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Texas Teacher Workforce Policy

Evolving From Short-Term Solutions to Comprehensive Investment



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Summary

A well-prepared, stable teacher workforce is essential to student learning and school system health, yet states nationwide continue to face persistent teacher shortages. Some states have responded by loosening entry requirements, leaning on short-term policy shifts that temporarily ease shortages but fuel a costly cycle of attrition in the long run. Texas has the largest teacher workforce in the nation and was an early adopter of opening doors to for-profit alternative certification and, later, uncertified teachers. As such, Texas's policy choices carry outsized weight nationally and offer notable lessons for moving forward. After decades of leaning on shorter-term solutions, Texas has more recently built an increasingly comprehensive, interconnected set of ongoing investments that span teacher recruitment, preparation quality, certification standards, mentoring, and compensation. This brief traces the full arc of Texas's investments from 1999 to the present, offering lessons for Texas and other states navigating similar challenges.

Introduction

A well-prepared, stable teacher workforce is foundational for student learning and for district operational and financial stability. Teachers' levels of preparation and experience impact student achievement and long-term outcomes.[1] Conversely, high teacher turnover and attrition directly harm student learning and force school districts into a continuous and costly cycle of hiring and training new teachers.[2]

Given these outcomes, it is especially concerning that states across the country face persistent teacher shortages: About one in eight teaching positions nationally are vacant or filled by teachers who are not fully certified for their assignments. In response, states may lean on short-term fixes that bypass quality preparation, such as shortening training, reducing certification requirements, or even waiving certification outright. While these approaches may temporarily ease teacher shortages, they exacerbate teacher attrition and fuel teacher shortages in the long term. Furthermore, because teachers' decisions to enter or remain in the profession are shaped by a wide range of factors—including low and stagnant pay, high cost of preparation, and working conditions—solving ongoing teacher shortages requires comprehensive strategies that address this full range of factors, rather than focusing on a single, isolated lever.

As the state with the largest teacher workforce in the nation, Texas employs more than 377,000 public school teachers who educate over 5.4 million students across more than 1,200 local education agencies, representing one in nine teachers in the nation. In addition to its scale, Texas has the largest rural population in the nation. Its policy choices therefore carry outsized weight nationally and make it an instructive case for policymakers navigating both urban and rural contexts. As one of the first states to open its doors to for-profit alternative certification and, later, uncertified teachers, Texas has now reversed course and taken the lead in historic, comprehensive investments into quality teacher preparation and retention efforts.

This brief traces the arc of Texas's teacher workforce policies from 1999 to the present (see Figure 1), alongside the known impacts of each phase. Texas's scale, historic approach, and recent course adjustments provide critical insights into understanding the risks and consequences of short-term fixes, as well as lessons learned for Texas and other states on potential paths forward.

