway](#) through its Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) program. High school students take courses, earning them up to 60 hours of college credit through one of the district's P-TECH campuses, and receive a letter of intent that guarantees them a teaching job in Dallas ISD once they complete their postsecondary education. As one [participating sophomore](#) explained, “This is a big chance for my life to be able to work as a teacher and make a difference. ... I had never seen myself before as someone who can inspire students and change lives. Now I know I can.”

Graduating students are eligible for tuition-free college education and teacher certification through the [Dallas County Promise](#) at Dallas College, Texas Tech, and the University of North Texas at Dallas. These preparation programs offer residency or apprenticeship options in Dallas ISD so students can return to the district for their clinical training.

[Teach Denton](#) in Denton ISD enrolls students of all ages who express interest in becoming teachers. The program offers mentorship, opportunities for internships and experience working in classrooms, and specific support for high school students as they consider postsecondary options. The district has hired [91 former Denton ISD students as teachers](#) in the district. Five of those recent hires came through the residency programs with Texas Woman's University and the University of North Texas. As one of those teacher candidates explained, her interest in teaching was fostered throughout her experience as a student in the district. The residency program offered a way to really get to know the district in a different way, as she felt integrated into the staff for the full year:

Being there the whole day, and on the days we're not in class, is great. Getting to co-teach the whole year ... was very helpful too. I feel like this is kind of like a first year in a way because I've gotten to teach the whole year, and I've gotten to feel like a part of the staff, because I have been there for all the staff meetings. And I have been ... in the same class the whole year, so I've gotten really close with my team as well.

By connecting their high school teacher pipeline programs to postsecondary training opportunities, both Dallas and Denton have invested in long-term strategies meant to grow the pipeline of fully certified new teachers into the district.

Sources: Breeding-Gonzales, L. (2025). 5 Denton ISD grads are coming back to teach after a new residency program prepped them to lead classrooms. *Denton Record-Chronicle*; Dallas County Promise. [Join the Dallas County Promise](#); Dallas Independent School District. [P-TECH/ECHS teacher education pathways](#); Dallas Independent School District News Hub. (2019, February 6). [Collegiate academy sophomores get letters of intent to teach in Dallas ISD](#); Denton Independent School District. [Teach Denton](#).

Prioritizing Certification Through Recruitment and Hiring

Districts can prioritize certification through their human resources processes for recruitment and hiring. Interviewed district leaders identified multiple ways in which they encourage the hiring of certified teachers. Although these practices varied considerably across the participating districts, we briefly summarize below some of the approaches identified by district leaders as effective approaches to prioritize teachers with certification.

Candidate Screening

In their recruitment processes, districts can screen or flag potential teacher candidates based on their certification status. For example, Hutto ISD's Talent Management and Personnel Support department does an initial screening of all candidates at the district level before providing candidate information to school-level administrators. In this screening, district staff check current certification status, prior experience with teaching or other types of classroom experience, and whether a candidate meets all (or some) of the requirements for the specific positions they have applied for.

Dallas ISD similarly does a prescreening of teacher candidates at the district level, and the district's Human Capital Management department sends a list of priority candidates to principals. In both districts, certification is part of the screening process and information provided to school leaders, but candidates are not screened out if they are not fully certified. Districts can also prioritize certified candidates through hiring timelines that only allow school leaders to consider certified applicants earlier in the hiring cycle. For example, Channelview ISD does not allow principals to hire uncertified teachers until July for the upcoming school year, prioritizing certified candidates.

Hiring Requirements

Districts can also set hiring requirements around preparation and certification exams. Statewide analyses by the Texas Education Agency have found that about 55% of uncertified teachers who began teaching in the 2021–22, 2022–23, and 2023–24 school years were enrolled in preparation programs before they began teaching; approximately 10% enrolled at the same time that they began teaching; about 5% enrolled in preparation after they started teaching; and about 30% were never enrolled in preparation.⁴⁶ All six of the districts participating in our interview required that uncertified candidates be enrolled in teacher preparation or have met certain subject-matter coursework requirements to be eligible to be hired for a teaching position.

In some districts, candidates must have scheduled or already passed certain certification exams to be eligible to be hired. For example, Denton ISD requires that almost all teaching candidates have at least scheduled all of their certification exams before being hired. The district has specific exceptions for bilingual teachers since they have more exams than other teachers, and bilingual candidates are incredibly difficult to find. Districts can also prioritize hiring candidates who are closest to being eligible for a statement of eligibility (SOE) for an internship. As explained by one district leader, “Our internal data has shown that once someone gets on an SOE, the likelihood of them completing [their certification] is astronomically higher than if they are completely uncertified and starting from scratch.”

Districts can also prioritize uncertified candidates who have prior experience working with children in non-teaching roles. A district leader in Hutto ISD described how their district screening process specifically filters out uncertified teachers without any prior experience with children:

So we look to see if [the candidate] has any experience. We are looking to see if they've maybe been in a paraeducator role, maybe a long-term sub position, if they have any classroom experience, or even experience working with students. If they have not ever worked with kids before, we typically will not interview. Because we know that the turnover rate for [people with experience] is low. So, that's typically what we look at first, their experience level and if they've worked with kids in some capacity in a school setting.

Multiple district leaders emphasized that they aim to hire promising candidates and then support those candidates through the certification process. The screening and hiring criteria offer one mechanism to find candidates who are more likely to be successful in the classroom and to remain in the district. Prior statewide research in Texas also found that uncertified teachers who had previously worked as a paraprofessional, a substitute teacher, or in another classroom role were much more effective than uncertified teachers without any prior classroom experience.⁴⁷

Incentivizing and Tracking Certification

In addition to the recruitment and hiring strategies described above, districts can also create systems that track the certification progress of teachers, create incentives for uncertified teachers to become certified, and provide additional support for teachers during the certification process. Participating districts varied in the extent to which they had formalized these additional incentives and supports, but these practices offer a promising way for districts to directly champion the certification process.

Timelines for Certification

All participating districts set time limits for their uncertified teachers to receive their SOE to become intern certified, and teachers are unable to continue their contract if they do not make progress on certification by certain predetermined points. These time limits range from 4 months to 3 years, and districts often calibrate the timeline based on their hiring eligibility requirements. Districts can also set forth deadlines for specific steps in the certification process. For example, Channelview ISD outlines eight steps with specific deadlines in its offer letter for uncertified teachers. These steps include milestones around their preparation program enrollment, progress through certification coursework, and registration and completion of certification exams. As a district leader from Channelview explained, the explicit, transparent steps create clear expectations and reduce anxiety for uncertified teachers who are working through the certification process.

As explored in the next sections, district leaders felt these timelines were particularly effective when paired with salary incentives for certification or support from district staff that helped to track and support candidates through the certification process.

Salary

Among the six participating districts, Channelview and Denton ISDs offer substantially lower salaries to their uncertified teachers (annual salary differentials of \$10,000 or more). In both districts, uncertified teachers' pay is increased to regular beginning teacher pay once they have fulfilled the certification requirements to become intern certified. District leaders emphasized that this lowered salary motivated many uncertified teachers to become certified. As explained by a district leader in Channelview, "Because once you're done, you get paid like a regular teacher. So they knock out [all their requirements] so they can get their full salary." Following changes made by HB 2, Mesquite ISD introduced a nominal difference in its salary schedule based on certification status. While some districts were already differentiating salaries, recent changes included in HB 2 will now require districts to differentiate the minimum salary in their salary schedule for certified and uncertified teachers.

