



Chairman Huberty and Committee members, my name is Lisa Dawn-Fisher, and I represent the Texas State Teachers Association. We thank you all for the support of public education you demonstrated in the crafting of House Bill 3.

We appreciate the significant investment in public education that will benefit Texas schoolchildren now and in the future. We strongly support funding aimed at early, struggling, and English learners, but we fundamentally oppose the introduction of merit-based funding that relies upon high-stakes testing to evaluate the performance of teachers, particularly when Texas teachers earn about \$7,000 less than the national average.

## Support

**Foundation School Program.** We wholeheartedly agree with the improvements to the Foundation School Program formulas, including the substantial increase to the basic allotment. We believe this will benefit districts all across the wealth spectrum and provide flexible spending dollars that districts can use to support all school personnel.

We also support the increased funding for dual language programs, expansion of career and technology education funding to middle school grades, and efforts to improve compensatory education funding as well as the funding to extend the school year.

We are very pleased to see the strong investments in the early grades through the expansion of state support to provide full-day prekindergarten. We also welcome the introduction of the new funding weights for early learners who are educationally disadvantaged or English learners.

## Concerns

**Compensatory Education.** Although House Bill 3 holds out the promise of increased funding for compensatory education, it also shifts significant authority to the commissioner for determining exactly how eligibility for funds will be determined with no opportunity for stakeholder engagement in the development of the new five-tiered index.

The commissioner would be required to consider median household income, average educational attainment of the population, the percentage of single-parent families, the rate of home ownership, and “other economic criteria the commissioner determines likely to disadvantage a student’s preparedness and ability to learn.” If sufficient data are unavailable to evaluate a census block in any school year, the funding will be based on the current weight of 0.2.

As a result, the commissioner will have sole discretion to determine how the new index will be developed. The commissioner is only required to consider the criteria listed; there is no requirement to adopt any specific criteria, nor are there any requirements for the commissioner to engage with stakeholders. The commissioner is not directed or authorized to adopt rules related to the new index.

In addition, the availability of data necessary to create the five-tier index for rural areas of the state is limited, and the Census Bureau cautions that the data that are available have wide margins of error. As drafted, only the localities for which the data are available will be able to access the new, enriched formula weights. Localities for which the data are not available will revert to the current weight, which is

lower than all of the proposed weights for the five-tier system. In other words, urban and suburban districts are much more likely to gain access to the enriched funding than rural districts. Significantly, the bill also repeals *all* of the current requirements to spend compensatory education dollars on compensatory education services. This means that districts could divert the resources intended for struggling students to other campuses.

**Minimum salary schedule (MSS).** While we appreciate the increases to the MSS, we are concerned about the plans to bifurcate the schedule. Our classroom teachers rely upon the other professionals who support our students' needs in a learning environment, including mental and physical health support provided by our counselors and nurses, as well as the academic support provided by our librarians.

As we have stated previously, we believe that *all* of our professional staff deserve an across-the-board pay raise that brings our Texas salaries in line with the national average. We are disappointed that HB 3 falls short on this goal.

## Opposed

**Merit pay.** We are very disappointed to see a merit-pay program that requires the use of high-stakes assessments to rank and evaluate teachers. As drafted, the bill requires the performance of teachers to be ranked against the performance of teachers statewide. The only mechanism by which this can be accomplished is through the use of STAAR assessments, which is strongly opposed by TSTA. Not only do merit-based programs fail to improve teacher quality, the reliance on high-stakes assessments leaves out important components of the state's adopted curriculum that are not part of the state's assessment system.

Research studies conducted on programs implemented in Round Rock, Texas; Denver, Colorado; and New York City failed to demonstrate that incentives result in sustained improvement in student outcomes or teacher quality. The most promising findings indicate only that outcomes-based pay programs are good at teacher sorting that results in improved outcomes rather than improvements in the quality of the teacher workforce. Based on this evidence from early adopters, policymakers across the country have shifted their focus away from outcomes-based funding and instead are focusing on improving teacher quality.

We are encouraged by the narrative regarding the importance of teacher quality in the current policy conversation. Because we strongly agree that the quality of the teacher is the most important factor in determining student performance, we encourage the Committee to focus their time and resources on programs that have a solid track record of improving teacher quality, rather than pursuing a merit-pay program based on high-stakes assessments.

Research tells us that the process of pursuing and achieving certification from the National Professional Standards Board as a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) provides real and lasting improvements in teacher quality. TSTA encourages the Committee to consider investing some of the resources intended to improve teacher quality in supporting teachers who are pursuing their NBCT and rewarding those who achieve that goal.

Another body of evidence indicates that providing teachers with adequate time to plan and to collaborate with their fellow teachers produces meaningful and sustained improvements in the quality

of instruction in the classroom. While the school calendars of our international economic competitors are longer, the number of hours of instruction do not differ significantly. Instead, the extended school calendars provide teachers with time to plan and collaborate. Your proposal to fund an extended school year dovetails perfectly with providing teachers with additional time to plan and collaborate throughout the extended school year.

**Repeal of prohibition of using reading diagnostic assessments for appraisals or incentives for educators or as part of the state's accountability system:** TSTA opposes the use of any assessments to affect the appraisal or pay of educators.