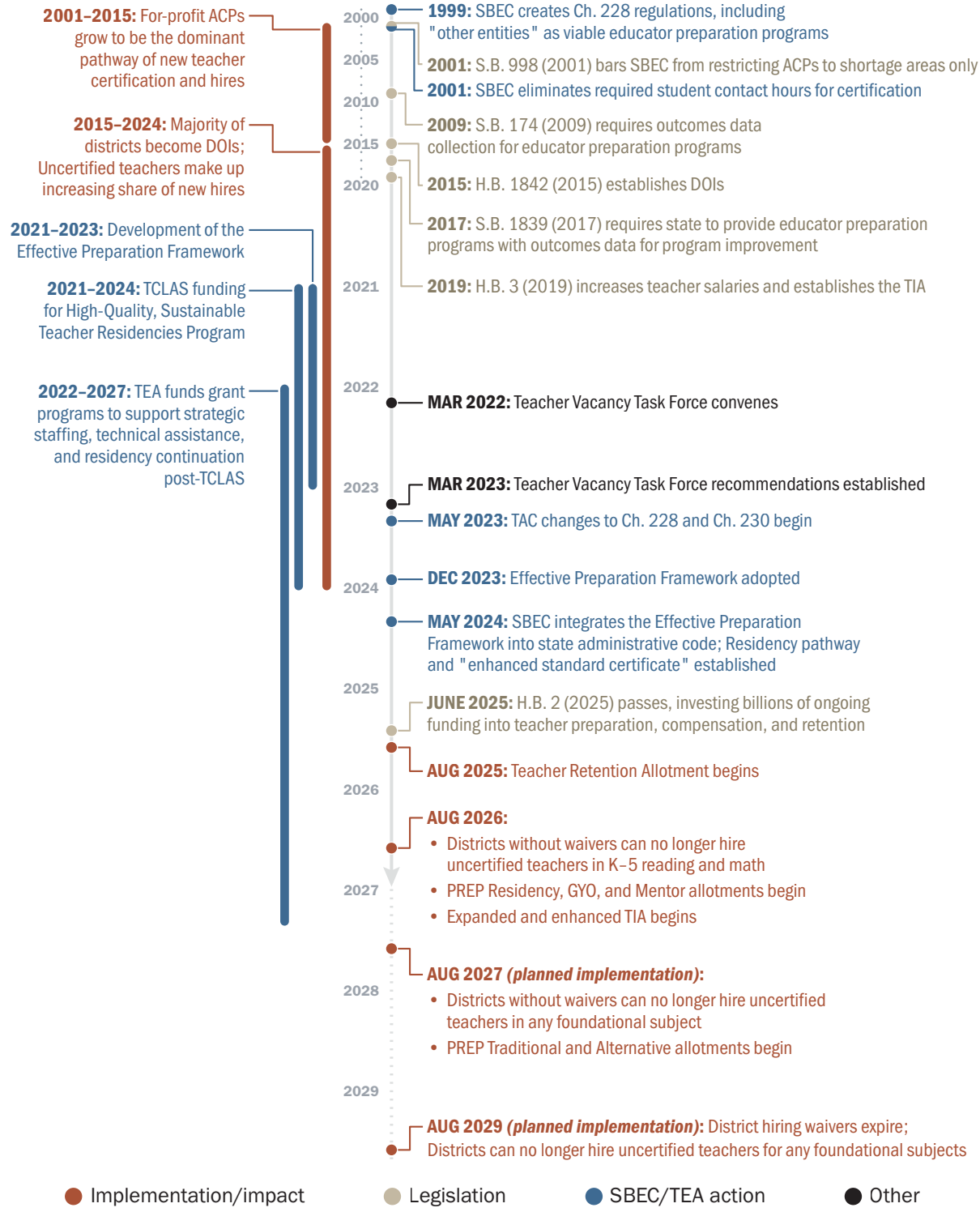
The Growth of Alternative Certification, 1999 to 2015

Following a decade of rapid enrollment growth coupled with increasing teacher attrition, Texas opened its doors to for-profit alternative certification pathways—a shift that greatly influenced the trajectory of its teacher workforce in subsequent decades.

Between 1999 and 2001, Texas made consequential changes in its educator certification pathways and regulations. In 1999, the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) created Chapter 228 of the Texas Administrative Code, which established governing rules for educator preparation programs. Included within these rules was an expanded eligibility to provide educator preparation beyond higher education institutions, school districts, and regional education service centers to include "other entities," opening the doors to new kinds of educator preparation providers. In 2000, SBEC eliminated the requirement for programs to include minimum student contact hours, meaning programs no longer needed to require student teaching or field experience prior to certification. The next year, the legislature passed S.B. 998, which barred SBEC from restricting alternative certification programs (ACPs) to only teacher shortage areas, expanding the scope and reach of ACPs.

In the decades following these changes, a rapidly expanding number of for-profit ACPs entered the state educator preparation ecosystem. During this time, the share of initial teacher certifications from for-profit programs grew sharply, eventually surpassing university programs in 2015 as the top producer of teacher certifications across the state. (See Figure 2.)