More broadly, increasing teacher salaries can be an important lever for both recruitment and retention. Interviewed leaders varied in the extent to which they felt that their district's salaries were competitive. Multiple leaders cited the value of the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA), a statewide initiative in which participating districts receive state funding to boost teacher compensation for high-performing teachers.⁴⁸ All six districts were either already participating in the TIA or were in the process of becoming a TIA district. Multiple district leaders also mentioned the state's new Teacher Retention Allotment, additional state funding provided to districts as retention bonuses for teachers with at least 3 years of experience. They felt it would be an important tool for teacher retention.⁴⁹

Increasing teacher salaries can be an important lever for both recruitment and retention.

In our quantitative analysis, participation in TIA and higher average beginning teacher salaries were both associated with higher certification rates. The average certification rates for districts participating in TIA were 2.1 percentage points higher than those in districts not participating in TIA. For traditional public schools, districts with cost-of-living-adjusted starting salaries above \$55,000 had average teacher certification rates that were 5.8 percentage points higher than those of districts with salaries below \$45,000. These differences held in analyses accounting for contextual characteristics, labor market conditions, working conditions, and school resources, as shown in [Table A3](#).⁵⁰

District Staff Tracking and Supporting the Certification Process

The certification process can be complicated and challenging, and district leaders emphasized that it can be helpful to have specific staff designated to track and support teachers going through the process. Some districts have dedicated human resources staff who focus on certification (e.g., "certification specialists"). District leaders explained the value of having someone who deeply understands the certification process, who can track the certification status of potential hires and current staff, and who can coach uncertified teachers through the process.

This role can be particularly helpful because the certification rules are often quite complicated, and principals and other school-based staff may struggle to fully understand and keep track of the certification requirements and current certification status of all their teachers. For example, Hutto ISD employs a certification specialist in the district HR office who is also a former teacher and

principal. She keeps track of the certification status of all staff, but she also works directly with teachers in the certification process. As explained by district leaders in Hutto, the certification specialist offers additional support for their uncertified teachers:

[The certification specialist] can also truly provide them some sound practical advice on the issues that they are navigating. Just to be an additional sounding board. We've found that some of our new teachers don't always feel comfortable going and sitting in their principal's office and talking to them about concerns, and they don't want to look like they don't have their stuff together in front of their campus principal.

Other professional support staff who work with new teachers can serve as an additional source of support around certification. In Mesquite ISD, the district's new teacher mentors—who are part-time, mostly retired teachers who mentor and coach new teachers—also focus on certification with teachers who are not fully certified. As explained by one district leader, “[New teacher mentors are] the ones that really are able to lean into the certification processes, and y'all, they take it on as their personal mission to see their people get certified.”

Districts have also tapped existing district personnel to serve as certification exam tutors. In Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, the district pays certified teachers to serve as tutors for specific certification exams and work with uncertified teachers who need extra support. In Channelview ISD, district staff in the bilingual department support uncertified teachers taking the bilingual certification exams, while the district's curriculum coordinator in English language arts and reading helps prepare teachers taking the Science of Teaching Reading exam. These approaches require that districts have systems to track uncertified teachers through the certification process so they can identify who needs support and organize the district staff tasked with various certification support efforts.

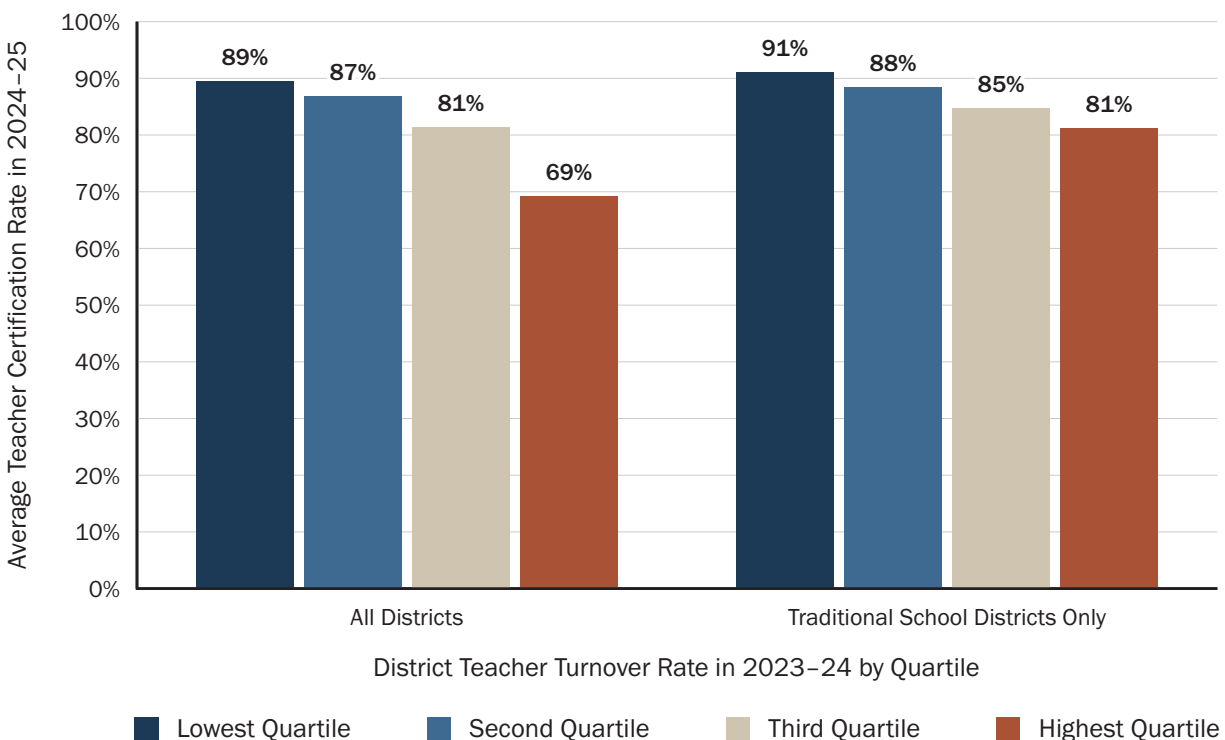
Supporting and Retaining New Teachers

District leaders in all participating districts emphasized the importance of teacher retention and discussed different approaches to boost effectiveness and increase retention, especially among newer teachers. As one district leader in Hutto ISD summarized, “The important thing is that we keep [teachers] here. ... Retention is the new recruitment.” Similarly, a Dallas ISD leader summarized the district's focus on retention:

Our best recruiting method is going to be retention, right? I mean, there's no reason to go out and get a new teacher if you can keep a good one here and grow them. So for us, our mentor program, new teacher supports, and wraparound supports [are important]. So that's definitely been our philosophy, is to take care of the people we have, and then you have to bring in less people, and the people that come want to stay.

Not surprisingly, our quantitative analysis found strong inverse relationships between districts' prior-year teacher turnover rate and certification rate. As shown in [Figure 5](#), districts with the lowest levels of teacher turnover in 2023–24 (with an average district turnover rate of 11.5%) had an average teacher certification rate of 89% in 2024–25. In contrast, districts with the highest district turnover rates (with an average of 38.4%) had an average teacher certification rate of 69% in 2024–25. While charter schools tend to have higher turnover and lower certification, the relationship between turnover rates and certification rates holds true when examining only traditional school districts (see [Figure 5](#)).

Figure 5. Average Teacher Certification Rates in 2024–25 by Prior Year Teacher Turnover



Notes: This analysis includes 1,194 local education agencies in Texas. All districts were categorized into quartiles by their reported district-level teacher turnover rate in 2023–24 (i.e., the percentage of teachers who left the district after the 2023–24 school year).

