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2021 Proposed Interim Charges For Senate Education

Recommendation #1 UNFINISHED LEARNING

Monitor and analyze the implementation of state and school system policies to address the learning recovery of all public school students, especially those disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including:

(i) Examining the ongoing use of **federal ESSER funds** at the state and school system level

(ii) Reviewing agency implementation and school system best practices to accelerate student learning, including implementation of **HB 4545 (87R)**

(iii) Examining efforts to expand student access to technology and internet connectivity, including implementation of HB 5 (87R)

(iv) Studying effective state and school system strategies to meet students' mental health needs while supporting their academic development, including implementation of the Safe and Supportive School Program under **SB 11 (86R)**

RATIONALE

Students of color (74%) and students from low-income backgrounds (61%) make up the growing majority in Texas public schools.[1] Our ability to recover and prosper as a state depends on their success and on our collective ability to ensure Texas schools provide high-quality learning opportunities for all students.

Due to the failure of our education systems, fourth grade reading and eighth grade math proficiency rates for Texas students from low-income backgrounds were less than half the rate of their peers from higher-income backgrounds before the pandemic. And regardless of family income, proficiency rates for Black and Latino students were about half the rate of their White and Asian peers before the pandemic.[2]

Based on initial 2020-21 STAAR data, these gaps in learning opportunities for Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds only widened as a result of the pandemic, regardless of whether they received primarily remote or in-person instruction.[3]

In response to the pandemic, the federal government has provided three rounds of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to states and school systems. Texas has received a total of $19.2 billion, including $2.2 billion to allocate to school systems specifically to address students' unfinished learning through summer, extended learning and after-school programs. This unprecedented federal investment, along with $664 million in state funds, provides the Legislature with an opportunity to identify strategies to address students' immediate needs — and to close opportunity gaps that have persisted for far too long

1 Texas Education Agency, Snapshot 2019 Summary Tables, Snapshot 2019: State Totals, 2019-2020.
2 U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2019.
3 Texas Education Agency (July 2021), 2021 STAAR Analysis, https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/2021-staar-analysis-presentation.pdf

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Recommendation #2 HB 3 MONITORING

Monitor and analyze the implementation of HB 3 (86R), examining the outcomes, strategic investments, and best practices related to:

(i) the **Early Education Allotment**, including districts' allocations of funds to improve performance in reading and mathematics for K-3 students and expand full-day PreK to eligible four-year-olds

(ii) the **Dual Language Allotment**, including district strategies to increase the number of students benefiting from dual language immersion programs and align to the state strategic plan authorized by SB 560 (87R)

(iii) **Reading Academy training**, including districts' efforts to incorporate complementary curriculum and teacher supports

(iv) the **Teacher Incentive Allotment**, including evidence of more equitable distribution of and expanded impact of effective educators

(v) **CCMR Outcomes Bonus Funding**, including which districts and student groups are generating funding and how districts are using funds to expand access to advanced coursework and quality advising

RATIONALE

The historic investment of HB 3 passed by the 86th Legislature and maintained by the 87th Legislature must continue to be monitored to assess its ultimate impact on student outcomes, with a particular focus on strategies designed with the intent of closing long-standing opportunity gaps.

Together, the creation of the Early Education Allotment, the addition of the Dual Language Allotment, and required Reading Academy training for elementary educators were established with the promise of setting a strong early foundation for students' long-term academic progress. Given dramatic enrollment declines in early grades during the pandemic, it is critical for the Legislature to identify best practices and complementary policies to maximize the impact of these investments.

The Teacher Incentive Allotment was established with the understanding that access to high-quality teachers, especially in schools where they are needed most, can dramatically improve student performance. The 87th Legislature reaffirmed this understanding by including the assignment of a certified master, exemplary, or recognized teacher as a strategy for accelerating instruction under HB 4545. As more school systems are approved to participate in TIA, the Legislature should identify best practices and complementary policies to ensure the retention, equitable distribution, and extended impact of designated teachers.