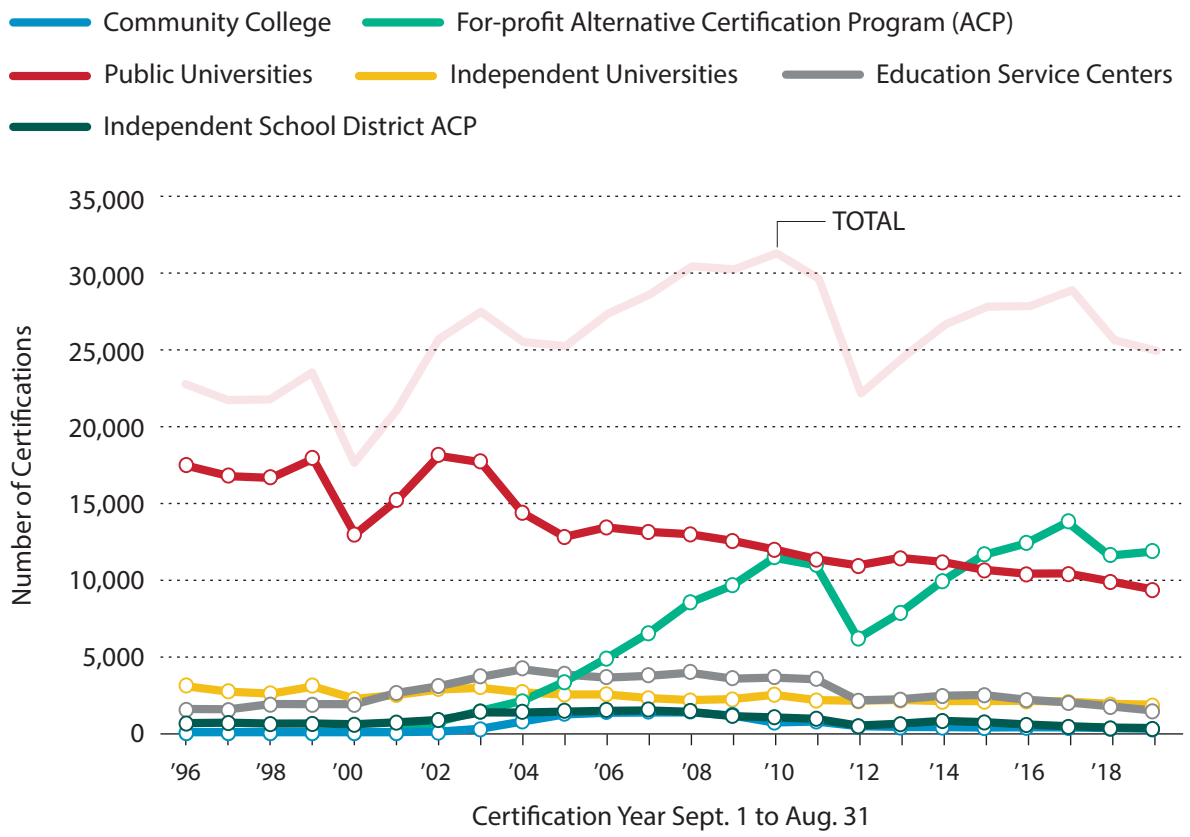
Figure 1. Timeline of Key Educator Workforce Policies and Changes in Texas, 1999 to 2026 and Beyond



Notes: ACP = alternative certification program; DOI = Districts of Innovation; GYO = Grow Your Own; H.B. = House Bill; PREP = Preparing and Retaining Educators through Partnership Program; S.B. = Senate Bill; SBEC = State Board for Educator Certification; TAC = Texas Administrative Code; TCLAS = Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports; TEA = Texas Education Agency; TIA = Teacher Incentive Allotment.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas statute and regulatory documents. (2026).

Figure 2. Texas Teacher Certifications by Preparation Pathway, 1995–96 to 2018–19



Source: Reproduced from Horn, C., Burnett, C., Lowery, S., & White, C. (2021). *Texas teacher workforce report*. (p. 88). University of Houston College of Education.