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency uncertified teacher and district data. (2026).

When asked specifically about factors influencing retention, all interviewed district leaders mentioned salary, climate or culture, and specific teacher supports. The participating districts all have mentoring and induction programs for new teachers, and interviewed leaders described these supports as important for retention. In all but one district, uncertified teachers participate in these supports alongside all other new teachers. In Channelview ISD, however, uncertified teachers do not participate in all components of the district’s first-year teacher academy because district leaders want them to have additional time to focus on their preparation and certification exams. As noted above, in some districts, mentors are explicitly tasked with supporting uncertified teachers through the certification process and providing specific support around certification exams. Some participating districts contracted with 240 Tutoring, a for-profit tutoring company specializing in Texas teacher certification exam tutoring, while others rely on district staff to assist uncertified teachers with their exams.

All participating districts require uncertified teachers to become certified within a given time frame, with specific requirements around preparation and certification exam passage. Providing financial support for these costs can increase retention of uncertified teachers. Districts take different approaches in offering such support, with some covering preparation and certification expenses and others not.

All six districts offer specific pathways (such as Grow Your Own programs or residency programs) in which they subsidize costs or offer stipends or salaries to compensate candidates, but most districts did not have widespread supports available for all uncertified teachers or all teachers working on certification requirements. For example, Dallas ISD runs its own internship program, and all costs are covered for candidates in that program who are training in critical shortage areas. Dallas ISD also used Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to reimburse uncertified teachers for their certification costs once they completed all their requirements. District leaders reported that this program was very popular and effective, but they could not continue funding it internally once ESSER funds ran out. On a much smaller scale, Channelview ISD reimburses its teachers' certification exam fees if they pass the exam.

Looking Ahead to HB 2 Implementation

The implementation of HB 2 provisions related to teacher preparation and certification was top of mind for all interviewed district leaders. District leaders were enthusiastic about the Preparing and Retaining Educators through Partnership (PREP) Program Allotment, the new state funding for teacher recruitment, preparation, and mentorship included in HB 2. These leaders plan to leverage the new state funding to sustain and/or expand their existing partnerships supporting residency and Grow Your Own programs. For example, one district leader in Hutto ISD described HB 2 as a “game changer” and explained that they feel the district is well positioned to benefit from the funding:

I feel very fortunate that we have all the structures in place with the Grow Your Own and the residency program to meet the requirements. I feel like we were kind of ahead of the game on some of those things and should be in a good position to utilize those funds the way they are intended.

Many interviewed leaders reported that they had been attending Texas Education Agency webinars, reading materials about the different funding streams available through the PREP Allotment, and trying to dig into the details about how it will work. The caps for residency funding came up in multiple interviews. As the program is currently designed, districts can receive PREP Allotment funding for up to 40 residents per district per year and can potentially leverage funding from other program types for residency spots as well.⁵¹

Leaders in Cypress-Fairbanks ISD and Dallas ISD (two of the largest districts in the state) expressed their frustration with the per-district caps for each program in the PREP Allotment, arguing that the largest districts should be able to receive additional funding given their relative size and need. For example, the Cypress-Fairbanks residency partnership included 75 residents in 2025–26, far exceeding the state funding cap. In contrast, leaders from smaller districts mentioned that they had sometimes struggled to fill the 20 residency seats from earlier rounds of state funding and were wondering whether this funding could help them expand their residency offerings.

In March 2026, the Texas Education Agency released the names of the districts receiving each of the three PREP allotments beginning in the 2026–27 school year.⁵² In total, 575 districts will receive at least one of the three allotments (48% of all districts in the state), and 298 will receive all three allotments (25%). [Table 3](#) illustrates the total number of districts receiving each allotment as well as how program uptake varies across Education Service Center (ESC) regions and geographic types. Notably, program uptake was highest among the state's largest and most urban districts and lowest among the smallest, most rural districts. Uptake also varied across regions, with much higher uptake in the Edinburg, Victoria, Houston, and El Paso ESC regions and much lower uptake in the Waco and Abilene ESC regions.

Table 3. Texas Districts Receiving PREP Program Allotment Funding for 2026–27

District characteristics	Districts receiving each allotment					
	Preservice residency program		Grow Your Own program		Mentorship program	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
All districts (N = 1,195)	348	29%	482	40%	432	36%
Geographic type						
Major urban (N = 11)	11	100%	10	91%	10	91%
Major suburban (N = 75)	51	68%	41	55%	50	67%
Other central city (N = 35)	24	69%	21	60%	25	71%
Other central city, suburban (N = 164)	77	47%	55	34%	80	49%
Independent town (N = 51)	31	61%	25	49%	26	51%
Non-metropolitan, fast-growing (N = 27)	7	26%	5	19%	12	44%
Non-metropolitan, stable (N = 164)	77	47%	59	36%	94	57%
Rural (N = 471)	94	20%	83	18%	123	26%
Charter school district (N = 176)	60	34%	49	28%	62	35%
Education Service Center regions						
01-Edinburg (N = 45)	29	64%	24	53%	25	56%
02-Corpus Christi (N = 45)	23	51%	17	38%	24	53%
03-Victoria (N = 37)	25	68%	22	59%	24	65%
04-Houston (N = 88)	50	57%	43	49%	42	48%
05-Beaumont (N = 37)	16	43%	11	30%	16	43%
06-Huntsville (N = 60)	23	38%	18	30%	26	43%
07-Kilgore (N = 101)	27	27%	21	21%	29	29%
08-Mount Pleasant (N = 46)	15	33%	11	24%	18	39%
09-Wichita Falls (N = 37)	11	30%	7	19%	13	35%
10-Richardson (N = 110)	39	35%	31	28%	59	54%
11-Fort Worth (N = 91)	29	32%	19	21%	38	42%
12-Waco (N = 81)	16	20%	13	16%	16	20%
13-Austin (N = 69)	27	39%	21	30%	26	38%
14-Abilene (N = 43)	4	9%	2	5%	9	21%
15-San Angelo (N = 46)	17	37%	16	35%	21	46%
16-Amarillo (N = 60)	9	15%	9	15%	25	42%
17-Lubbock (N = 60)	18	30%	15	25%	16	27%
18-Midland (N = 34)	13	38%	13	38%	17	50%
19-El Paso (N = 19)	10	53%	8	42%	13	68%
20-San Antonio (N = 86)	31	36%	27	31%	25	29%

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency Learning Acceleration Support Opportunities (LASO) Cycle 4 selection data. (2026).

Overall, interviewed district leaders reported fewer details and less concrete plans about how their districts would approach the new certification requirements of HB 2. To reiterate, under new HB 2 provisions, districts will not be able to assign uncertified teachers to teach reading and math in kindergarten through 5th grade starting in 2026–27 and in all foundational subjects (i.e., English language arts and reading, math, science, social studies) in all grades starting in 2027–28.⁵³ Multiple district leaders expressed concerns about their ability to fill vacancies with certified teachers and wondered if the new requirements would lead to higher class sizes. Four participating districts submitted a district plan to the Texas Education Agency that allows them to delay these requirements.⁵⁴ Statewide, 553 districts (54% of the state’s traditional school districts) had state-approved plans that allow them to delay these certification requirements as of March 2026.⁵⁵

District leaders identified certification timelines as an important lever to fulfill the new state requirements. In Dallas ISD, which had the most lenient certification timeline of all participating districts (allowing uncertified teachers up to 3 years to become certified), leaders have been updating timelines for certification to align with the new law and informing teachers of this change. According to one district leader:

We held some information sessions for the [uncertified] teachers that are impacted by this update ... to give them the timeline [and] opportunity to ask whatever questions they have. Subsequently, we’re surveying them just to get a pulse of where they’re at in obtaining their certification. We’ve already started developing partnerships with local EPPs [education preparation programs] to provide them discounted rates [and] to ensure that our folks have a spot [in a preparation program] to meet those deadlines.

