

 GOVERNOR'S BUSINESS COUNCIL 

**EXCELLENCE
IN THE
CLASSROOM**

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EXCELLENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

Bolstering Teacher Effectiveness

Introduction

Texas has made good progress in education since the school reform movement began in earnest 15 years ago. While we have seen better gains in the early grades, state test scores are up for all groups of students in all grades in all subjects. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Texas is close to the top in student performance in math, and, because of recent reading reforms advocated by the Governor's Business Council, has begun finally to make real progress in reading scores.

Our graduation rate, though still unacceptably low, has improved, and our college-going numbers are beginning to increase.

Further, the Legislature recently adopted several important recommendations of the Governor's Business Council. Both academic and financial accountability will be enhanced. High schools will be improved to create increased college and workforce readiness among our graduates. Pay for performance and differentiated pay for teachers will now be utilized more in Texas than in any other state.

We have much more to do and to accomplish in Texas before we can achieve excellence. Even with the gains, our dropouts are too numerous, our performance is too low, and the number of young Texans graduating high school ready for college and the workforce are too few. Happily, the reforms in HB1 will go a long way – structurally – towards accelerating progress and addressing these challenges in our state.

Just as in business, improvement in education requires ongoing attention and effort. The job of getting better, even becoming excellent, is one that is never complete. In that spirit, we must ask: What is next on the agenda to improve education? We have established much of the framework for accountability, and the school finance issues are resolved. These reforms have improved results in the classroom, but there are vital issues that have yet to be clearly addressed. The need now is to focus on and set policy and practices that will more directly foster excellence in the classroom. What steps can we take that will most significantly increase teacher effectiveness in the classroom?

Teachers matter. There may be no better or simpler proof of this than the study of prominent researcher, Eric Hanushek, which showed that if a student had an effective teacher, as opposed to an average teacher, for only five years in a row, the increased learning would be sufficient to close entirely the average gap between low and middle income students during that relatively short amount of time. Teachers do indeed matter.

We have sought out rigorous research and have analyzed the best research and best practices in the area of improving teacher effectiveness. What follows represents the results of our research, a plan for achieving excellence in the classroom for all Texas students by bolstering teacher effectiveness.

The basic elements of this plan are to:

- strengthen standards and align coursework and achievement tests with these standards;
- improve the statewide collection of information about student, teacher, administrator, and school performance;
- create the best tools to measure the academic progress of students in order to increase teacher effectiveness;
- dramatically improve the evaluation of teacher performance;
- pay more to teachers who perform well and who take on greater and more difficult assignments;
- support and retain teachers through improved professional development and other proven academic programs;
- remove persistently ineffective teachers,
- improve principal leadership; and
- improve teacher preparation to increase the supply of more effective teachers.

I. STRENGTHEN STANDARDS AND ALIGN COURSEWORK AND ACHIEVEMENT TESTS WITH THESE STANDARDS

Students must be prepared for college and the workplace by the time they complete high school. If teachers are to be successful in keeping students on track to this goal, the state must do a better job of providing teachers clear direction with respect to standards, the expectations of what students academically should know and be able to do.

According to national experts who recently testified before the State Board of Education, current standards in Texas are generally too vague and not easily understood, and they do not give teachers clear direction on exactly what specific skills and knowledge and in what progression they should be taught and at what grade. This problem is particularly pronounced for reading standards in the elementary and middle grades.

We propose that the Texas Education Agency (“TEA”) and the State Board of Education (“SBOE”), working with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, complete a thorough revision of Texas’ standards so that standards would be:

- more coherent, focused, and measurable;
- clear, well-defined and directly skill or knowledge-based;
- more specific to each grade level;

- designed and systematically taught such that they increase in difficulty and complexity from one grade level to the next, with vertical alignment from kindergarten through grade 12;
- geared grade by grade to the ultimate objective of college and workplace readiness;
- developed so that, for each grade level, they can be completed in a 9-month period, and
- set with respect to reading in the early grades (K-3) with an emphasis on explicit, systematic instruction based upon the research reflected in the National Reading Panel Report, and in the middle grades with an emphasis on continued and increasingly complex skill development.

We propose that instructional materials and state academic achievement tests be aligned with the revised standards.

We propose that the standard setting process benchmark the standards of high performing states and countries and that the new Texas standards be comparable to the best standards.