ACP certification continued to be the dominant pathway for new teacher hires in the state through 2020, and since 2019–20, for-profit ACPs have accounted for over 70% of all educator preparation enrollment in the state (though a much lower percentage of newly certified teachers). Research shows that, when compared to teachers who were certified through traditional student-teaching pathways, for-profit ACP-prepared teachers in Texas tend to produce poorer student learning outcomes and are less likely to stay in the profession over time.

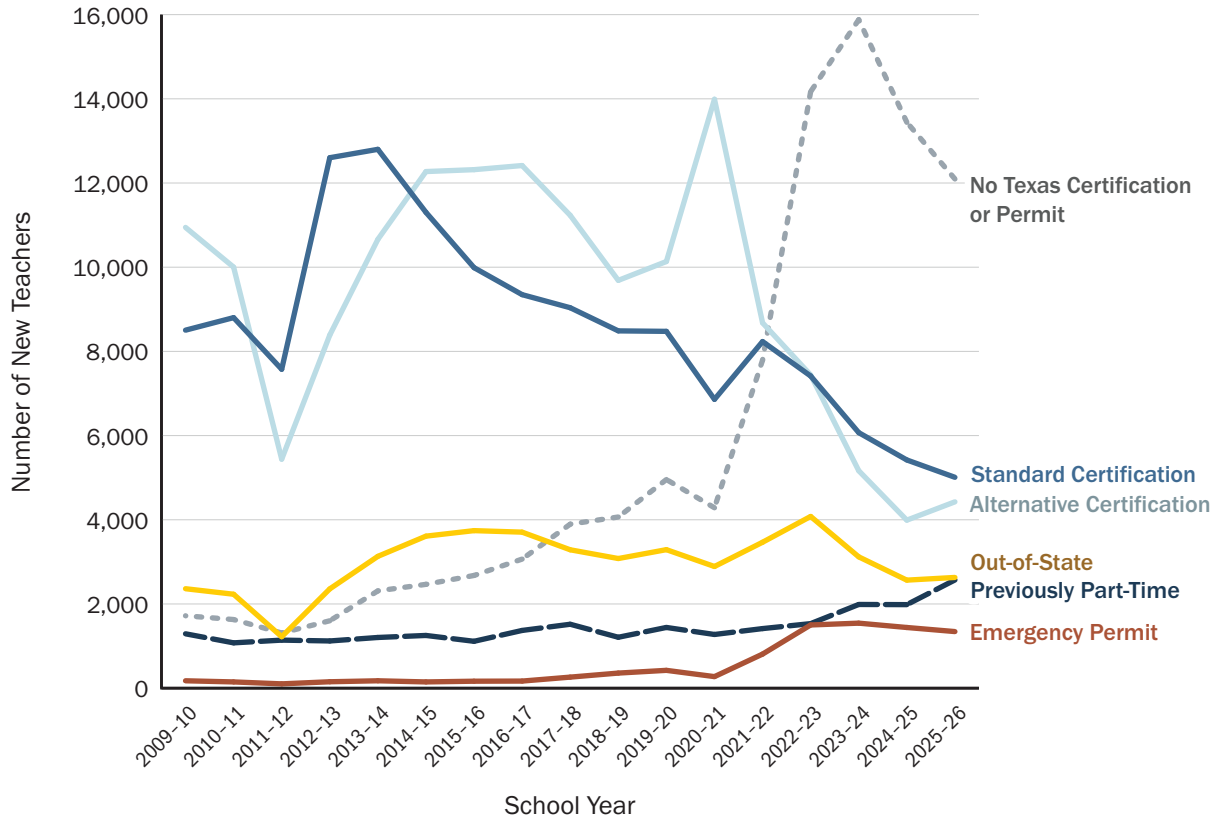
During this time, Texas attempted to address challenges in preparation program quality through policy changes that impacted statewide collection and accessibility of program outcomes data. In 2009, S.B. 174 reshaped the state's accountability system for educator preparation providers, including requiring principal surveys of first-year teachers and program completer exit surveys. S.B. 1839 (2017) further required the state to give educator preparation providers access to outcomes data for program improvement. Together, these measures expanded the state's ability to collect and act on preparation program data, which could later inform future research and policy shifts.

