

Keeping Texas Competitive

A Legislator's Guide to the Issues 2013-2014



Teacher Quality & Compensation

The Issue

Research clearly shows that the quality of a student's teacher is the most important school-related factor in raising student achievement. In fact, a Tennessee study found that students with strong teachers for three consecutive years achieve 50% more than students with weak teachers. The study also found that students with strong teachers erase the achievement gap associated with race, ethnicity, and income within three to five years.

How precisely to measure teacher effectiveness is subject to some debate, as a number of factors can influence the learning quality in a classroom on a day-to-day basis. Regardless of how, ultimately a teacher's effectiveness is best determined at the local level. An administrator at his or her given school knows the staff, and the conditions the staff works in better than anyone. The state, however, does have the power to create an environment that empowers administrators to maximally encourage and reward effective teaching.

The Facts

- Becoming a teacher in Texas requires a lengthy certification process that makes it difficult for otherwise qualified individuals to enter the teaching profession.
- Texas maintains a state minimum salary schedule that encourages school districts to give annual raises to all instructors in the district based on longevity within the profession.
- As of 2010, approximately 27% of Texas teachers have a master's degree and receive an extra \$1,423 per year, equaling more than \$124.5 million spent on a method of compensation that has no correlation with higher student achievement.
- Educators in Texas are generally granted "term contracts" that serve a function similar to that which teacher tenure provides in other states.
- It is extremely difficult to dismiss ineffective teachers in Texas, as a lengthy notification and appeals process is afforded for the dismissal of any contract employee.

Recommendations

- Texas should lower barriers to entry into the teaching profession. Ideally, this would include allowing individuals with strong credentials in a pertinent subject area to get in front of a classroom in a few weeks instead of having to go through a year-long certification process.
- Eliminate Texas' minimum salary schedule and local salary schedules based on longevity to allow school officials more freedom at the local level to target resources at local needs.
- Discourage school districts from paying teachers more for possession of a master's degree.
- Remove state mandates and term contracts that make it difficult for school administrators to remove ineffective teachers from the classroom.

Resources

Teacher Effectiveness in Texas by James Golsan, Texas Public Policy Foundation (June 2012).

Short Changing our Kids: How Poor Teacher Quality and Failed Government Policy Harm Students by Brooke Dollens Terry, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Oct. 2009).

Applying Free Market Principles and Common Sense to Teacher Compensation by Brooke Dollens Terry, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Oct. 2008).