In the following section, we offer policy considerations for districts as they work to adhere to the new HB 2 requirements related to teacher certification as well as take advantage of its supports related to teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention.

Policy Considerations

Across Texas, the number of uncertified teachers (i.e., teachers without any state certification) has rapidly increased over the past 5 years, with more than 42,000 uncertified teachers working in 2024–25. More than half of these uncertified teachers were teaching foundational subjects (English language arts and reading, math, science, and social studies) across elementary and secondary schools. A growing body of Texas-focused research has found that uncertified teachers are less likely to remain in the profession and tend to be less effective than their certified colleagues.⁵⁶

Despite the statewide surge in uncertified teachers, certification rates varied considerably across contexts, and some districts have maintained high teacher certification rates. In 2024–25, more than 200 Texas districts had teacher certification rates over 95%, and average teacher certification rates were highest in certain Education Service Center (ESC) regions, including Edinburg, Fort Worth, and Wichita Falls. Traditional school districts in urban and suburban districts have higher average rates than districts located in rural areas and smaller towns, while charter school districts have much lower certification rates than traditional school districts. On average, districts serving more Black students, more Hispanic/Latino students, and more economically disadvantaged students have lower certification rates. While some of these differences reflect underlying inequities in district resources and local access to certified teachers, they also highlight differences in district approaches to recruitment and hiring.

As part of this study, we identified six urban and suburban districts with noted success in maintaining high certification rates and/or supporting their uncertified teachers to become certified. Leaders in these participating districts highlighted numerous practices, policies, and partnerships that help them prioritize certification. Participating districts invested in preparation partnerships to increase the pipeline of certified new teachers through teacher residency programs and Grow Your Own programs targeting paraprofessionals and high school students. Districts also incentivized certification by screening candidates based on their preparation and certification status, setting specific timelines for uncertified teachers to become certified, differentiating salary for uncertified teachers, and identifying specific district staff to support the certification process. Leaders in participating districts emphasized the importance of retention and highlighted how competitive salaries, mentoring, and induction programs—along with specific supports around certification exams and preparation costs—improved retention of their districts' new teachers.

With these findings in mind, we outline key considerations for school districts and preparation programs as Texas moves toward implementing the certification changes and teacher pipeline investments enacted in House Bill 2 (HB 2). These considerations focus first on short-term constraints affecting districts as they support uncertified teachers in working toward full certification. We then consider the longer-term implications of other HB 2 provisions meant to support preservice preparation pathways and help build a more stable pipeline of well-prepared and fully certified teachers.

Considerations for Districts

Short-Term Constraints and Considerations Around Certification

Before outlining specific policy considerations, we note key constraints districts face in helping uncertified teachers meet HB 2 certification requirements. Most notably, HB 2 requires uncertified teachers teaching foundational subjects to become certified by August 2027 (with an earlier deadline of August 2026 for those teaching K–5 math and reading) unless their district obtains a waiver to delay the requirement. However, as of March 2026, 54% of districts have received this waiver, postponing meaningful implementation of these new certification requirements. The high uptake of certification waivers likely reflects district concerns about their capacity to move uncertified teachers through the certification process, as well as the existence of enough certified teachers to fill positions in foundational subjects. HB 2 includes certification incentives of \$1,000 per teacher for districts whose uncertified teachers become certified, but those incentives are only available for those who are certified by August 2027.

Working under the original timelines set out under HB 2, uncertified teachers may be likely to choose the shortest or least onerous programs, given their day-to-day teaching load and the challenges of balancing personal and professional commitments with preparation coursework and assessments. However, asynchronous online alternative certification programs—typically offered by for-profit providers and often with limited clinical practice or support—may not always offer the most effective training. Indeed, recent research suggests that teachers trained through online, for-profit alternative certification programs are less effective and more likely to leave the profession than new teachers who are trained in other preparation models.⁵⁷

In Texas, online preparation programs can vary widely in the types of clinical experiences candidates receive alongside their coursework, and differences in design may matter for candidate success. For example, one analysis of teachers trained in an online program with a yearlong residency found that the student achievement growth of their students was similar to that of teachers trained in preservice, university-based programs.⁵⁸ In addition, it may be difficult to ensure that candidates' coursework directly supports their work in classrooms if this training is delivered asynchronously through online modules with little field-based clinical practice or support. The following considerations offer ways to manage these constraints while working to connect uncertified teachers with the types of preparation experiences most likely to support their success.

Strengthen Certification Pathways in Collaboration With Partners That Offer High-Quality Training and Meaningful Support

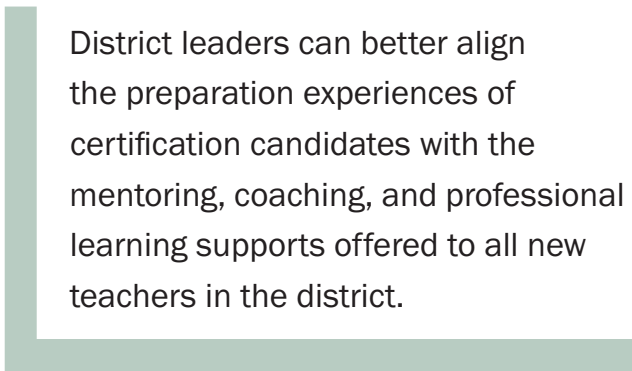
It can be challenging to design preparation experiences for teachers who are already carrying full teaching loads, but districts and their preparation partners can draw on several research-based practices to bolster candidate learning and growth.

Collaborative Planning for HB 2 Implementation. Districts would likely benefit from prioritizing early meetings with preparation and certification pathway partners to plan for HB 2's certification requirements. In these meetings, districts and their preparation partners can identify opportunities to strengthen and expand partnerships to address the needs of uncertified teachers and consider long-term partnerships, including leveraging funding from the Preparing and Retaining Educators through Partnership (PREP)

Program Allotment. Partnership meetings can also be a space for district leaders to better articulate the needs of their uncertified teachers, while preparation programs can determine which offerings could help meet those needs.

Cohorts. Districts and preparation programs can work together to create cohorts of teachers in the same school, district, or region working toward certification at the same time and can create regular time and space for the teachers within each cohort to connect. Teachers in these cohorts can observe one another, share practices, develop plans together, solve problems collectively, and provide mutual social and emotional support.⁵⁹ One of the participating districts encouraged uncertified teachers to enroll in certain preparation programs so the district could facilitate preparation cohorts that regularly met together and offered additional support. Especially if teachers are primarily completing asynchronous and online coursework, these types of in-person interactions can be vital in bridging the isolated experiences of that coursework with the day-to-day experiences of teaching.

Mentoring and Coaching. District leaders can better align the preparation experiences of certification candidates with the mentoring, coaching, and professional learning supports offered to all new teachers in the district. With new requirements for statewide mentor training and the integration of new Reading and Math Academies as preservice content for all PREP-funded routes, the state is working to align preparation and new teacher mentoring in ways that districts can build on.



District leaders can better align the preparation experiences of certification candidates with the mentoring, coaching, and professional learning supports offered to all new teachers in the district.

