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*Testimony before the Texas Senate Committee on Education*

By Emily Sass

Chairman Taylor and members of the committee:

My name is Emily Sass, and I represent the Texas Public Policy Foundation, where I serve as the K-12 education policy analyst. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today.

Texans can all agree that the focus of our education resources, from the state to the local level, should be the good of Texas students. What results in better outcomes for Texas students in academic achievement and life beyond high school should constitute success for Texas education. While Texas ranks at the top nationally when our student population is split out by racial attainment, we trail the nation in overall performance. Closing that gap is critical to the future success of our economy. That task will require attracting and retaining excellent teachers for Texas students.

We suggest a simple strategy: untethering teacher compensation from teacher longevity. It doesn't matter to kids whether their teacher has been teaching for two years or twenty, or has a bachelor's degree or a doctorate. What matters to students is how effectively that teacher can help them progress and max out their potential.

Research has consistently shown that years of [teaching experience](#) (beyond the first few) and [advanced degrees](#) held by teachers bear no correlation with the actual value that teachers bring to a classroom. According to [Dr. Lori Taylor](#) of the Bush School at Texas A&M, there have been over one hundred studies examining whether a Master's degree makes a difference in academic performance; "only nine...say anything positive at all."

Districts as diverse as Dallas, Lubbock, and Bloomberg ISDs have pioneered pay systems that reward their best teachers for their effort. But currently Texas has a very different approach as its standard. The minimum pay scale sets a default pay system that communicates to current and potential teachers that the state of Texas values simple time spent over quality achieved.

Tying teacher pay to the value they bring to their classrooms and districts could be as simple as setting the teacher salary schedule to expire by the end of the 2020-21 school year. To ensure a smooth transition, the Legislature could add a hold-harmless provision for individual educator compensation through 2021-22, and a hold-harmless provision for collective educator compensation through 2022-23. This approach expands local control and allows principals and districts to work together to develop their own pay system based on their district's characteristics, rather than instituting a single state-wide policy in a state as diverse as Texas. The recent House Select Committee on Economic Competitiveness [report](#) noted that "the importance of local control for school districts was stressed with the explanation that local control granted from the state is important for hiring staff and providing a safe campus for students."

We must change the current salary schedule's implication that time spent, not value added, is Texas' chief priority to be rewarded. Texas students deserve a focus on excellence, not acceptance of average.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.