The Rise of Uncertified Teachers, 2015 to 2024

In 2015, H.B. 1842 established Districts of Innovation (DOI), allowing eligible school districts to submit local plans to exempt themselves from many state requirements, including the hiring of certified teachers. DOI districts quickly proliferated across the state in the following years, reaching over 95% of all traditional school districts in 2025–26, most of which included exemptions for teacher certification.

Between 2015 and 2024, uncertified teachers made up an increasing share of Texas's newly hired teachers, with the sharpest increases following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. (See Figure 3.) The share of uncertified teachers among new hires peaked in 2023–24 and 2024–25, when uncertified teachers made up almost one half of the state's new teacher hires, excluding re-enterers. In 2025–26, about 12% of the state's total teacher workforce was uncertified. Recent research in Texas has found that smaller, more rural, and higher-need districts tend to have disproportionately higher shares of uncertified teachers. Given that uncertified teachers are linked to lower levels of student achievement, this increase may compound existing opportunity gaps for student learning.

Figure 3. Newly Hired Texas Teachers by Pathway, 2009–10 to 2025–26



Note: This analysis reflects new-to-profession teachers only, excluding rehires returning to the workforce after being licensed in previous years.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of: Texas Education Agency. (2026). *Newly Certified and New Teacher Hires Dashboards*.

A Focus on Teacher Preparation, Quality, and Retention, 2019 to 2026

After 2 decades of loosening regulations and quality requirements for teacher certification, Texas continued to face high statewide attrition rates, losing about 1 in 10 of its educators annually and even more after the pandemic. The state's continued workforce challenges—paired with growing evidence on the cost of under-prepared teachers on student learning and continued teacher attrition—prompted a shift in approach: Instead of further reducing entry requirements into teaching, Texas has spent the past 7 years engaging multiple policy levers to invest in and strengthen its teacher workforce. Importantly, these levers were designed to operate as a coherent system that feeds into and reinforces itself—rather than piecemeal and disconnected initiatives. In 2025, these efforts converged into landmark legislation that simultaneously and comprehensively invests across the arc of the teacher pipeline, from recruitment through retention.

Investing in Teacher Salaries

In 2019, Texas policymakers passed H.B. 3, a sweeping education bill that invested in multiple workforce policies, including teacher salary increases, retirement contributions, and teacher mentors. When adjusted for inflation, however, these salary increases mostly restored teacher pay to where it had stood a decade earlier.

H.B. 3 also created the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA), which funded incentive pay of up to $32,000 per teacher for teachers who were designated as demonstrating success across multiple district-determined criteria. TIA includes higher rates of compensation for designated teachers in rural and higher-poverty locations. In 2025, Texas expanded TIA, increasing the number of teachers who were eligible for TIA designation and the corresponding funding rates (now up to $36,000 per teacher). The state also increased technical supports and initiated a new Enhanced TIA that funds strategic compensation systems that include both teachers and administrators.

Originally funded at $40 million in 2019–20 across 35 districts, TIA experienced lower uptake in its early years but has since scaled at a rapid rate. TIA has now provided more than $1 billion in funding to tens of thousands of teachers in more than 1,000 participating districts. Uptake was initially low in rural districts, but the rural participation rate has since caught up with the statewide rate. Furthermore, emerging research has shown promising impacts of TIA on student learning and teacher retention.

Establishing a Vision for High-Quality Preparation

Over the past decade, multiple efforts across the state have also coalesced around systemically improving and incentivizing high-quality teacher preparation pathways.

In 2021, the SBEC launched the development of the Effective Preparation Framework, which outlined guidance for educator preparation programs across five research-based, foundational levers: (1) candidate recruitment and admissions, (2) curriculum, (3) training and support, (4) progress management and candidate development, and (5) P–12 partnerships.