We are not suggesting that all students will graduate high school and proceed to college. But we are proposing that standards viewed by institutions of higher education and employers as consistent with requirements for college and workplace readiness be set for the advanced graduation plans. Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses should be encouraged as part of these graduation plans.

We recognize that the standard setting process may be lengthy, so we propose that revisions in the core areas of English/Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies be initiated and completed within two years.

We propose that assessments with respect to English/Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies be implemented no later than three years after the revision of the standards. Through both a continuation of grade by grade assessments and a greater utilization of end-of-course assessments, teacher instruction and student learning each year will be more precisely measured at the high school level.

In order to assist teachers and parents, we propose that the key standards in the core curriculum areas be supplemented with examples of expected performance that can be widely distributed to illustrate the levels at which students are expected to show mastery of knowledge and skills at each grade level. Further, the state must implement policies encouraging teaching to the standards rather than the unacceptable practice of “teaching to the test.” Students do best on tests, and generally, when their teachers have effectively taught curricula based on the standards.

We propose strongly that the law specify a mechanism for adoption of core curriculum standards to assure that the SBOE adopt the standards consistent with the advice of researchers in the academic disciplines, experts knowledgeable about the standards in high performing states and countries, representatives of the business and higher education communities as well as exemplary educators in establishing the new Texas standards.

II. IMPROVE THE STATEWIDE COLLECTION OF INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENT, TEACHER, ADMINISTRATOR, AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

There is no way to measure progress, or evaluate programs, without the appropriate data. Texas was once a leader in the statewide collection of administrative data, exemplified by the implementation of the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) in the 1990s. Regrettably, Texas has now fallen behind other states that collect better data, analyze it more efficiently, and make it available (under appropriate restrictions and safeguards) to independent researchers at universities and non-profit organizations.

We propose that funds be appropriated for TEA to develop and implement within two years PEIMS II, the second generation of the PEIMS system. That system must include the following data elements:

- Student-teacher links. Currently the PEIMS system includes the grade of the students and the grade(s) taught by a teacher, but individual students cannot be linked to individual teachers. Creating these links is vital to improving the way we measure teacher performance. TEA should add these links to the PEIMS system going forward, and reconstruct past data to the extent available.
- Student Transcript and Other Course Information. The current PEIMS system only records the courses completed by students. Forward thinking states have created standardized course numbers from the secondary level through higher education. Texas should do the same. Further, student identification numbers should transfer up to higher education to allow for more accurate tracking. Grades earned by students should be added, so that studies can be undertaken regarding such topics as grade inflation and the link between grades earned and performance on assessments.
- Teacher preparation and prior experience. Currently, only the degree received (bachelors, masters, etc.) is included in PEIMS. To facilitate evaluation of teacher preparation institutions and programs, the name of the institution, the major field of study, and course information should be included in each teacher's record. In addition, data regarding experience in other occupations should be recorded to enable researchers to study the effectiveness of alternative routes into the teaching profession.
- In-Service Professional Development. Currently, evaluations of professional development programs can only be done locally, and are hampered by small sample sizes and inadequate outcome measures. PEIMS should include the number of hours received, the type of instruction, and the identification of the instructor, and the identification of the providing agency or organization. Then, the impact of such programs on teacher performance can be evaluated based on the impact on teacher effectiveness, as measured by the value-added to student learning.

Much of this information is already recorded by local education agencies, but not collected by the TEA in a systematic manner. Thus, while some funding support will be necessary to collect the data in electronic form, these measures should impose limited additional burden on local education agencies.

III. CREATE THE BEST TOOLS TO MEASURE THE ACADEMIC PROGRESS OF STUDENTS IN ORDER TO INCREASE TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires states to improve academic performance such that achievement gaps close between student groups and all students reach proficiency in reading and math by 2014. Currently, states set adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets based on the percentage of students deemed proficient on tests. However, many states would like to rely more on growth in student achievement. The Secretary of Education has permitted some pilots in this area.

Growth models can measure the progress of schools as well as student groups. They can also be used to measure the growth of individual students over time. The information obtained using growth models can be used by states for a variety of purposes. For instance, the information may allow states to 1) provide teachers specific data about the performance of their students, and help inform instruction, 2) evaluate teacher performance more precisely and more professionally, 3) target resources for schools, teachers, and students that need additional help, 4) reward teachers and schools for achieving key academic goals; and, thus, 5) improve teacher performance

Multiple models exist in tracking academic achievement and determining teacher effectiveness. Multi-level regression-based models are the most accurate. Other models may have other strengths, for example, in being simpler or being usable to meet the accountability requirements of NCLB. We propose that the state develop a growth model incorporating the best elements of these models, and implement a system that could be used both for school accountability as well as the evaluation of teacher effectiveness. The state should pay for and create incentives for this model to be used by local districts. Local districts would, however, retain the authority to use their own models of measuring student progress for the purpose of teacher evaluation, so long as they are approved by the state as being technically sound and significantly based on student achievement.

