

**Date: March 10, 2022**

**Time: 8:30am – 3:00pm**

Task Force Members Present: Andrew Kim, Ashley Osborne, Bernadette Gerace, Brandon Chandler, Brandon Enos, Casey Morgan, Chane Rascoe, Chris Tatum, Christie Volmer, Dave Lewis, Diana Barrera Ugarte, Greg Rodriguez, Roland Hernandez, Jason Hewitt, Judd Marshall, LaTonya Goffney, Leah Tunnell, Marilyn Cook, Melina Recio, Melissa Morales, Narciso Garcia, Norma Castillo, Richard Cooper, Rick Rodriguez, Roland Toscano, Rosy Vega-Barrio, Sherry Taylor

Staff Members Present: Allison Friedlander, Emily Garcia, Grace Wu, Iván Nieves, Jack Reed, Jessica McLoughlin, Kelvey Oeser, Lizette Ridgeway, Mark Olofson, Mike Morath, Sydney Gaitan

Invited Panelists Present: Amy Campbell, Karen Salerno

### **Session: Welcome, Introductions, and Logistics**

Deputy Commissioner Kelvey Oeser welcomed the Teach Vacancy Task Force (Task Force) members and shared the charge of the Task Force, agenda for the meeting, potential topics for future meetings, and norms for group participation. Task Force members shared introductions using the chat function, and a couple of Task Force members shared additional details with the group about why they were interested in joining the Task Force.

### **Session: Teacher Vacancy Task Force Charge and Q&A**

Commissioner Mike Morath shared an overview of statewide student achievement, teacher attrition, newly hired teachers, teacher production, and teacher tenure trends. He shared an overview of TEA strategies and initiatives targeted at addressing teacher recruitment, support, and retention and an overview of how state funding has increased over time and that the impact of this funding increase on teacher salaries has depended on local education agency (LEA) staffing decisions. He highlighted the staffing and certification flexibilities that are already available to LEAs and highlighted two case studies of innovative staffing practices from Forney ISD and Ector County ISD. Finally, he shared reflections on what the future of the Texas teaching workforce could be with if we improved recruitment, support, and retention of teachers.

Commissioner Morath opened up the floor for questions from the group. Task Force members asked questions about how we could free up more teacher time through structural changes to staffing models, if there were ways to reduce the number of requirements on new teachers after new teachers have graduated from a preparation program, and how districts could shift how they could better distribute funding between high schools and elementary schools. Commissioner Morath responded to questions with ways TEA is considering these strategies and suggested creating smaller work groups with the Task Force to discuss these strategies further.

### **Session: Challenges and Opportunities (Statewide Data and Trends from Prework)**

Deputy Commissioner Kelvey Oeser shared a recap of the key takeaways from Commissioner Morath's statewide data trends discussion. In particular, she noted the trends in attrition and new teacher production, the filling of openings by teacher interns, the relatively higher rates of attrition for early career teachers, and the importance of quality preparation. Dr. Mark Olofson, Director of Educator Data, Research, and Strategy, shared summaries of the Task Force member prework survey on local teacher vacancies and hardest to fill subject areas. He noted that respondents identified relatively more unfilled teacher positions at the beginning and middle of the current school year, and that those positions tended to be in identified teacher shortage areas. Task Force members asked how additional education stakeholders and particularly teachers would be included in these conversations. Ms. Oeser clarified that additional teachers, educator preparation program providers (EPPs), and other education stakeholders would be part of panel discussions in future Task Force meetings, and that additional ways to include teacher perspectives and perspectives from other education stakeholders were welcome and being considered.

Task Force members broke into five small groups to discuss the major causes of the data trends, what is unique about their district context, and reflections on potential opportunities for programs or policies to address these trends. The first group shared that key causes included teacher burnout and additional trauma and anxiety for educators, and that one key difference between urban and rural districts is that urban districts could provide additional compensation or flexibilities that rural district could not. The second group shared that urban areas are struggling with higher housing costs and more student needs, while all districts struggle with additional state mandates and requirements for teacher time, lack of flexibility for the highest need areas (bilingual and special education), and EPPs not adequately preparing teachers. The second group added that their group was especially looking for ideas and best practices to implement immediately, particularly related to increasing time for teachers through flexible work weeks and workdays. The third group shared an idea for creating partnerships between districts and EPPs to fast-track teachers through the programs and discussed how they could utilize district of innovation flexibilities. The fourth group shared that we need to improve the messaging around the teaching profession, that we need to improve compensation and help teachers get the proper certifications, and that the preparation of candidates needs to be improved. The final group shared that the timing of funding to districts could better match the hiring timeline and certificate areas of teachers.