Interviews highlighted how districts could create dedicated time during professional learning days for uncertified teachers to focus on preparation coursework or certification exams, how the district's curriculum experts could provide targeted support around certification exams, and how mentors can be explicitly tasked with supporting uncertified teachers through the certification process. Such an approach can provide uncertified teachers with access to broader new teacher supports while at the same time strengthening coherence and alignment between different learning opportunities (e.g., preparation coursework and new teacher mentoring) without overwhelming uncertified teachers.

Districts can also ensure regular check-ins between mentors and mentees, while also providing structure for how mentors engage with mentees to ensure they are drawing connections between their coursework and experiences in the classroom. Given the importance of new teacher mentoring and induction programs in retaining early-career teachers,⁶⁰ districts could benefit from carefully balancing commitments across both teacher mentoring and pathways to certification. This could include actively working to integrate expectations and requirements for mentoring and induction programs with uncertified teachers' preparation requirements to ensure more integrated and complementary supports.

Build District Capacity and Allocate District Staff to Support Certification Efforts

High-touch supports, in which district staff work directly and regularly with uncertified teachers on the certification process, may be a particularly high-leverage way for districts to support their uncertified teachers and meet HB 2's certification requirements. For example, districts can identify specific staff members, such as certification specialists in the human resources department or mentor teachers trained on the certification process, to provide direct oversight over a teacher's pathway to certification. Such oversight can keep individuals on track and facilitate access to additional supports, such as certification exam tutoring or help navigating program and certification requirements. This could include making sure uncertified teachers are fully aware of the additional resources and supports available to them, including certification and exam fee waivers established in HB 2 for bilingual and special education teachers.⁶¹ District staff overseeing the preparation and certification process may be able to work with school-level leaders to identify opportunities to balance a teacher's workload alongside their coursework and assignments. Further, these district staff could also support uncertified teachers in choosing a preparation program and potentially serve as a liaison between the preparation program and the district.

Communicate Expectations and Incentivize Certification Through District Practices and Policies

With HB 2 introducing requirements around differentiated salaries for uncertified teachers, districts can explore ways to leverage salary structures to incentivize timely completion of a certification program and potentially use the savings from these differentials to directly support preparation and certification costs. As described in the qualitative findings, Channelview and Denton Independent School Districts (ISDs) offer starting salaries to uncertified teachers well below those for certified teachers. However, once the uncertified teachers fulfill the certification requirements and become intern certified, their salaries are increased to match regular beginning teacher pay. Districts could use the savings from this salary differential to subsidize preparation costs, cover the costs of certification exams, or pay salaries for district staff to oversee and support certification. Districts can design both the supports and the incentives for uncertified teachers based on the number of uncertified teachers and the specific needs of the district (e.g., targeting incentives toward uncertified teachers in foundational subjects or the highest-need areas in the district).

While Texas state policy prior to HB 2 did not require that uncertified teachers hired under Districts of Innovation plans ever become certified, participating districts in this study all set their own certification timelines for their uncertified teachers and would not allow uncertified teachers to remain in their positions if they did not meet these timelines. As Channelview ISD did, districts and staff supporting certification could develop detailed timelines to monitor and directly support the process. Districts will likely need to negotiate these timelines alongside teachers, given the time constraints teachers face with their regular teaching workload, but together they can establish a shared timeline to reduce confusion about expectations for meeting certification requirements under HB 2.

Districts can also consider taking a more active role in identifying or suggesting preparation options for their uncertified teachers. Candidates face a plethora of options and may not be able to fully weigh the potential benefits or pitfalls of a specific type of program. Given recent research on how retention and effectiveness vary based on preparation pathway, districts have a vested interest in the type of preparation their teachers pursue. District leaders could explore ways to further incentivize and potentially

subsidize enrollment in higher-quality programs. Financial models from existing residencies, Grow Your Own programs, and apprenticeship partnerships could inform districts on how to sustainably finance preparation and certification supports.⁶²

If districts have limited capacity to directly support and oversee the certification process, they may want to consider steering candidates toward programs such as the Alternative Teacher Certification programs at Sam Houston State University or University of Houston, where individual faculty oversee a cohort of uncertified teachers working in schools and maintain regular touchpoints throughout the online coursework to help them navigate any barriers to timely completion of program requirements.⁶³ As Mesquite ISD did, districts can also partner with outside groups such as TEACH.org, which currently operates partnerships in the Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio regions.⁶⁴ TEACH partners with districts to support a comprehensive teacher recruitment system and can help candidates identify potential preparation routes and programs.

Improve District Hiring Practices and Personnel Management Beyond HB 2

Finally, while HB 2's timelines for moving uncertified teachers toward certification specifically target teachers already working in districts, there are a number of steps districts can take in the short and long terms to strengthen the hiring process and prioritize the candidates best positioned to remain in the classroom and support student learning. District leaders can ensure hiring decisions are made as early as possible—with the best candidate pool and based on the best information possible. A productive process should allow school staff and candidates to assess their fit based on high-quality information, including teaching demonstration lessons and school visits in which candidates meet other teachers and staff. It may also benefit districts to revise timelines for voluntary transfers or resignations so that hiring processes can take place as early as possible, ideally in the spring of the prior school year. Districts can implement incentives for teachers to submit their intent to resign or retire earlier in the school year and also require that the voluntary transfer process be completed earlier.⁶⁵

Considerations for Educator Preparation Programs

In addition to the district considerations outlined above, these findings highlight how educator preparation programs can support their district partners. For some districts across the state, this support from local and regional preparation providers may be essential in ensuring they can support uncertified teachers toward certification.

Provide More Targeted Supports to Help Uncertified Teachers Earn Certification

While districts typically coordinate and oversee the certification process for uncertified teachers, educator preparation programs can also provide critical wraparound supports to keep candidates on track. To reiterate an earlier district consideration, planning conversations focused on HB 2 implementation could help identify specific supports districts and candidates might need and the ways preparation program partners could help meet those needs. This also offers an opportunity for preparation programs to better explain their program features and offer recruitment materials for teaching candidates or uncertified teachers in their district. Research on Texas residencies has demonstrated the value of regular

governance meetings between educator preparation programs and districts, and this sort of shared planning and decision-making can better facilitate HB 2 implementation planning and help address the needs of uncertified teachers.⁶⁶

As noted earlier, preparation program partners can support districts by creating cohorts of teachers completing certification programs together, particularly when districts lack the staffing or resources to coordinate and convene them. Preparation programs may be best positioned to find authentic and relevant shared learning opportunities—similar to those provided in the University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley’s STEP UP program—that include a monthly meeting with a cohort of peers, where teacher candidates connect their coursework with their experiences in the classroom and reflect on other learning experiences.⁶⁷

Communicate Candidate Progress With Relevant District Staff to Ensure Shared Tracking of Individual Timelines

Another key role for preparation program partners is to closely monitor the progress of uncertified teachers in their programs and report back to employing districts. Districts and preparation program partners could use common data sharing tools to access regular updates on candidate status and, if a disruption or delay occurs, jointly identify specific approaches to help candidates get back on track. A transparent and systematic way to share updates and status reports between preparation programs and districts could prove an important tool in meeting district needs while providing more individualized support and attention to teachers seeking certification.⁶⁸ The state’s Insight 2 Impact data dashboards could serve as one of the tools to support this type of sharing and monitor progress across programs and districts. Developed by the Texas Education Agency with input from a diverse group of educator preparation programs from across the state, the Insight 2 Impact dashboards provide programs in Texas with actionable data about their candidates and programs.⁶⁹

Taking Advantage of Investments in the Teacher Pipeline

The PREP Program Allotment and other investments made through HB 2 create an unprecedented opportunity to rebuild the Texas teacher pipeline over time through preparation, new teacher supports, and long-term retention. In the long term, districts will benefit from building a sustainable pool of well-prepared and certified teachers in partnership with preparation providers. However, in the short term, given the statewide declines in the number of teacher candidates currently completing 4-year teacher preparation programs, there likely will not be enough individuals in the pipeline ready to move into open residency allotment slots. In the short term, districts may not be able to fill slots despite having a demonstrated need.