IV. DRAMATICALLY IMPROVE THE EVALUATION OF TEACHER PERFORMANCE

A fair, accurate, and sound method of evaluating teacher performance is essential to strengthening the effectiveness of teachers in the classroom. In Texas, as in other states, teacher evaluation is currently inadequate and insufficient. It relies more on inputs and efforts than on results and effectiveness. Further, it often blesses certain faddish and unproven pedagogies, and vague concepts such as “learner-centered instruction.” As a result, effective teachers are not properly rewarded, teachers in need of improvement are not properly helped, and persistently ineffective teachers are not properly removed.

We propose to base teacher evaluations primarily on the academic growth rates their students achieve over time. Thus, teachers deemed highly effective would be those who on a fair, or “value-added”, basis achieve a high amount of academic growth for students. Teachers deemed acceptable would be those who achieve acceptable student growth. Those with minimal growth rates, or even regression, would be deemed ineffective.

Any system that evaluates teacher performance must address certain challenges. Many courses are not tested by the state, such as foreign languages, art and music, and physical education. Certain grades are not tested at all. In high school, at least until our proposals are implemented, it is virtually impossible in most districts to measure growth from different student baselines to different levels of mastery of specific course content. Further, teachers do not have total control over student achievement, and the contribution to student achievement is often complex, involving the work of the school as a whole or several teachers. Some teachers have primary responsibility for students with serious disabilities. For these reasons, at least a portion of teacher evaluation must involve such factors as the acquisition of content knowledge and skills known to be related to student achievement, principal and multiple peer evaluations and other measures of value as part of goal setting determined at the local level under general guidance by the state.

The evaluation must be fair, have clear rubrics that are easily understood, and be administered multiple times. With such a design, claims of bias or favoritism will be baseless.

Necessary funds should be appropriated to the TEA to utilize the best available expertise and resources to develop within one year the essential criteria of a solid evaluation system and an actual model evaluation system. In so doing, the state will revise the Professional Development and Appraisal System to: (a) reflect research-based knowledge about effective teacher characteristics and practices; (b) evaluate teachers on outcomes that directly relate to student achievement; (c) base teacher evaluations on individual student and classroom-level achievement using value-added measures; (d) identify ineffective teachers using specific educational outcomes; and (e) secure validation of the system and criteria by nationally recognized experts. Criteria must be comparable in rigor for evaluating teachers in assessed areas as well as in non-assessed areas. Local districts should be free during the subsequent year either to choose the state model or modify their own systems consistent with these state criteria.

Administrators and teachers would at state expense be provided professional development on the proper and effective implementation of this evaluation system.

V. PAY MORE TO TEACHERS WHO PERFORM WELL AND WHO TAKE ON GREATER AND MORE DIFFICULT ASSIGNMENTS

With the exception of recent reforms in HB1, our current teacher salary structure offers virtually no incentives to reward excellence. And a system that does not reward excellence is unlikely to inspire it. Moreover, research indicates that one of the reasons the teaching profession is failing to attract the most promising, high aptitude candidates is because of the severe compression of pay in education. Further, the teaching profession is failing to attract the most promising, highly motivated candidates because excellent teachers are not rewarded according to their

effectiveness. Teachers with similar experience and credits get similar pay, regardless of their outcomes. Those teachers with greater seniority get paid more, regardless of their outcomes.

House Bill 1 begins to effectuate, and we propose to extend, the principle that a large component of all future increases in teacher compensation must be utilized as pay for performance.

Additional pay, honor, and recognition should be awarded both for performance and as incentives for:

- teachers in schools that principally serve low income students and that are rated exemplary as well as those that show the greatest gains in student progress;
- teachers whose evaluations deem them highly effective based on achieving a high amount of student gains and other criteria, such as mentoring, principal and peer evaluations;
- highly effective teachers who teach in hard-to-staff schools;
- highly effective teachers who teach subject shortage areas, such as math and science, and in special education and English language acquisition; and
- highly effective teachers who take on increased levels of academic responsibility and work, including serving as a master or mentor teacher.

