Written Testimony on the Implementation of House Bill 2 (89R)

House Public Education Committee Interim Hearing
June 1, 2026

Honorable Chair Buckley, Vice Chair Bernal, and Members of the House Public Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony related to the monitoring of House Bill 2 implementation. Philanthropy Advocates brings together nearly 60 private, community, and corporate foundations working across Texas to improve outcomes for students and equip them for lifelong economic mobility. We appreciate the opportunity to share what our member foundations are seeing from the field as HB 2 begins to take hold, what research and data reveal about the need and impact of HB2, and what is possible for students once the law is fully implemented.

HB 2 is one of the most significant state investments in public education in Texas history. With $8.5 billion in state funding, nearly $4 billion in teacher and support staff compensation, $648 million in early literacy and numeracy, $187 million in teacher preparation, and substantial new investments in special education, Additional Days School Year, and strategic investments in school funding and programs, the Legislature put significant resources behind the policy levers that move student outcomes.

With such a large and complex piece of legislation, the full effects of HB 2 will not arrive on a one-year timeline, as is the case with most education policy changes. The Teacher Retention Allotment is in its first year of payments. The Preparing and Retaining Educators through Partnership (PREP) Allotment takes effect September 1, 2026, with nearly 600 districts in all 20 Education Service Center regions planning to participate and first funding payments scheduled for October. The phased teacher certification deadlines run through the 2029-2030 school year. The new K-3 Mathematics Academies launch as a pilot in 2026-2027, with roughly 100,000 educators required to complete the academies by 2031. The phased approach to the significant policy changes in HB 2 provides the needed time for school systems to plan and adjust. This also means that the effectiveness of the policies must be considered over a longer period of time. What the legislature built in HB 2 is the foundation and the enabling conditions for stronger student outcomes and durable economic mobility. The job now is implementation, and Texas philanthropy is committed to being a constructive partner in that work, alongside the Committee, TEA, superintendents, school leaders, and educator preparation programs.

This testimony focuses on three areas of HB 2: **teacher compensation, preparation, and certification; early literacy and numeracy; and postsecondary readiness**. In each, we present the data underscoring why the investment was needed, what the bill is already beginning to do, and the indicators that will signal continued progress.

1. Teacher Compensation, Preparation, and Certification

The classroom teacher is the most important in-school factor affecting student learning, and Texas entered the 89th Session in an environment where too many teachers lacked appropriate training, supports, resources, and investment. In 2025-26, uncertified teachers made up 80%+ of new hires in 66 counties. This is up from 40 counties in the 2022-23 school year. A majority of these counties are in more rural areas of the state. Statewide, 192 of 254 counties exceeded the 47% statewide average.[1] The share of the entire Texas teaching workforce that is uncertified has more than tripled in five years, from 3.8% in 2019-2020 to 12% today.[2]

The impact shows up negatively in student learning. Research from Texas Tech finds that students assigned to a new, uncertified teacher with no prior classroom experience lose roughly four months of learning in reading and about three months in math in a single year. Texas-based analysis extends the consequences into adulthood: students with greater exposure to highly prepared teachers earn meaningfully more years after high school, and the effects are largest in rural communities.[3] The ability for students to have access to a well-trained teacher has direct implications for lifelong economic mobility.

HB 2 treats compensation, preparation, and certification as one integrated system designed to ensure every Texas student has access to a high-quality, well-prepared effective teacher.

On compensation, the new Teacher Retention Allotment delivers ongoing, formula-based raises to experienced teachers across the state, with larger raises in small and rural districts where retention pressure is most acute. Districts with fewer than 5,000 enrolled students see annual raises of $4,000 for teachers with three to four years of experience and $8,000 at five or more years. Districts above that threshold see $2,500 and $5,000. The new Support Staff Retention Allotment provides $45 per adjusted ADA to recognize the paraprofessionals, counselors, and other school personnel who support students and hold campuses together.[4] The expanded Teacher Incentive Allotment, which independent research has shown raises participating teachers' pay by more than $11,000 on average, improves student achievement, and lifts retention by nearly nine percentage points among designated teachers,[5] will allow top teachers to earn up to $36,000 in supplemental pay beginning in 2026-2027. The combined effect is a substantial and overdue signal about the value of the teaching profession in Texas.