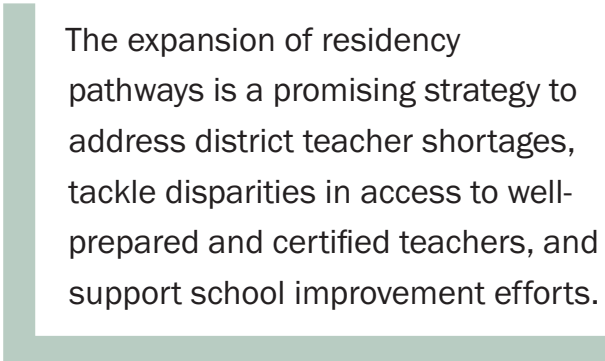
These state investments can build on current district efforts, such as those highlighted in this report. Many Texas districts have been engaged in different strategic staffing models that create more financially sustainable teacher pipeline programs. For example, a growing number of Texas districts have created and scaled registered teacher apprenticeships like the model built by Hutto ISD. Many districts throughout the state have invested district funds in teacher residency programs in which residents serve in critical district roles, such as substitutes and paraprofessionals, to offset the cost of residency stipends or preparation costs.

Importantly, the PREP Program Allotment establishes state funding that is accessible to all interested districts, with funds from some portions of the allotment first disbursed in the 2026–27 school year and funds from other portions disbursed in the 2027–28 school year. Almost half of the districts in the state will receive at least one of the three initial PREP allotments in 2026–27, indicating strong interest across the state. At the same time, our analysis of PREP Allotment recipients shows the strongest uptake with the state’s largest and most urban districts and raises concerns about how best to encourage greater uptake among the state’s smaller, more rural districts. Because these are the districts that tend to have greater challenges in finding and retaining fully certified teachers, the state will need to develop more targeted supports for rural districts. This may include regional approaches that leverage partnerships with the Education Service Centers or lean on partnerships with community colleges and 4-year institutions that create pipelines for new teacher candidates coming out of local high schools.⁷⁰ Recent efforts to support the Houston Teacher Pathways Consortium may hold lessons for scaling these types of more targeted solutions for rural districts across the state.⁷¹

In the sections below, we highlight the key opportunities in the PREP Allotment that will be implemented in 2026–27 and that districts can tap into to strengthen their teacher workforce.

Preservice Residency Programs

A growing body of research on teacher residency programs has found that residency-trained teachers are more instructionally effective and more likely to be retained compared to new teachers from other routes into the profession.⁷² For example, one Texas-based study found that students of residency-trained teachers show, on average, 2.5 months of additional learning gains in math and 3 additional months in reading compared to students of an average new teacher. The research found even larger differences in learning gains relative to



The expansion of residency pathways is a promising strategy to address district teacher shortages, tackle disparities in access to well-prepared and certified teachers, and support school improvement efforts.

online-prepared and uncertified teachers.⁷³ As such, the expansion of residency pathways is a promising strategy to address district teacher shortages, tackle disparities in access to well-prepared and certified teachers, and support school improvement efforts. In addition, residency pathways provide a built-in pipeline of residents who already know and have worked in the district.

The recent creation of the PREP Preservice Residency Program through HB 2 codifies the state’s ongoing commitment to expanding access to teacher residencies across the state. For the PREP Preservice Programs, funding will range between \$24,000 and \$39,500 per candidate and could fund up to 40 residency candidates.⁷⁴ The design of this and other PREP allotments includes both baseline funding and “success-based” incentives. A participating district would receive \$12,000 up front per resident and could get up to \$16,000 in success-based funding depending on whether a district has rural status and whether residents end up teaching at a high-need campus and in special education or bilingual placements. Residents are required to receive a minimum of \$20,000 in financial support, with half coming from the allotment and the other half from district matching funds. Cooperating teachers also receive at least \$2,000 in state funds under the program.

Grow Your Own Programs

In addition to funding for residencies under the PREP Allotment, districts can also tap state funding to support two types of Grow Your Own programs: high school Career and Technical Education programs focused on the field of education, and programs that help current uncertified district employees earn a bachelor's degree and enter an educator preparation program. Under the program, districts can receive between \$8,000 and \$12,000 per candidate and can fund up to 40 candidates. Districts receive \$4,000 in initial funding per employee who begins a Grow Your Own pathway, with another \$2,000 of initial funding available for rural or high-need schools. After the employee earns a bachelor's degree and enrolls in an educator preparation program, districts receive an additional \$4,000 in success-based funding, with up to \$2,000 in additional funding for rural or high-need schools.⁷⁵

Mentorship Programs

The value of new teacher mentoring and induction has been documented in research. When paired with impactful preparation, it can help ensure new teachers remain in the profession beyond their early career. A study drawing on national teacher data, for example, found that beginning teachers who did not participate in any induction and mentoring support left teaching at twice the rate of beginning teachers who received a comprehensive set of induction supports, including mentoring from a teacher in their field; supportive communication with their principal; regular collaboration time with peers; and extra resources, such as a reduced workload and support from a paraprofessional.⁷⁶ Importantly, all teachers can benefit from robust mentoring and induction regardless of certification status, and the investments from HB 2 demonstrate the state's commitment to expanding and sustaining access to these needed supports.⁷⁷

The program provides \$3,000 per beginning teacher and requires districts to implement programs that support classroom teachers who have less than 2 years of teaching experience. Prospective mentors are required to participate in the state's Texas Mentorship Training.⁷⁸ While trained mentors can be assigned to any beginning teacher, new teachers completing a PREP route are required to be paired with a trained mentor for their first 2 years as a teacher of record. In addition, legislation requires that mentors receive a stipend of at least \$1,000 for each beginning teacher they mentor. Remaining funds for each new teacher support scheduled release time for mentor teachers and mentees to meet, as well as mentor training and strategic staffing training.⁷⁹

Additional PREP Program Allotments Coming in 2027–28

In 2027–28, the Texas Education Agency will begin implementing two additional components of the PREP Program Allotment: the Traditional Preservice Program and Preservice Alternative Certification Program. The Traditional Preservice Program focuses on implementing semester-long paid student teaching experiences for university students, while the Preservice Alternative Certification Program supports various structured, clinically focused alternative preservice routes into the classroom.⁸⁰ Taken together, these programs create the opportunity for a district to receive more than \$2 million per year in state funding to support their teacher pipeline and new teacher support programs. Districts can leverage the different allotments to strengthen their broader preparation and professional learning infrastructure, and a growing number of tools and technical assistance supports are now available to districts for that strategic planning.⁸¹

Conclusion

This report highlights how several Texas regions and districts have maintained high certification rates in the face of high statewide attrition from the profession and substantial declines in the pipeline of fully prepared and certified teachers. Texas districts can support teacher certification through their policies and practices by balancing high-leverage, short-term strategies to support uncertified teachers with longer-term investments in building their teacher pipeline and improving retention through mentoring and other supports for beginning teachers. The passage of House Bill 2 pushes districts to help current uncertified teachers earn certification and provides funding to build a more comprehensive system of preparation and support for new teachers.