The College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) Outcomes Bonus was designed to bolster school system efforts to better support all students' postsecondary access and success, particularly students from low-income backgrounds and students with special needs. Preliminary Fall 2021 data shows that statewide undergraduate enrollment has declined by 4.2% compared to Fall 2019, primarily due to a 10.7 decline among 2-year colleges.[4] These CCMR Outcomes Bonuses are increasingly critical to ensure students are prepared and supported to succeed after high school. The Legislature should continue to monitor agency implementation and school system best practices to ensure funds are being used to expand postsecondary opportunities for students and close gaps within and across districts, including access to advanced coursework (8th grade Algebra 1, Advanced Placement, dual credit) and quality college advising.

4 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, "Preliminary Fall 2021 Texas Higher Ed Enrollment Data," http://www.txhighereddata.org/index.cfm?objectid=58428080-32B7-11EC-85120050560100A9

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Recommendation #3 TEACHER WORKFORCE

Monitor and study the impact of the pandemic on the state's teacher workforce, as well as state and district strategies to improve the recruitment, preparation and retention of diverse, high-quality educators, including:

(i) Examining available trends and data gaps related to the quality and diversity of teacher candidates, experience and retention

(ii) Identifying promising programs and partnerships improving the quality and diversity of the teacher pipeline, including high-quality teacher residency programs and other "grow your own" initiatives

(iii) Monitoring the impact of SB 3 (872) on the perception of the teaching profession among current and aspiring educators

RATIONALE

The teaching profession in Texas is at a pivotal moment. Prior to the pandemic, participation in educator preparation programs (EPPs) had not recovered to pre-recession levels, dropping to a 20-year low in 2018.[5] This shortage of qualified and effective teachers in key subject areas and regions of our state has disproportionately impacted those who most need access to them: low-income students, students of color, English Learners and students with special needs. Despite the increasing diversity of the state's workforce and research demonstrating the positive benefits of a teacher workforce that reflects the student body,[6] the certification of new Black and Latino educators has not substantially increased.

Based on initial reporting from school systems,[7] the pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges as the teacher pipeline gets further squeezed at both ends. Rising retirements, health concerns, and unfavorable working conditions are likely to fuel increased turnover, even among our most experienced and effective educators, while financial insecurity limits access to high-quality preparation pathways for aspiring educators. At a time when Texas students will require even more support to make up for unfinished learning resulting from the pandemic, the Legislature should explore promising practices and potential policy actions to ensure every child in Texas has access to great teachers now and in the future.

5 University of Houston College of Education, Center for Research, Evaluation and Advancement of Teacher Education (CREATE) and Education Research Center (ERC), "Assessing the Effectiveness of Texas Educator Preparation Programs," https://uh.edu/education/research/institutes-centers/erc/reports-publications/deans-report-epp-july-2020.pdf

6 Johns Hopkins University, "Black Students Who Have One Black Teacher More Likely to Go to College," https://releases.jhu.edu/2018/11/12/black-students-who-have-one-black-teacher-more-likely-to-go-to-college/

7 Texas Tribune, "The pandemic's toll on educators has made Texas' teacher shortage worse," https://www.texastribune.org/2021/09/09/texas-teachers-shortage-covid-19/

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Recommendation #4 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Examine the impact of current attendance policy and the impact of attendance on student outcomes, as well as promising policy solutions to support positive student engagement and learning outcomes, including:

(i) The current Average Daily Attendance system and resulting disparate impacts on school system funding

(ii) Evidence-based strategies and policies at the school system and state level, including student count methods and related accountability frameworks, to reduce chronic absenteeism and improve student learning outcomes

RATIONALE

In 2020-21, as a result of the pandemic, statewide student enrollment decreased by 2.2%, the first time enrollment has declined since TEA began collecting this data. Of those enrolled last year, nearly 4 in 10 students received remote asynchronous instruction, leaving questions about their level of engagement.8 And even before the pandemic, chronic absenteeism was on the rise for the three previous years, exceeding 12% in 2019.9

With the pandemic forcing districts to reimagine what a school day looks like, the different platforms in which students can engage in learning, and the current digital divide, now is the time for the Legislature to examine the impact of current state attendance policy and explore evidence-based strategies to improve student attendance, engagement and learning.

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