On preparation, the Preparing and Retaining Educators through Partnership Allotment, or PREP, is the single most consequential change Texas has ever made to how the state invests in the

[1] Kirksey, J. J. (2026). Texas's uncertified teachers: Assessing the learning loss and unstable workforce left behind. Texas Tech University.

[2] Texas Education Agency, Uncertified Teacher Rates 2019-2020 through 2024-2025.

[3] Kirksey, J. J. (2024), op. cit.; Kirksey, J. J. (2025). The Economic Benefits of High-Quality Teacher Preparation in Texas. Texas Tech University.

[4] Texas Education Agency, HB 2 Implementation: Teacher Retention Allotment and Support Staff Retention Allotment.

[5] Kirksey, J. J., Lansford, T., Crevar, A. R., & Mansell, K. E. (2024). From Incentive to Impact: The Texas Teacher Incentive Allotment's Path to Improved Retention and Achievement. Texas Tech University.

preparation and certification of teachers. PREP supports districts to recruit, prepare, and mentor teacher candidates through evidence-based pathways: Grow Your Own programs, paid residencies, traditional preservice student teaching, alternative preservice models, and new-teacher mentoring. Funding is differentiated by the rigor and quality of the pathway and weighted for rural, high-needs, bilingual, and special education contexts.

The early signal from the field is unmistakable. In its first LASO Cycle 4 awards for the 2026-2027 school year, PREP has reached approximately 577 school districts across all 20 Education Service Center regions, with awards spanning the smallest rural ESCs and the largest metropolitan ones.[6] That number will change during the May 2026 Verification of Participation window, when districts confirm or opt out of specific PREP programs, but the breadth of early uptake confirms what we have heard directly from districts and educator preparation programs across the state: when Texas funds evidence-based teacher preparation, districts are ready to use it. The research supporting this design is equally clear. First-year teachers who complete a paid residency in Texas are as effective as fifth-year teachers in reading, and students gain the equivalent of one to two extra months of math learning per year, fourth through ninth grade, when taught by university-certified teachers.[7] House Bill 2 funds these models at scale Texas and provides the incentive structure and funding needed to make a variety of high-quality preparation pathways a viable pathway for teacher candidates.

On certification, HB 2 closes the local exemption that had allowed school districts to bypass teacher certification requirements through their local innovation plans. The phase-in is staggered to provide districts with a reasonable runway while ensuring that Texas schools provide student with strong foundation in literacy and numeracy. This phased approach requires that K-5 reading and math teachers must be certified starting in 2026-2027; the remaining core subject teachers in K-12 reading, math, science, and social studies must be certified by 2027-2028; and districts that need additional time can submit a transition plan to certify all core subject teachers before the start of the 2029-2030 school year. The Teacher Certification Incentive, a one-time $1,000 payment to districts for each first-year teacher hired in 2022-2023 or 2023-2024 who was uncertified on January 1, 2025, remains continuously employed, and earns a standard certificate by the end of 2026-2027, provides districts with the financial incentives to train up their current staff working in the classroom and get them certifies. New pay differentiation for certified beginning teachers and the expanded mentor allotment complete the package.

Early signs are encouraging. Statewide teacher attrition has declined from a post-pandemic peak of 13.5% in 2022-2023 to 12.1% in 2025-2026. The share of uncertified teachers in the workforce has plateaued. Enrollment in university-based teacher preparation programs is increasing, after multiple years of decline.[8]These trends precede the full activation of HB 2's compensation and

[6]Texas Education Agency, LASO Cycle 4 Selection List

[7]Bastian, K. C., Fuller, S. C., & Otte, A. (2024). Paid Residency Programs in Texas: Initial Impacts on Student Achievement and Teacher Retention; Texas Educator Preparation Pathways Study (2022), University of Texas at Austin and Educate Texas, available via the Learning Policy Institute.