Technical Appendix

This analysis explores variation in teacher certification rates across Texas districts to better understand how certification rates vary based on local context and identify potential district policies that can increase reliance on certified teachers. This sequential mixed methods study uses statewide administrative data and interviews with district leaders to address the following research questions:

1. What local contextual factors are associated with higher rates of teacher certification in Texas?
2. How can district policies, practices, and partnerships support certification?

In the following sections, we describe the data and methods used to address these research questions.

Quantitative Data and Analysis

To answer the first research question, the quantitative component of this analysis used district-level data provided by the Texas Education Agency and U.S. Department of Education. For all districts in Texas ($N = 1,195$), we connected state data on teacher certification with state and federal data capturing contextual characteristics from prior years. The key outcome variable is the district's rate of certified teachers in the 2024–25 school year (i.e., the number of teachers with any certification divided by the total number of teachers in the district).

Using state and federal data, we created a set of predictor variables capturing the contextual characteristics of districts. Unless otherwise noted, these predictor variables captured information about districts from the 2023–24 school year, 1 year prior to the certification rates. First, to examine whether students had equitable access to certified teachers, we included a set of variables capturing student enrollment (i.e., number of students in a district) and student populations (i.e., percentage of students identified as English learners, special education students, Black students, Hispanic/Latino students, White students, and economically disadvantaged students). Next, we included predictors capturing labor market conditions that would affect the supply or demand for new teachers. These included the district's geographic type,⁸² teacher turnover rate, average beginning teacher salary,⁸³ two regional variables capturing the percentage of new teachers prepared within the Education Service Center (ESC) region and the unique number of education preparation programs that prepared teachers within the ESC region, and two metrics capturing the employment rate and family poverty rate in the broader community served by the district.⁸⁴ The next set of predictors captures working conditions and resources, including the average principal tenure (i.e., the average number of years a principal in the district has served as principal at their current school), average teacher years of experience, student–teacher ratio, and average per-pupil expenditures.⁸⁵ Finally, we include two policy indicators capturing whether a district participated in the Teacher Incentive Allotment and whether the district had a partnership with a vetted teacher residency program as of the 2023–24 school year.

[Table A1](#) shows the relationships among the continuous measures. Because of the high correlation between the percentage of Hispanic/Latino students and percentage of White students, we only include the percentage of Hispanic/Latino students in the regression models. [Table A2](#) includes the average student composition by district geographic type to illustrate the differences in average certification rates and demographic composition across districts.

We first examined cross-tabulations among numerous district characteristics and certification rates, as well as differences across and within ESC regions. The initial results from these descriptive analyses informed the structure of subsequent regression analysis as well as the sampling for the qualitative component of the study. We then examined associations between certification rates and these contextual factors through a series of regression analyses. Our early analyses found that charter schools had much lower certification rates than traditional public schools and that charter schools differed on many observable characteristics that serve as key predictors in our analyses. As a result, we split our models to cover three different samples: (1) all districts, including charter schools, (2) traditional public school districts only, and (3) charter school districts only. [Table A3](#) includes the final regression results for a model that includes all predictors in the same model.

Table A1. Correlations Among All District Characteristics

District characteristics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. District teacher certification rate	1.00																	
2. Student enrollment	0.12*	1.00																
3. Percentage of English learners	-0.19*	0.25*	1.00															
4. Percentage of Black or African American students	-0.46*	0.10	0.03	1.00														
5. Percentage of Hispanic/Latino students	-0.16*	0.13*	0.60*	-0.19*	1.00													
6. Percentage of White students	0.40*	-0.23*	-0.61*	-0.38*	-0.82*	1.00												
7. Percentage of special education students	0.18*	-0.06	-0.26*	-0.13*	-0.11	0.19*	1.00											
8. Percentage of economically disadvantaged students	-0.34*	0.01	0.45*	0.30*	0.53*	-0.61*	0.04	1.00										
9. Teacher turnover rate	-0.48*	-0.12*	0.05	0.29*	0.06	-0.21*	0.04	0.19*	1.00									
10. Local employment rate	0.16*	0.30*	0.19*	0.09	0.05	-0.13*	-0.10	-0.28*	-0.05	1.00								
11. Local poverty rate for families	-0.16*	0.01	0.33*	0.05	0.43*	-0.41*	0.03	0.54*	0.00	-0.26*	1.00							
12. Average beginning teacher salary	-0.04	0.23*	0.24*	0.17*	0.16*	-0.28*	-0.16*	0.05	0.05	0.18*	-0.01	1.00						
13. Percentage of new teachers prepared in the region	-0.01	0.15*	0.30*	0.01	0.30*	-0.30*	-0.10	0.06	0.01	0.12	0.06	0.28*	1.00					
14. Unique number of EPPs preparing teachers in region	-0.13*	0.22*	0.24*	0.27*	0.06	-0.26*	-0.09	-0.02	0.15*	0.26*	-0.14*	0.39*	0.43*	1.00				
15. Average principal tenure	0.08	0.12*	0.04	0.02	0.02	-0.04	-0.08	-0.04	-0.25*	0.09	0.03	0.07	0.03	-0.01	1.00			
16. Average teacher years of experience	0.57*	-0.09	-0.32*	-0.36*	-0.22*	0.43*	0.14*	-0.25*	-0.43*	-0.08	-0.08	-0.21*	-0.20*	-0.33*	0.15*	1.00		
17. Student-teacher ratio	-0.14*	0.15*	0.18*	0.19*	0.13*	-0.25*	-0.21*	0.02	0.05	0.12	0.04	0.21*	0.12*	0.21*	0.03	-0.22*	1.00	
18. Per-pupil expenditure	-0.07	-0.20*	-0.14*	-0.04	0.07	0.00	0.28*	0.21*	0.20*	-0.26*	0.12	-0.17*	-0.10	-0.23*	-0.14*	0.10	-0.37*	1.00

Notes: EPP = education preparation program. This table includes pairwise correlations for each variable. * indicates the correlation is statistically significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

Table A2. Average Student Composition by District Geographic Type

District geographic type	Avg. certification rate in 2024–25	Student composition in 2023–24 (Average percentage of students from each subgroup)					
		Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	White	English learner	Special education	Economically disadvantaged
Major urban	94.40%	10.71%	72.17%	11.91%	32.11%	13.92%	72.39%
Major suburban	92.50%	15.56%	50.40%	24.41%	23.29%	13.93%	58.42%
Non-metropolitan, fast-growing	90.00%	6.58%	32.40%	54.48%	10.50%	14.33%	43.66%
Non-metropolitan, stable	90.80%	6.54%	46.96%	42.18%	12.94%	15.12%	64.54%
Independent town	82.40%	10.07%	47.15%	38.00%	15.25%	15.98%	68.97%
Other central city	87.80%	12.17%	53.78%	26.61%	21.93%	15.03%	64.14%
Other central city, suburban	85.10%	6.69%	44.14%	43.39%	15.20%	15.09%	57.16%
Rural	85.32%	3.64%	37.12%	55.69%	7.91%	15.66%	60.30%
All traditional public schools	86.84%	6.31%	42.34%	46.56%	12.30%	15.30%	60.68%
Charter school districts	52.21%	22.49%	53.08%	17.62%	24.01%	12.88%	69.27%
All districts	81.74%	8.69%	43.92%	42.3%	14.03%	14.93%	61.95%

Note: The geographic types and mutually exclusive charter school category are created by the Texas Education Agency to categorize districts.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency uncertified teacher and district data. (2026).