The two programs in HB1 should be sustained at the very least at current funding levels in the next biennium. The TEA should be required to further develop criteria based on proven models for pay for performance systems. Local districts should develop systems consistent with such criteria. The legislature should commit to provide additional funding to districts that have adopted such systems to pay more for highly effective teachers as soon as the new evaluation methods are operational for identifying highly effective teachers.

VI. SUPPORT AND RETAIN TEACHERS THROUGH IMPROVED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER PROVEN ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

A. PROFESSIONALIZE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development programs are essential to improving the performance of teachers who demonstrate average or below-average effectiveness, but not all of these programs are equally well-designed, and too few are effective.

In his March 5, 2002 presentation “Research on Teacher Preparation and Professional Development” Grover J. Whitehurst (then Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement and now Director of the Institute of Education Sciences) stated, “Context studies tell us that all teachers can do a better job when supported by good curriculum, good schools, and good state policy. He also said, “variation in teacher effectiveness needs to be reduced substantially if our schools are going to perform at high levels.”

Toward that goal, he cites two ways that research indicates will substantially improve teacher effectiveness and reduce variation in effectiveness between teachers:

“FIRST, we can be substantially more selective in the cognitive abilities that are required for entry into the teaching profession.

SECOND, we can provide pre-service and in-service training that is more focused on the content that teachers will be delivering and the curriculum they will be using.

Therefore, professional development programs should be targeted toward improving the academic knowledge and skills of teachers, and the knowledge teachers have of research based instructional strategies to increase student achievement. We propose that state-approved program providers with expertise in instruction and management be made available to develop teacher and administrator skills that will impact academic achievement. Professional development programs should be:

- based upon principles that research has shown have a positive influence on student academic achievement;
- geared toward improving the knowledge and skills of teachers, and in line with the standards set by the state for the students they teach;
- individualized to meet the needs of teachers as identified in their evaluation;
- provided on-site, at the school, to a reasonable extent;
- delivered with fidelity and consistency to the research that undergirds the program;
- evaluated periodically for proof of effectiveness (i.e. improves academic achievement, decreases absenteeism, or decreases discipline referrals); and
- based in part on technological delivery to assure individualization, high quality and fidelity.

We propose that state requirements in this area formally connect individual professional development with individual teacher evaluations and with efforts to improve teachers with less than effective performance.

We propose that, under the auspices of the TEA, leading researchers as well as extraordinarily successful practitioners review and assess professional development and mentoring programs that focus on academic achievement. This work could be handled within the Best Practices Clearinghouse established in HB1. It would review solid research that already exists and evaluate professional development and mentoring programs based on the criteria of effective strategies.

The TEA would principally utilize strategies approved by the Clearinghouse for its sponsored programs and where it is authorized by law to act to improve school performance. Regional Service Centers would be incentivized and evaluated to the extent to which they promote effective strategies.

Local districts would be encouraged to utilize programs that are deemed most effective and would be provided additional funds or services, as was the case with the Reading Initiative, for professional development programs determined effective by the Best Practices Clearinghouse.

B. SUPPORT RESEARCH-BASED, PROVEN PROGRAMS THAT HELP TEACHERS SUCCEED

There are many additional programs that can help teachers succeed, but none is more important than the successful implementation by districts of interventions to keep students on grade level, as provided for in the state's Student Success Initiative. The Commissioner should utilize authority granted in HB1 to leverage change in low performing schools where these interventions are not effectively administered.

The state helped teachers considerably in achieving the goal of student success on the 3rd grade reading test. Now a similar effort, as systematic as that of the Reading Initiative, should be implemented to assure student success by the 8th grade. While some current funds from the program are devoted to achieving this goal, we must do more to assure that students at this level are proficient in reading and math to be prepared for high school. The state should fund and administer an effective program of diagnostics, academies for teachers, and research-based interventions to help struggling middle school students. Such a program will help not only these students' teachers in middle school but also the high school teachers who await them.

Because reading proficiency is so vital to high school success, we further recommend that reading be taught explicitly in middle school and that the state create a new teaching certificate for Reading Specialist K-8, which would be designed to provide instruction to students who have not acquired grade level proficiency in reading.