Lizette Ridgeway, Director of District Systems and Strategies, shared an overview of the Task Force survey data, recent legislation, and a summary of the challenges and opportunities for hiring retired teachers. Several task force members shared experiences rehiring retired teachers, including the value of retired teachers, but that paying for the surcharge is expensive and the sit-out period is a key barrier to bringing retired teachers back into the workforce. Task Force members suggested utilizing retired teachers as mentor teachers and shared that the need is even greater this year than previous years for the ability to hire retired teachers, but that some of the flexibilities are no longer in place and these flexibilities are still needed. Ms. Ridgeway shared that they will be updating their website to include the legislative updates and additional guidance soon.

Ms. Oeser shared a synthesis of the best practices shared by Task Force members in the prework surveys related to the hiring process, preparation and certification, marketing and recruitment, support, and compensation. Superintendent Diana Barrera Ugarte shared best practices from Kenedy ISD including multiple teacher pay incentives, additional teacher support with planning and instruction, and restructuring district leadership roles to pay for teacher leadership positions. Ms. Norma Castillo shared best practices from Austin

ISD such as multiple strategic recruitment efforts including district-specific marketing messages and branding, incentives for early notice of resignation to support early hiring processes, and international recruitment through J1 and H1B visas.

### **Session: Certification Flexibilities and Hiring Processes Panel Discussion**

Ms. Oeser welcomed everyone back from lunch and highlighted the importance of continued flexibility in certification assignments and hiring processes. Ms. Oeser introduced Marilyn Cook, Director of Educator Certification, to provide opening comments and anchor the session's conversation. Ms. Cook asked Dr. Olofson to explain the introductory data slides that addressed the production of teachers and confirmed the ongoing need for a well-prepared education pipeline of talent for our classrooms. Dr. Olofson noted the trends in teacher production and the difference between newly certified teachers and the total numbers of newly hired teachers. Lastly, Dr. Olofson spoke briefly about the use of emergency credentials and flexibilities through districts of innovation.

Ms. Cook stated the session goals and introduced the two panelists, Ms. Amy Campbell, Director, TASB HR Services, and Ms. Karen Salerno, Partner, TNTP. Ms. Cook introduced four discussion prompts throughout the session that allowed panelists to share information, engaged the taskforce members in conversation, and obtained helpful feedback to inform future sessions.

#### **Discussion Prompt #1 – Staffing Changes**

Ms. Campbell started with recognition of ongoing work being done and introduced options that address short-term solutions on the pathway to long-term sustainability. She referenced the commissioner's earlier comments in the day around master schedules and shared that most teachers are looking for additional time and relief around the work being put in. She highlighted that staffing is often discussed as a puzzle, and every school board she speaks to wants to give as much time as possible, and that is not always realistic. She stated a viable option to meet salary and time needs for teachers would be to look at class size, consider appropriate modifications, and explore a secondary planning period. She acknowledged this requires significant communication and is facilitated by strong support. She also shared that some longer-term fixes might include revisiting instructional programs; reviewing current programs and determining costs and feasibility of those offerings; reviewing vacancies as they occur and reinventing positions where feasible, to better meet district needs; and resisting the urge to fill the vacant position as previously done.

Ms. Salerno highlighted TNTP's recent research into how best to address staffing challenges and shared that what makes this moment so hard is the need to address immediate challenges while looking ahead to longer-term, systemic solutions. She emphasized the need to increase employee compensation, preparedness, and support in the pipeline, and cautioned everyone not to jump right into strategizing before taking the time to consider what the data is telling you so that you make data-driven decisions that positively impact your short-term and long-term goals. She posed a series of questions for reflection: "Are there differential costs to your districts worth exploring?" "Are there staffing strategies that offer solutions and opportunities to broader your impact?" "How can you utilize technology to make additional improvements?" "Is there opportunity to combine classes and offer the highly effective teacher additional support from educational aides?" "Can you

expand techniques to establish and retain a strong pool of substitutes?" "Can you tap teacher strengths in areas of data and instructional strategies that would benefit the team?"

Ms. Campbell mentioned ESSER funding and creative thinking around that resource, given its temporary funding status and suggested the possible use of federal funds to hire support staff in term or "at will" positions to offset some of the workload during peak seasons.

One Task Force member shared they have experienced a shortage of teachers for years. One thing they know is their paraprofessionals are highly skilled and wonderful with students; taking advantage of funding to pay for some of their paras to obtain their bachelor's degree and certification and looking at longer-term plans for sustainability.

Ms. Campbell commented that pay is poor for teacher aides and shared that TASB works with 200+ school districts annually, and districts are willing to spend more in their reframing of efforts to make paraprofessionals the first step in the educational pathway.