The same year, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) distributed more than $91 million of its Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports (TCLAS) funds into teacher residencies, where aspiring teachers spend a full school year of clinical training with an experienced mentor teacher. Between 2021 and 2024, TCLAS funded the $20,000 teacher resident stipends, district residency costs, and technical assistance for more than 85 partnerships between districts and educator preparation programs, supporting the preparation of more than 2,000 teacher residents in the state. Early research found that TCLAS supported the adoption of evidence-based best practices, leveraged preexisting residency infrastructure from early adopting educator preparation and district partners, and provided technical assistance that supported efforts to sustain paid residencies. However, many districts struggled to maintain the $20,000 teacher stipends after funding lapsed in 2024, prompting TEA to issue follow-up grants to continue supporting districts.

These efforts converged in 2024, when the state formally codified its vision for high-quality teacher preparation. Texas SBEC adopted widespread changes to state administrative code, formally incorporating the Effective Preparation Framework guidelines into preparation program regulations. Furthermore, the SBEC established a new teacher residency preparation pathway. The pathway aligns with many of the evidence-based residency features piloted in the earlier TCLAS grants, such as shared governance structures between districts and educator preparation programs, as well as a gradual progression of coteaching throughout a full school year. The state also created a new teaching certificate—the Enhanced Standard Certificate—that would be issued to teachers who were certified through the new residency pathway, making it possible to track outcomes and differentiate future policies by certification type.

Developing Comprehensive, Ongoing Teacher Workforce Investments

In 2022, Governor Greg Abbott launched the Teacher Vacancy Task Force to examine teacher retention and recruitment challenges across the state. Composed of educators and administrators, the task force issued its final report in 2023, recommending improvements to teacher compensation, preservice preparation, and mentorship structures.

These recommendations, coupled with the state's ongoing structural efforts to codify and scale high-quality teacher preparation, culminated in the passage of H.B. 2 during the 2025 legislative session. H.B. 2 is a comprehensive school funding package that invests a historic amount of ongoing funding into educator recruitment, preparation, certification, mentoring, and compensation. H.B. 2 leans on three key levers to address the state's ongoing teacher shortages: investment in preparation and mentorship, requirements and incentives for teacher certification, and increased teacher compensation.

H.B. 2 Teacher Preparation and Mentorship Investments

To support educator preparation and mentorship, H.B. 2 established the Preparing and Retaining Educators through Partnership (PREP) Program Allotment, which provides ongoing funding to five types of preparation partnership programs that are scheduled to roll out during the 2026–27 and 2027–28 school years. (See Table 1.) Notably, the preservice alternative allotment attempts to incentivize more rigorous ACP partnerships, requiring that candidates have at least 120 clock-hours of clinical training with gradually increasing instructional responsibility prior to serving as a teacher of record.

Table 1. Overview of the PREP Program Allotments

PREP program	First year of available funding	Funding per qualifying individual
Preservice Residency	2026–27	$24,000–$39,500
Grow Your Own	2026–27	$8,000–$12,000
Mentorship	2026–27	$3,000 per beginning teacher
Preservice Traditional	2027–28	$10,000–$21,500
Preservice Alternative	2027–28	$10,000–$21,500

Notes: PREP = Preparing and Retaining Educators through Partnership Program. Funding ranges are dependent upon participating districts' high-needs or rural status as well as candidate certification in bilingual or special education. Additional details on funding allocations can be found in the PREP Program Guidebook.

Source: Texas Education Agency. (2025). *H.B 2 implementation: Preparing and Retaining Educators Through Partnership Program allotment*.

PREP provides candidate and mentor teacher stipends, higher funding amounts for high-need and rural campuses, incentives for bilingual and special education certification, and success-based funding for educator preparation programs and school systems. For Grow Your Own and preservice pathways, district and educator preparation program partnerships can receive between $8,000 and $39,500 per teacher candidate. At full scale, PREP is projected to allocate $400 million annually to district and educator preparation program partnerships.