[8] TEA Commissioner presentation to SBOE April 2026

preparation provisions and reflect, in part, the cumulative effect of investments Texas has been making for years. HB 2 is positioned to accelerate the turn as PREP funding flows in October 2026, pay differentiation takes effect, and the staggered certification deadlines reach the districts that have leaned hardest on uncertified hires. **The next three to five years will see the pipeline composition shift in earnest, and the leading indicators are already moving in the right direction.**

Texas grantmakers are providing access to coaching and peer-to-peer cohorts to school districts to ensure awareness and understanding of HB 2's teacher preparation policies. This support is accelerating implementation of the teacher preparation programs as outlined in HB 2. Further, grantmakers are supporting rural schools in accessing start-up capital to provide the required match necessary to access state funding. These privately funded strategies are accelerating the impact of policies passed in HB 2.

2. Early Literacy and Numeracy

Texas has been working on early literacy and numeracy as a sustained, multi-year priority, and the data show both the scale of what remains and the reality of recent progress. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) makes the long-term challenge visible: Texas's 2024 fourth-grade reading scores fell to their lowest point since 1994, and eighth-grade reading hit its lowest level in the history of the assessment, with Texas ranking 37th nationally in fourth-grade reading and 44th in eighth-grade reading.[9] These results reflect a national post-pandemic challenge that every state is still working through.

Texas's own most recent state assessment data show the strategy beginning to bend the curve. 2025 STAAR results show third-grade reading proficiency at the Meets level climbing from 48% to 52%, third-grade math from 42% to 46%, and fifth-grade reading reaching a new high of 58%. Across all grades, more than half of Texas students are now on grade level in reading.[10] These gains are the cumulative effect of Texas's investments in Reading Academies, full-day Pre-K, the science of reading, and the educator preparation reforms that began before HB 2 and that HB 2 now scales and accelerates. Both NAEP and STAAR are telling parts of the same story: a state with significant ground to cover and a strategy that is starting to work.

HB 2 builds on the existing foundation in four ways.

First, the bill takes the model of the Teacher Literacy Achievement and creates Reading Intervention Academies, as well as parallel Mathematics Achievement and Interventionist Academies. Now, K-3 math teachers must complete the academies by 2030-2031. TEA estimates approximately 100,000 educators will need to complete the new math academies by that deadline.

[9]National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2024 results; Texas state profile via NCES; Texas 2036, NAEP Results: Reading and Math Scores in Texas Cause Concern.

[10]Texas Education Agency, 2024-2025 TAPR State Report.

The structure is built on the lessons of the reading academies: fewer hours with prioritized content, deep ties to classroom practice, and job-embedded coaching. PREP funds candidate completion of the academies during preservice preparation, ensuring that the next generation of K-3 teachers arrives in the classroom already trained.

Second, HB 2 establishes the Early Literacy and Numeracy Instruments for kindergarten through grade three. School districts will administer commissioner-approved screeners at multiple points across the school year, with the explicit goal of identifying students at risk of not meeting grade-level expectations on the third-grade STAAR. This brings to mathematics the same diagnostic discipline that has driven reading gains, and it ensures that struggling readers and struggling math learners are identified well before third grade, when the cost of catching up grows steeply.

Third, the bill requires Early Literacy Intervention for any student whose results on two consecutive reading screeners indicate they are at risk. The requirements are specific and evidence-based: targeted instruction in foundational literacy skills, consistent intervention providers, instructional materials designed for intervention, and protected time that does not pull students from core curriculum or recess.

Fourth, the bill provides students below grade level in Reading in 1st-3rd grade with funding to access additional tutoring outside of the classroom. These $400 grants ensure that struggling students can access needed supports before they fall too far behind. These grants will roll out for the first time with results of the 2026 3rd Grade STAAR results, with eligible students able to apply for funding in the fall.

Reading on grade level by the end of third grade is a significant predictor of high school graduation, postsecondary completion, and lifetime earnings.[11] Texas-based analysis of nationally representative longitudinal data finds that early math skills are an even stronger predictor of long-term earnings than early literacy, with improvements to a child's math performance through age twelve producing the largest gains in age-30 earnings of any well-being lever tested.[12] The Committee's investment of $648 million in early literacy and numeracy is poised to be among the highest-return investments Texas has made.

