

TESTIMONY  
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Senate Select Committee on Education Reform and Public School Finance  
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School Finance

TSTA would encourage this committee and ultimately the Texas Legislature to use the Special Session in April to do more than the court mandated minimum, just correcting our funding system with a revenue neutral tax swap plan. Lower property taxes are important. Greater local fiscal discretion is required. Increased revenue for public education is necessary if our schools are going to continue to improve. TSTA appreciates Sen. Shapiro and other committee members who have publicly made the point that teachers are the key to providing a quality education for our students. We agree. Even the Supreme Court mentioned stagnant teacher salaries in its decision.

A significant portion of any increased revenue ought to be directed to improving teacher salaries. This committee has heard testimony for across the board increases and for incentive based increases. At the most recent Select Committee meeting, Sen. Shapiro expressed the idea that what might be needed was a combination of a salary increase plus some incentives.

Teacher Salary Increases: Incentive Based Increases

Without getting into a debate over semantics TSTA is not opposed to many of the things the legislature has discussed using incentive money for. Extra work or extra responsibility or additional credentials ought to result in additional compensation. TSTA supports funding for teachers to work in hard to fill subject areas and hard to fill campuses. TSTA thinks the state ought to reward teachers who get National Board Certification. TSTA supports providing extra money for people who serve as mentor teachers. Mentoring has proven it will help reduce the atrocious turnover rate Texas is experiencing among our new teachers. What TSTA does object to is using a standardized test to determine even a portion of a teacher's salary. There is already an over emphasis on testing in this state and adding compensation decisions to the outcome of a high stakes test just exacerbates the problem. Teachers should not be judged on what happens on a single day in the spring anymore than legislators ought to be evaluated based on how many bills they pass on a single day of the session. A lot of things that happen before and after that one day are important in establishing the value of that teacher or that legislator.

As Dr. Hanushek reported to you earlier, incentives are a new concept in education. There is not a place you can point to and say this is where it worked well so just adopt or tweak that model. There are a number of state and local experiments being implemented. Let's wait and see if any of these incentive systems actually deliver the kind of increases in student performance you envision before we impose a plan on everyone.

A number of people have told you that an incentive pay plan should only be implemented after a satisfactory salary schedule was in place. That is especially true in Texas. As you well know, there has not been a state pay raise since 1999.

## Teacher Salary Increases: Across-the-Board Raises

According to SBEC, Texas has a shortage of certified teachers. There are 40,000-50,000 teachers each day teaching at least a portion of the day in a subject they are not certified to teach. Our students deserve better than that. Texas needs to raise teacher salaries to whatever level is necessary to provide every student with a certified teacher for every class.

Lew Solmon, in his material to the stakeholders meeting on "Understanding the Teacher Advancement Program", noted that in 2004 the average beginning teacher salary was \$31,704 whereas the average starting salary for a non-education major was \$40,472. According to TEA the average starting teacher salary in Texas in 2004-05 was \$33,775. However that figure was skewed by the 100-150 urban/suburban districts that pay even more in order to attract a quality teaching staff. I have provided each committee member with a copy of the 2005-06 TSTA Research Bulletin on teacher salaries and benefits. That shows that this school year (2005-06) 70% of the districts in Texas have a starting salary of \$30,000 or less and over 20% of the districts are trying to attract a quality teaching staff with a starting salary of \$25,000 or less.

These same districts experience some of the highest turnover rates as their teachers quickly move on to districts that do pay better or just leave the profession. According to TEA's Academic Excellence Indicator System reports, in 2004-05 182 districts, with about 180,000 students, had a teacher turnover rate of 25% or more (four small districts had a 50%+ turnover rate). 80% of those districts had a starting salary under \$30,000. Another 155 districts, with over 380,000 students, had a teacher turnover rate of 20%-25% that same year and over 70% of those districts had a starting salary of less than \$30,000. One third of the school districts in this state, teaching over half a million students, had a turnover rate among teachers of 20% or more. The common thread among these districts is that they offered low starting salaries. All our students deserve access to the best possible teaching staff. All our students deserve the continuity of a stable teaching staff.

At the other end of the salary spectrum, the maximum salary on the state minimum schedule, after 20 plus years of teaching, is about the same as the beginning salary for non-education majors cited above. There has been discussion in this committee about the automatic increases teachers get each year. Most districts either pay the state minimum or a flat dollar amount above the minimum. In those districts the annual step increases are less than the rate of inflation most years. Someone with 0-3 years of experience gets an average 2.3% increase each year; 4-6 years gets a 4.5% increase; 7-9 years gets 3.5%; 10-14 years 2.5%; and after 15 years less than a 2% increase per year. No wonder there is a retention problem among career educators.

Before any incentive plan is considered, TSTA recommends that a significant across-the-board salary increase for all teachers be enacted along with the restoration of health insurance benefits.