While the five PREP programs are distinct allotments, the state intentionally designed them to support the continuum of teacher recruitment, preparation, and mentorship, encouraging districts to integrate participation across all these stages as a long-term talent pipeline strategy. For example, district participation in the Grow Your Own program—which focuses on recruiting existing school employees or high school students into the teaching career—is contingent on district participation in one or more preservice pathways to support Grow Your Own candidates through their full teacher certification.

To further support and incentivize preparation pathways, H.B. 2 waives exam fees for bilingual and special education certification exams. In alignment with H.B. 2, Texas also developed a statewide mentorship training infrastructure, which delivers high-quality training to mentoring educators of teacher candidates and early-career teachers as well as campus and district leaders.

H.B. 2 Teacher Certification Requirements and Incentives

To address the proliferation of uncertified teachers in the state, H.B. 2 phases in limitations on district hiring of uncertified teachers and incentivizes this reduction through a one-time payment to districts of $1,000 per uncertified teacher hired between 2022–24 who earns a standard teaching certificate by 2026–27. By 2026–27, districts can no longer hire uncertified teachers in K–5 reading and math, and in 2027–28, this restriction extends to all foundational subjects across all grade levels. However, districts can delay this requirement with a waiver until 2029–30, and almost half of the state's districts had been approved to do so as of the beginning of the 2026–27 school year.

Furthermore, prior to H.B. 2, alternatively certified teachers with little to no preservice training and uncertified teachers were paid the same salary as their counterparts who had completed preservice preparation programs. To further incentivize certification, H.B. 2 now mandates a salary differential for new teachers: Districts must pay their certified first-year teachers more than their uncertified counterparts. Additionally, H.B. 2 allows districts to adopt a minimum salary schedule that differentiates by certification type for teachers with less than 5 years of experience.

H.B. 2 Teacher Compensation Investments

Finally, H.B. 2 further expanded TIA and created the Teacher Retention Allotment, which provides ongoing funding for school districts to directly funnel into increasing teacher compensation to encourage early-career retention. Allotments are differentiated by the size of districts, with higher amounts for school systems with 5,000 or fewer enrolled students. Beginning in 2025–26, districts began receiving $2,500 or $4,000 per classroom teacher with between 3 and 5 years of experience and $5,000 or $8,000 per classroom teacher with 5 or more years of experience.

With the compensation-related policy changes from both H.B. 3 (2019) and H.B. 2 (2025), Texas teachers now have opportunities to increase their income through certification pathways, retention allotments, and demonstrated success within their classrooms.

Conclusion

Texas's recent policy shifts mark a significant turning point in the state's approach to addressing persistent teacher shortages. After decades of lowering entry requirements into the teaching profession, Texas has emerged as a national leader in strategically engaging multiple policy and regulatory levers across the full life cycle of its educator workforce—from recruitment and quality preparation to retention and career progression. Rather than treating these as isolated fixes, the state has increasingly designed them to reinforce one another: Its investments in educator preparation feed into its mentorship, retention, and salary structures, while limitations on uncertified teachers close off the shortcuts that undercut both quality preparation and retention. Over time, stronger retention from improved preparation and mentorship should also reduce reliance on quicker, lower-quality pathways.

This story is worth learning from and monitoring. Early evidence of these shifts shows promising results, but investments of this scale—particularly with the interconnected nature of these policies—will take time to implement well. It will be important to track progress, with attention to the varied needs, resources, and capacity across Texas's many school communities. Furthermore, monitoring the effects of these policies alongside broader statewide shifts, such as declining enrollment, will also be important for understanding how these trends may shape teacher staffing over time.

As with any large-scale policy rollout, continued attention to how districts and educator preparation programs experience implementation and program requirements can inform refinements needed to sustain and scale these investments over time. The growth of TIA over the past 7 years offers an early example of how sustained investment and ongoing refinement can expand reach over time. As Texas continues this work, staying the course rather than leaning on short-term fixes will be essential to delivering lasting benefits for its students, teachers, and schools.

Endnotes

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