One Task Force member concurred that great ideas are being shared, but they are long-term goals and emphasized that we must find some type of relief going into next year. The Task Force member also shared that entry-level of pay is rising quickly, and that if pay is not competitive, districts cannot sustain talent pools. Another Task Force member spoke to loss of teachers in June and small applicant pools and noted that districts need foundational help, not just temporary fixes to long-term problems. Several Task Force members commented on the difficulty with recruitment and retention due to perceptions of the teaching profession, additional stress, and low pay.

Ms. Campbell stated every district she is working with is adopting a deficit budget, but that is not sustainable, and acknowledged the finite budgets we must work with and that communities will vary in what trade-offs they are comfortable with. Ms. Salerno concurred with comments made and shared that the conversation makes her wonder if some of the longer-term solutions can be thought of as shorter-term opportunities where feasible.

Several Task Force members asked questions and commented about the need to increase flexibility to ease some of the current requirements and facilitate district ability to innovate and be more flexible to meet needs. Several Task Force members also shared the importance of community feedback and support for changes needed. Ms. Oeser summarized that some of what she was hearing was interest in reducing paperwork and improving timing and speed of waiver and DOI processes where possible.

One Task Force member spoke to how his district has completed their DOI plan to maximize certification flexibility. He agreed the process is too long – 60 days minimum to complete the DOI process and shared suggestions on how to streamline this process, and he also spoke to the use of stipends and performance pay, offered to share the district's compensation plan with others, and highlighted the Grow Your Own plan in his district.

### **Discussion Prompt #2 – Hiring Process Changes**

Ms. Campbell shared that TASB provides significant support in this area and knows none of us has time to add more to our plates. What can we stop doing to make the time we have more meaningful? *TTWWHADI – That's The Way We Have Always Done It* – we need to challenge ourselves. What can we stop doing behind the

scenes as relates to internal processes (e.g., streamline application processes - eliminate redundant signoffs, reduce paperwork)?

Ms. Salerno stressed revisiting vacancies and considering opportunities to maximize positions to meet district needs. Districts that prioritize hiring in the winter have the strongest candidates. Finding opportunities to apply for multiple positions; use data to study trends and identify top talent. Cultivate candidates for roles and spend quality time on recruitment and retention plans. Some districts have changed board policy to grant final hiring approval to the superintendent. Important to acknowledge the key role of boards and their varying approaches across the state.

Ms. Campbell shared that money is always a concern and encouraged TEA and districts to continue looking for ways to offer state and district-based support in paying for certification related activities (where possible and allowed) because supporting teachers candidates through the certification process can go a long way.

Ms. Salerno discussed early hiring strategies and thinking about how you continue to cultivate candidate interest and engagement in the role after contract has been signed and prior to start of duty.

Ms. Campbell spoke of TASB's longstanding work with districts regarding teacher pay structures and abilities to get ahead by sharing pay scale.

### **Discussion Prompt #3 – Recruitment Strategies**

Ms. Campbell shared her excitement about this topic and her recent presentations at TASBO conferences. Most districts have in their policy that salaried staff are paid across 12 months, and she suggested changes to frequency of pay if possible – 24 payments instead of 12. Other strategies include a referral bonus or an alumni bonus for coming back home to contribute to your community. She wondered about an in-between route to facilitate and support the education pathway and also how we could help certification of candidates who have hit their 5-time test limit and encourage individuals in that situation to explore other certification areas.

Ms. Salerno recommended taking time to take stock of your current state. What do recruitment efforts look like now and recommended talking with stakeholders to determine what was successful with your recruitment strategies. She suggested continuing to broaden the employee value proposition in districts to utilize meaningful, compelling, easy to access marketing opportunities.

Several Task Force members shared their successful recruitment strategies including targeted marketing messaging specific to their district, utilizing surveys to obtain key feedback that allows the district to adjust for ongoing success, and sharing district specific innovations, like a 4-day week instructional calendar. One Task Force member spoke of their district-run EPP and shared that they are seeing a stronger product from their local program versus other online offerings, while acknowledging it is an expensive option that requires district support, but a great investment in development and retention of talent.

#### **Discussion Prompt #4 – Retention Strategies**

Ms. Campbell shared retention has been the larger area of concern over the years, but now we see recruitment and retention balancing out – they are both important. She reflected on Commissioner Morath’s comment earlier in the day that if we are not losing people, we have fewer vacancies to fill, and shared that employee opinion and engagement surveys are key. There is value in having a third-party do this – you must ask people what their concerns are - strive for quick wins – take opportunities to address things within your scope and bandwidth.