VII. REMOVE PERSISTENTLY INEFFECTIVE TEACHERS

Personnel management that assures the most effective teacher in the classroom is an essential requirement of building a strong educational system. We seek greater professionalism for our state's teachers. That means greater respect and greater rewards for results. It also means more effective evaluation, the expectation of continuous improvement in performance, and removal, if performance remains persistently ineffective after proper support.

We believe strongly that principals should have full control over hiring teachers for their schools, and they should as well be fully accountable for student achievement in their schools.

There should be far greater scrutiny by principals of teacher effectiveness during a teacher's first three years of service, the time during which teachers essentially work at will. Our first recommendation, therefore, is to train principals and administrators to better utilize the

evaluation data and the clear authority they have in the teachers' first years of service, and to hold principals accountable, through their own evaluations, when they fail to remove persistently ineffective new teachers.

We propose the following reforms with respect to veteran teachers:

- A teacher who receives an ineffective evaluation based on student growth and other measures of effectiveness should be required to participate as part of a corrective action plan in an intensive, research-based professional development program tailored to that teacher's particular needs with adequate, relevant, and ongoing coaching.
- If that teacher receives a second ineffective evaluation the following year, the principal and the district would have the discretion to remove the teacher, and the teacher would bear the burden of proof in any dismissal hearing. Should dismissal not be pursued, an appropriate and rigorous course of professional development would be required.
- If that teacher receives a third ineffective evaluation, the principal would be required to remove such a teacher, and the teacher would bear the burden of proof in any dismissal hearing.

VIII. IMPROVE PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

We will not achieve excellence in the classrooms throughout our state unless we bolster and improve principal leadership in our schools. Where we have strong and effective principals, we tend to find successful schools. And, while there are many problems associated with low performing schools, one of the chief problems almost always is weak leadership.

We propose that the changes in policy we are supporting with respect to more rigorous evaluation, more relevant and research-based professional development and consequences for performance apply, as appropriate, to principals as well as teachers. Further, effective principals would be awarded additional pay both for performance and as incentives.

Principals must be held accountable for the performance of students in their schools and removed from this position of leadership when schools persistently fail to meet state standards for acceptable school performance. But principals also must be given the support and the authority a leader requires to be successful, including greater authority over resources and personnel in their schools. State law and policy must be consistent in both respects.

Principals must be held accountable for decision-making with respect to teacher decisions, including hiring, assignment, and termination. Principals must be responsible for assisting and leading their faculty to higher levels of performance. Principals should be held accountable for effective and efficient management. This must include productive evaluation of teachers, including ongoing feedback, necessary mentoring, staff development and the site-based assistance necessary to create an effective teaching staff. Principals must provide teachers with the conditions and resources to succeed, including a safe and orderly campus, appropriate support for curriculum and instructional materials, performance data, and professional

development. Essential for student success, these functions must be incorporated by the Commissioner into a state-approved evaluation system for principals.

Principals in our schools must be offered the training necessary to make effective decisions about human resources and finances. Additionally, the supply of principals who possess the skills needed to manage today's schools must be enlarged by recruiting entrepreneurial talent from non-traditional backgrounds. State certification requirements that currently limit this pool, such as prerequisite classroom experience of two years stipulated in the Texas Education Code Section 21.046, must be opened up through broader waiver opportunities or eliminated. To attract talented professionals from the private and non-profit sector to public education, the Commissioner must work with national organizations, such as the Broad Center for the Management of School Systems, to identify and expand opportunities within Texas public schools.

IX. IMPROVE TEACHER PREPARATION TO INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF MORE EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

A. REVISE CERTIFICATION STANDARDS

Research shows that certain teacher knowledge and skills are linked to student achievement. Currently, teacher certification tests do not clearly or fully measure such knowledge and skills. We propose that state authorities require modification of these tests so that they are rooted in research and demonstrate predictive validity of teacher effectiveness. High performance on the certification test must indicate that a teacher actually possesses the knowledge and skills that research shows will maximize student achievement.

B. HOLD COLLEGES OF EDUCATION ACCOUNTABLE

A substantial number of teachers in Texas have graduated from the state's colleges of education. There is substantial evidence that these colleges do not rely enough in shaping their curricula and programs on rigorous research, orientation to success of students on Texas' K-12 standards and college/workplace readiness requirements, and strategies grounded in predictive validity of what most affects student achievement.

We simply will not see a substantial improvement in the success of our students until we graduate more teachers who are properly and effectively prepared to perform successfully in the classroom.