Table A3. Regression Results Predicting Teacher Certification Rate With All Predictors

Predictor	Sample 1: All districts	Sample 2: Traditional public school districts only	Sample 3: Charter school districts only
Panel A: Equitable access			
Student enrollment (per 100 students)	-0.001 (0.004)	0.002 (0.003)	-0.043* (0.017)
Percentage of English learners	0.063 (0.044)	0.040 (0.034)	0.079 (0.126)
Percentage of Black students	-0.216*** (0.044)	-0.151*** (0.033)	-0.368* (0.141)
Percentage of Hispanic/Latino students	-0.055* (0.022)	-0.054** (0.018)	-0.179 (0.133)
Percentage of special education students	0.352*** (0.105)	0.027 (0.098)	0.395* (0.199)
Percentage of economically disadvantaged students	-0.125*** (0.030)	-0.114*** (0.025)	-0.063 (0.102)
Panel B: Labor market conditions			
Prior year teacher turnover	-0.189*** (0.050)	-0.183*** (0.042)	-0.161 (0.118)
Employment rate	-0.017 (0.046)	-0.020 (0.041)	1.217 (0.986)
Family poverty rate	0.022 (0.059)	0.025 (0.053)	0.544 (0.922)
Adjusted average beginning teacher salary (reference is <\$45,000)			
• \$45,000–49,999	1.752 (1.241)	1.646 (1.094)	8.068 (7.320)
• \$50,000–54,999	0.780 (1.225)	1.751 (1.024)	-1.807 (7.097)
• \$55,000–59,999	3.001* (1.231)	3.574*** (1.051)	0.806 (5.205)
• \$60,000–64,999	4.709*** (1.392)	4.169*** (1.170)	8.451 (5.910)
• \$65,000 or more	4.766** (1.451)	6.075*** (1.216)	3.079 (6.627)
• Missing salary data	1.551 (1.560)	2.185 (1.395)	-4.836 (6.474)
Percentage of new teachers prepared in region	0.146** (0.055)	0.209*** (0.046)	-0.310 (0.224)
Number of TPPs who sent new teachers to region	0.065** (0.024)	0.045* (0.019)	-0.130 (0.144)

Predictor	Sample 1: All districts	Sample 2: Traditional public school districts only	Sample 3: Charter school districts only
District geographic type (reference is rural district)			
• Major urban	10.200** (3.197)	5.471* (2.402)	
• Major suburban	7.300*** (1.443)	4.237*** (1.194)	
• Other central city	4.389* (1.881)	2.404 (1.675)	
• Other central city, suburban	3.706*** (0.955)	2.390** (0.779)	
• Independent town	-1.186 (1.344)	-2.631* (1.247)	
• Non-metropolitan, fast-growing	0.171 (1.729)	-0.956 (1.442)	
• Non-metropolitan, stable	0.075 (0.851)	-0.720 (0.736)	
• Charter school district	-20.850*** (2.061)		
Panel C: Working conditions and resources			
Average principal tenure	-0.099 (0.156)	0.030 (0.114)	-0.287 (0.408)
Average teacher years of experience	1.468*** (0.170)	0.922*** (0.151)	2.897*** (0.628)
Student-teacher ratio	-0.030 (0.049)	-0.031 (0.044)	0.173 (0.529)
Adjusted average per-pupil expenditures	-0.009 (0.009)	-0.017* (0.007)	0.034 (0.044)
Panel D: Policy indicators			
Teacher incentive allotment	2.696*** (0.709)	1.542** (0.551)	8.734* (3.735)
Residency district	0.095 (0.875)	-0.564 (0.723)	1.839 (5.593)
Constant	70.501*** (5.732)	82.183*** (4.650)	-24.487 (61.698)
Observations	1193	1018	175
R-squared	0.658	0.416	0.500

Notes: TPP = teacher preparation program. The dependent variable is the district certification rate in 2024–25. All predictors are measured for the 2023–24 school year or earlier. * $p < .05$. ** $p < 0.1$. *** $p < .001$.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency and U.S. Department of Education data. (2026).

As with any analysis, there are numerous limitations to our approach to predicting teacher certification rates. Most importantly, we cannot capture causal effects in this analysis, and these results only indicate associations among contextual factors and certification rates. We cannot observe differences in certification rates within schools in the same district, and we cannot account for many factors that may influence teacher certification. Additional analyses leveraging changes over time may be better able to disentangle these relationships, but the Texas Education Agency has only published certification data by district for the past 2 years.

Qualitative Data and Analysis

To answer the second question, we interviewed district leaders about their district's recruitment, hiring, support, and retention practices. We identified districts through a purposeful sampling approach meant to capture districts that have had success in (1) maintaining high certification rates, and/or (2) supporting uncertified teachers to become certified. We selected the districts based on three criteria:

1. **Quantitative data.** We examined the Texas Education Agency's uncertified teacher and new hire data for the 2024–25 school year. We were interested in identifying districts that had higher rates of certification than other districts in their region or other districts with similar size/urbanicity.
2. **District size and geographic locale.** We focused our sample on urban and suburban areas because the labor market conditions are considerably different in more rural and remote regions of the state. We wanted to identify districts of various sizes and across multiple metropolitan areas, including Houston and Dallas, the state's two largest metropolitan areas.
3. **Expert recommendations.** We reached out to partners within the state to seek recommendations on districts with noted success in maintaining high certification rates and/or supporting uncertified teachers to become certified. We asked for recommendations from staff at the following organizations: City Education Partners, Commit Partnership, Dallas College, Houston Endowment, Texas Education Agency, University of Houston, and University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley.

We identified a list of 20 districts through this process, and we reached out to 14 districts during the recruitment process. We ended up with six participating districts, and information on these districts is provided in [Table A4](#).

We conducted interviews with district leaders who led their district's hiring, recruitment, and/or teacher development efforts. These interviews included questions about the district's approach to teacher hiring, recruitment practices and challenges, district engagement with education preparation programs, regional and state initiatives to support teacher hiring and recruitment, and strategies to support uncertified teachers to become certified. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then coded to better identify and describe district practices and policies as well as explore how local context shapes these approaches. We organized the data using codes developed a priori and then read across each district to understand variation. We also identified a small number of codes that emerged through the coding process. After identifying key findings from reading across all districts, we selected illustrative examples and quotes to include in the report.

Table A4. Texas Districts Participating in Interviews

District name	Education Service Center region	District characteristics in 2024–25			
		Student enrollment	Total teachers	New hires	Certification rate
Channelview ISD	04-Houston	9,434	599	63	96%
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	04-Houston	118,470	7,008	741	99%
Dallas ISD	10-Richardson	139,246	8,347	811	85%
Denton ISD	11-Fort Worth	32,866	2,370	281	97%
Hutto ISD	13-Austin	10,035	727	89	93%
Mesquite ISD	10-Richardson	38,265	2,455	280	89%

Note: ISD = Independent School District.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency uncertified teacher and district data. (2026).

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50. As shown in Table A3, the estimated difference in certification rates by Teacher Incentive Allotment status were even higher among charter school districts. Charter school districts participating in the Teacher Incentive Allotment had certification rates 8.7 percentage points higher than those not participating, when accounting for all other covariates.
51. Each PREP Program Allotment includes caps on the number of individuals who can be funded. The caps for the PREP Preservice Residency Program, PREP Grow Your Own Program, and PREP Mentorship Program are 40 each. The two allotments that will be introduced for the 2027–28 school year—the PREP Preservice Traditional Program and PREP Preservice Alternative Program—will have a collective cap of 80. If the total number of residents exceeds 40, partnerships are eligible for funding for up to 80 additional residents but at a lower program level. For more, see: Texas Education Agency. *Introduction: PREP Program Allotment*. <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/health-safety-discipline/laso-cycle-4-prep-overview.pdf> (accessed 02/01/2026).
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