Ms. Salerno concurred with Ms. Campbell’s comments and shared recent TNTP findings about why people stay and why they leave. The group reflected on the importance of having identified action steps from school leaders to invest in and retain talent and to define, communicate, and celebrate great teaching. Task Force members shared the importance of providing mental health services to staff, providing support in responding to political issues, and finding opportunities to reduce teacher workload by reviewing how teachers are using their time and supporting them in creating more efficiency with their time.

Ms. Campbell cautioned that as we raise the floor for pay, we also need to raise the ceiling for pay because it is critical for employee retention and morale. She also shared that it is important to recognize and celebrate staff work widely, including at board meetings.

Ms. Cook called for final reflections and takeaways and thanked the presenters for doing an exceptional job of leading the conversation. Ms. Campbell emphasized that people do not leave the profession for just one reason and that today’s conversation is a great starting point for addressing those reasons. Ms. Salerno expressed gratitude to the group, acknowledged the challenges being faced, and praised the Task Force’s positivity and demonstrated commitment.

#### **Session: Overview of TEA Talent Strategy and Support and Areas for Future Deep Dive Topics**

Deputy Commissioner Kelvey Oeser introduced Emily Garcia, Associate Commissioner for Educator Preparation, Certification, and Enforcement. Ms. Garcia referred to results of the survey taken by Task Force members that outlined successful practices they have previously used to tackle teacher vacancies in their corresponding districts. Ms. Garcia introduced the guiding questions for the session: “What are some obstacles or challenges to implementing or accessing aligned TEA initiatives?” and “Where are there gaps in current TEA supports that could amplify the best practices presented by the Task Force members?”.

Ms. Garcia introduced Jessica McLoughlin, Director of Educator Standards, Testing, and Preparation. Ms. McLoughlin provided information about the State Board for Educator Certification’s (SBEC) work to develop an Effective Preparation Framework aimed at codifying the best practices that Texas educator preparation programs (EPPs) engage in daily. She shared that the framework would be used to build common language among educators, support EPP continuous improvement efforts, and inform statewide alignment. Ms. McLoughlin provided an overview of TEA’s High-Quality Teacher Residency Models initiative which funds yearlong teacher residency models that leverage LEA/EPP partnerships to build sustainable talent pipelines. Ms. McLoughlin then presented information on TEA’s Texas Strategic Staffing initiative focused on supporting LEAs and EPP partners to design and implement strategic staffing models to address immediate and long-term

LEA instructional needs. Ms. McLoughlin provided an overview of TEA’s Principal Residency Grant, which funds paid principal residencies that leverage LEA/EPP partnerships to develop a strong bench of future instructional leaders for the LEA.

Ms. McLoughlin introduced Allison Friedlander, Director of Teacher Pathways. Ms. Friedlander outlined TEA’s Grow Your Own initiative, which provides grant funding for districts to support paraprofessionals in earning their teacher certification and/or expand high school Education and Training courses. Ms. Friedlander outlined TEA’s Mentor Program Allotment, which supports districts in implementing high-quality mentoring programs to support beginning teachers. Ms. Friedlander outlined TEA’s Teacher Leadership grant opportunities that support districts in building teacher leadership models in one of three pathways: Distributed Leadership, National Board Candidacy Cohorts, or District Practices Fellowship. Associate Commissioner Garcia then outlined the Texas Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA), which recognize effective teachers on three different levels: Recognized, Exemplary and Master. These teacher designations generate additional teacher-focused allotment funding for districts.

Ms. Garcia divided the group into smaller breakout groups to discuss the essential questions introduced at the beginning of the session. After the breakout sessions, each group shared their key takeaways. The first group shared the challenges districts faced with the timing of TCLAS grant opportunities and some districts not being aware of these opportunities. The second group shared challenges with teacher perception of TIA and the challenge that the timing of grant awards doesn’t align with the hiring cycle. Additionally, the group discussed the challenges created by student to teacher ratios and the negative perception from the community when class size waivers are requested by the district. The third group shared challenges with TIA and not always having their board aligned on the details of their TIA plan and shared thoughts on the rigor of National Board Certification and belief that a teacher who earned that status should qualify for “exemplary” teacher status under TIA. The fourth group shared the challenge that they face with being able to participate in grant opportunities when they are short staffed and have many administrators wearing multiple hats. The group also shared that it would be helpful for TEA to simplify grant processes and requirements and provide more resources and guidance to allow districts to be more responsive to grant opportunities. The final group shared the challenge of having staff bandwidth to participate in grant opportunities provided by the state or federal government. The group also shared that larger districts need additional flexibilities with state requirements in order to overcome challenges staffing their schools.

Ms. Garcia concluded the meeting with logistics and next steps for the Task Force and gratitude for the rich discussion and engagement of Task Force members throughout the meeting.