At the same time, an implementation timing concern deserves the Committee's attention. While the policy framework for the new K-3 literacy and numeracy screeners is in statute, districts are not required to implement the commissioner-adopted instruments until the 2027-2028 school year. That delay postpones diagnostic identification and the required interventions for K-3 students who could benefit from them now. While the agency is rolling out the supplemental tutoring funding this year, the delay of the literacy instruments adoption means that many struggling K-3 students will not get the support and service that they are entitled to. We raise this not as a criticism of the bill's

[11]Hernandez, D. J. (2011). *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Students not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are roughly four times more likely to leave school without a diploma
[12]Werner, K., Acs, G., & Blagg, K. (2024). *Comparing the Long-Term Impacts of Different Child Well-Being Improvements*. Urban Institute. Among childhood interventions tested in the Social Genome Model, improving math skills produced the largest gains in age-30 earnings, with the impact growing through age 12.

design or TEA, understanding the significant volume of implementation and rulemaking that they are currently navigating, but as constructive observations from the field. The urgency the Legislature built into HB 2 has not yet fully translated into urgency in the classroom for the students who need it most this year, and accelerating that implementation is among the most consequential things the Committee, TEA, and districts can do in the coming months.

Over the next two years, the new K-3 numeracy infrastructure will stand up alongside the literacy infrastructure that is already producing results. Math academy enrollment will accelerate toward the 2030-2031 deadline. The new screening and intervention requirements will reach every K-3 classroom. And the third-grade reading and math STAAR results will continue to reflect the cumulative effect of Texas's investment in foundational skills, with the largest opportunity for gains concentrated among economically disadvantaged students and emerging bilingual students, where significant gaps have persisted.

In addition to providing foundational supports in K-3, HB 2 made some significant changes to Pre-K that are worth applauding, while also carefully monitoring as they are being implemented.

First, the legislation expanded Pre-K eligibility to include the children of teachers in the school district where the parent teaches. This expansion does two things at once: it brings more students into free, high-quality early education, and it removes the cost of private childcare or private Pre-K from educators' household budgets. For teachers weighing whether to stay in the classroom against the pressure of family costs, that benefit provides real flexibility and reinforces the broader teacher retention investments HB 2 makes.

Second, the legislation changed how funding for Pre-K flows to districts, ensuring that those offering Pre-K have designated state funding for the second half of full-day Pre-K 4. By directing the Early Education Allotment to fund that second half first, the state has given districts certainty that they will have full state funding for Pre-K 4, rather than having to redirect resources from other priorities.

The change does, however, raise a structural concern that will matter for future conversations about expanding Pre-K eligibility. The Early Education Allotment is generated by the enrollment of economically disadvantaged and emergent bilingual students in kindergarten through third grade, not by Pre-K enrollment. Expanding Pre-K eligibility would not grow the allotment. Rather, expansion would draw a larger share of the same fixed pool toward Pre-K and decrease the funding available to support the K-3 students whose enrollment generates the allotment in the first place. If Texas chooses to expand Pre-K eligibility in a future session, the finance formula will need to be adjusted first so that funding for Pre-K is generated by Pre-K enrollment or attendance, not by the size of the K-3 student population the Early Education Allotment is meant to support.

Last, HB 2 reshapes the structure of Pre-K in Texas, creating a new role for intermediaries and elevating public-private Pre-K partnerships as a central expansion strategy. The partnership model has real promise: high-quality community-based providers can reach families that traditional school-site Pre-K does not, and a well-resourced intermediary infrastructure can accelerate the

spread of evidence-based practice across districts and providers. We encourage the Committee to monitor the rollout with that opportunity in mind, and with one specific caution. HB 2 restricts school districts from offering tuition-based Pre-K seats to families not eligible for free Pre-K, and thousands of Texas families currently rely on those tuition seats as the most affordable Pre-K option in their community. We hope to see partnerships stand up at scale in response to the legislation, but building that partnership capacity takes time, and a near-term reduction in district-offered tuition seats could leave working families without an affordable Pre-K option in the interim. The intent of HB 2 is to expand access to high-quality early learning, and the Committee, TEA, and districts have a meaningful opportunity to ensure the partnership rollout keeps pace with that intent.