We propose first to evaluate colleges of education principally on the effectiveness of their graduates in the classroom. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), in concert with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), would be required by law to develop an evaluation system using state student performance data to gauge the effectiveness of graduates of colleges of education during their first two years of service.

Based on this data, the colleges of education would be rated on an annual basis as exemplary, acceptable, or low-performing. In order to provide competent and qualified teachers for Texas,

“exemplary” colleges would be recognized as such and encouraged to continue with their programs, “acceptable” colleges would be required to improve their programs, and “low performing” colleges would be required to overhaul their programs or face the consequences described below.

Once the colleges of education have been given the opportunity to improve their programs, we would recommend that these ratings be taken into account by colleges, universities, and legislators in funding and appropriations decisions. Expansion of activities in exemplary colleges of education should be encouraged. Colleges and universities should work to improve performance of low performing programs in order to justify continued support. Districts and the public would be advised of these ratings. State law should provide that colleges of education that are rated low performing for two years lose state support.

Further, we recommend that, until this accountability system is operational, the THECB and the TEA be authorized to establish a task force to review and assess with the assistance of the Regional Educational Laboratory-Southwest the programs and courses of study in Texas’ colleges of education. They should be evaluated on their use of research based strategies, alignment to the K-12 standards, and success in fostering teacher knowledge and effective performance. These evaluations could take the form of the recent study, “What Education Schools Aren’t Teaching About Reading,” by the National Council on Teacher Quality. (This study utilized some of the nations’ leading reading researchers to analyze coursework in 223 required courses in 72 colleges of education across the country and found that only 11 of the 72 were actually teaching, even minimally, all the components of the science of reading, as identified by the National Reading Panel.)

C. PROMOTE EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE PREPARATION ROUTES

Traditional training and certification programs are not producing a sufficient number of effective teachers to keep up with demand, particularly in critical shortage areas. To that end, we encourage fostering an atmosphere of competitive certification through alternative preparation and certification programs. The state provides funding to traditional colleges of education. Similarly, we propose that the state provide incentives for proven alternatives and subject these programs to the same evaluation and accountability requirements mentioned above with respect to colleges of education.

In particular, the state must assure that alternative programs:

- are grounded in research and oriented to success of students on state standards;
- select high aptitude, well educated individuals with strong verbal and critical thinking skills (which research shows positively predicts student achievement);
- include carefully constructed and timely coursework tailored to candidates’ backgrounds and school contexts;

- provide strong and comprehensive pre-service training that includes a student-teaching component with expert supervision, instruction in key pedagogical skills and best practices, and literacy instruction;
- provide trained mentors, who will work collaboratively with new teachers to improve their instructional skills and classroom management abilities and to provide additional support as needed; and
- generate effective teachers for Texas' classrooms.

Happily, there are extremely successful and proven models, including Teach For America and The New Teacher Project. Further, programs such as UTeach show us a model of how teacher preparation can be more creatively constructed within colleges and universities with the cooperation of the colleges of education. Higher education should be challenged to build off these models.

Bureaucratic obstacles that serve little purpose in generating a more effective teacher corps yet burden strong alternative programs should be removed. Course requirements that have no research basis in effective teacher preparation should be the first such obstacle to bear scrutiny.

Conclusion

We have made good progress in the past decade in improving education in Texas. Yet, we have a long way to go to get to excellence. We simply cannot rest until we have an education system that assures that all young Texans graduate high school ready for college and the workplace.

We have much of the foundation in place – for example, a strong accountability system and a much improved method of finance. Now is the time to focus on that area that matters most – the effectiveness of teachers to create excellence in the classroom.

These proposals represent an integrated, cohesive approach to bolstering teacher effectiveness.

First, they will help teachers succeed by providing them clear standards and other support by which their teaching can be most productively structured.

They will provide necessary, timely, and relevant data to help educators make better decisions.

They will create better tools to measure the academic progress of students in order to help teachers improve their own performance.

They will improve the evaluation of teacher and principal performance and assure through policy that effective educators are properly rewarded, educators in need of improvement are properly helped, and persistently ineffective educators are properly removed.

They will provide the resources to reward educators who perform well and who take on greater and more difficult assignments.

They will establish the policies and practices to support and retain teachers through improved professional development and other proven programs.

They will improve teacher preparation programs to increase the supply of more effective teachers.

Let us have excellence in each and every classroom in Texas. Let us have an effective teacher in each and every classroom in Texas. If we do, we will make the greatest leap yet in assuring our children the education they require and deserve.

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