

### Session: Commissioner Morath's Comments and Q&A

The Commissioner thanked Task Force members for volunteering to serve, reviewed the Task Force charge, and mentioned TEA staff has been working to synthesize stakeholder input to improve our ability to recruit, support, and retain teachers.

The Commissioner shared that he visited Uvalde twice last week and that families, students, teachers, principals should not have to experience what they are going through. He mentioned TEA is committed to providing as much support as possible to prevent this from happening anywhere else.

The Commissioner shared that TEA is working with ESC Region 20 to provide resources to identify and provide case management supports to students in need. The Commissioner provided an overview of the Safe and Supportive Schools Program and the Texas School Mental Health Website and resources available. He mentioned that these resources are part of the broader conversation in Texas about how to support students and teachers.

The Commissioner mentioned that this Task Force is critical to finding solutions that can help improve the health of the teaching profession and results for students. He reviewed data related to teacher vacancies, which included slides 7-18 of his PowerPoint presentation. Included in his key points:

- Teachers are the single most important in-school factor impacting student outcomes. (Slide 7)
- More teachers are employed today in Texas than ever before. The number of teachers is a function of how many students we have, but it is not a direct relationship. (Slide 8)
- The teacher employment count remains high, even while statewide student enrollment has declined during COVID. (Slide 9)
- The percentage of college students interested in teaching is declining, unlike other professions. (Slide 10)
- The rate of teacher retention has worsened during COVID; teacher retention improved at the beginning of the pandemic, but significantly declined during the middle of the pandemic. TEA does not collect real-time retention data, though districts have this information. (Slide 11)
- Retirement reporting to TRS provides more regular data. Teacher retirements increased in the 2020-21 school year but appear to be tracking closer to average during the 2021-22 school year. (Slide 12)

The Commissioner described three conditions that impact perceptions of teaching and the difference between teaching and individuals' preferred profession: pay, working conditions, and training and development. Key points from his remarks are included below. (Slides 14-15)

#### Teacher Pay Key Points

- Median teacher salaries have increased over the last five years. Today, the median salary is above \$60,000 (as of the 2021-22 school year). The total number of teachers employed has increased as has the median salary. (Slide 16)
- The Texas legislature has consistently increased funding for public education since school year 2011-12. There has been a 20% increase in per pupil funding since school year 2011-12, though there has not been the same percentage increase in teacher salaries. Student-to-teacher ratios may help explain this. Today, Texas has the lowest student-to-teacher ratio than it has ever had and employs more

teachers than it ever has. Administrators across the state are faced with challenging budget decisions such as whether they should invest in hiring more educators or providing current staff raises with their budget. (Slide 17)

#### Teacher Training Key Points

- Since teacher training was discussed in depth during the first Task Force meeting, the Commissioner acknowledged that while important and relevant to teacher vacancy discussions, it would not be discussed in depth during this meeting.

#### Working Conditions: Classroom Management & Behavior Supports, Instructional Resources, Time

- Many teachers are overwhelmed with all they must accomplish in the day. The stressors include the number of student expectations (SEs) the length of the workday, limited job-embedded planning, and minimal breaks. COVID has made this worse with a lack of substitutes, more students behind academically, and more students with behavioral issues. (Slide 21)
- The Commissioner shared a typical elementary schedule, noting that many self-contained elementary teachers teach more than five hours per day. He noted that teachers also have many non-instructional duties (e.g., taking students to recess and lunch), which can equal almost two hours daily. This architecture requires teachers to work on weekends and after hours or teach without the proper planning and preparation. However, it does not need to be this way. (Slide 22)
- As a comparison, teachers in some other countries (South Korea, Japan, and Singapore) spend 65% of their working schedule giving instruction, compared to 83% in the U.S. (Slide 23)
- The Commissioner shared an example of what an alternative elementary schedule could look like in Texas, including deliberate shifts: students receive PE every day, an art every day, and two recesses per day. This creates a different experience for teachers and students (Slide 24).
- There are current examples of these types of schedules in Texas. Longview ISD has an example of this. Some small rural schools have adjusted to a 4-day school week, though this might not be a feasible solution in all areas. (Slide 25)
- Moving towards these alternative schedules would require both changes in staffing patterns and budget. Ultimately, some of the changes would require sufficient teaching assistants, which would require trade-offs. There would also be some academic considerations such as ensuring the instructional materials would support covering the content well in the time available. (Slide 26).
- Cross-curricular alignment could help address some of the academic concerns; high quality instructional materials must be made universally available to cover the TEKS while being delivered in efficient content blocks that balance instruction and planning time for teachers (Slide 28)
- Currently, teachers are not consistently provided access to high quality instructional materials, requiring them to fill gaps. This places incredible strain on the teachers. Part of the solution lies in the instructional resources provided to teachers. Schools in Texas have made instructional changes, calendaring changes, and instructional materials changes to address these challenges. (Slides 30-31)
- Many teachers also report that inadequately addressed discipline and behavior issues contribute to poor working conditions. A decline in referrals does not necessarily mean improvements in the classroom environment. There are two reasons we might have declines: (1) MTSS and supports for

students have improved or (2) referrals do not happen as they should, and teachers are asked to “deal with it” in their classrooms. (Slide 31)

The Commissioner wrapped up his comments and invited questions from the group.

A Task Force member shared a positive response to the alternate schedule the Commissioner presented to the group and shared that this type of schedule might allow for some teachers to focus on delivering instruction while others could focus on developing content, which in some cases, would allow class sizes to increase. A different Task Force teacher member shared that the numerous requirements and time demands were especially true for Special Education teachers and urged the group to consider how alternative schedules could impact special education teachers as well. Several Task Force members shared that they weren’t seeing the lower class size ratios in their classrooms or districts. A Task Force member shared that their district has been discussing alternative class sizes and compensation models and have found that their teachers, for the most part, are open to small increases in class sizes of two to three students to support teacher pay raises. The Commissioner responded to these comments that it is helpful to think about the master scheduling changes needed at secondary versus elementary schools, and that there are different considerations and financial implications for scheduling changes in different contexts. He also shared that there is a high degree of variance in student-to-staff ratios and a high level of specialization needed in some teaching roles or contexts, which also impacts the ratios of students to teachers.

Deputy Commissioner Oeser shared that the Commissioner will be joining future Task Force meetings and thanked him for his time. The Task Force took a 15-minute break.