3. Postsecondary Readiness

The economic case for HB 2's postsecondary provisions is direct. By 2031, 63% of jobs in Texas will require a credential or training beyond a high school diploma.[13] Today, only 25% of Texas eighth graders earn that credential within six years of graduating high school, and just 16% of economically disadvantaged students do.[14] Texas has established the goal of 60% postsecondary credential attainment among working-age Texans (25 to 64) by 2030, a target carried forward from 60x30TX into the current Building a Talent Strong Texas plan.[15] HB 2 ensures that high schools are set up to be a critical driver of credential attainment for Texas students.

Three provisions deserve particular attention.

First, HB 2 elevates workforce readiness and postsecondary readiness without remediation to Public Education Academic Goals 5 and 6. The state's academic goals shape what the state invests in, districts measure, what counselors emphasize, and what the accountability system rewards. Adding these two goals to statute brings the front end of public education into formal alignment with the longitudinal outcomes Texas needs.

Second, the bill requires TEA to post ten years of data showing where graduates ended up. Postsecondary enrollment, persistence, completion, employment, occupation, and earnings will be available by district, campus, and program. The same data flows into the College, Career, and Military Readiness plans that boards of trustees adopt and report on annually. For the first time, every Texas school board and every high school counselor will be able to see, in their own community, which programs and pathways produced strong outcomes for graduates. That transparency is the engine of continuous improvement, and it positions the College, Career, and

[13] Carnevale, A. P. et al. (2023). After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031, Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce; Texas state-level analysis by Texas 2036, Making Texas High Schools Career Ready.

[14] Texas A&M System Data Science, Failing to Finish: Tracking the 8th Grade Cohort in Texas; The Plight of Economically Disadvantaged Students in the 8th Grade Cohort. Texas Talent Trajectory (T3) data.

[15] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Building a Talent Strong Texas.

Military Readiness metric, which already carries significant weight across all three domains of the A-F accountability system, to drive better decisions on the ground. While this is still being developed and is not yet available, we believe that outcome transparency and reporting will better equip districts, counselors, and school board members to make data driven decisions that benefit students.

Third, HB 2 expands two proven models. The per-student allotment for students enrolled in or completing a Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) program, or a Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership (R-PEP), triples from $50 to $150. The R-PEP funding cap rises from $5 million to $20 million per year, finally matching demand. The career and technical education facility allotment rises from $100 million to $150 million, with new authority for renovations targeting high-cost, undersubscribed CTE programs. Districts can subsidize up to two industry certification attempts per student. P-TECH and R-PEP students attain dual credit and industry-based credentials at significantly higher rates than their peers, and the bill positions both models to scale.[16]

These provisions reinforce the central economic story of the next decade in Texas. The state's prosperity will be determined by whether the next generation arrives in the labor market with the skills and credentials employers actually demand. HB 2 takes meaningful steps toward that future while preserving local control over how districts and their industry and higher education partners build the pathways that fit their regions.

The postsecondary outcomes data infrastructure, P-TECH and R-PEP program growth, and district and state goal setting will each produce signals on different timelines, but each provides a measurable lever the Committee, TEA, and districts can track year over year. Most importantly, the new transparency will give every Texas community visibility into where their graduates ended up and what produced strong outcomes, which is the foundation for the kind of continuous improvement the state has lacked at scale.

Closing

HB 2 is the right framework and investment at the right time. By taking an integrated approach across the teacher workforce, early literacy and numeracy, and college and career readiness, the bill aligns the highest-leverage policy levers in public education behind a single coherent strategy. The early implementation signals are on pace: PREP awards are on track to reach districts in every ESC region, and the pre-HB 2 trendlines on attrition and early literacy give the state a base to build from. The policy foundation is sound, and the conditions to compound progress across all three pillars are now in place. Other elements of HB 2, particularly the K-3 screening and intervention

[16] Texas 2036, Pathways to Rural Careers in Texas

infrastructure, are running behind the urgency the bill anticipates, and accelerating implementation could ensure that struggling student receive the supports they need sooner.

The work ahead is implementation and execution, and this will take years. Many of the most important provisions will show their full effects in three, five, and ten years. While this type of investment will take time to demonstrate its ROI, it is critical for the long-term success of students, schools, and the state. The Committee's monitoring role across this interim and beyond is critical, and Texas philanthropy is committed to being a constructive partner: supporting implementation at the local level, funding research to understand impact, surfacing what we learn from the field, sharing data, and accelerating what works.

Thank you again for your leadership and for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

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