



Over the last decade, the Texas legislature narrowed funding gaps between the state's high- and low-poverty school districts. That, along with the hard work of many of the state's educators, has helped boost student achievement in Texas schools. However, despite the progress toward more equitable school district funding across the state, low-income students in too many Texas schools are still being short-changed—in some cases, by many thousands of dollars each school year.

After all the work that's been done in pursuit of more equitable funding among school districts, how can this be? The answer is that large funding gaps still exist between schools *within* the same district. In fact, funding gaps within Texas school districts are sometimes wider than the gaps between them.

As if this weren't bad enough, the within-district funding gaps reflect an unfair pattern of teacher distribution that leaves low-income students with more than their fair share of teachers who are inexperienced or teaching subjects outside their field of expertise. These patterns of inequitable funding *and* inequitable teacher distribution all but sabotage the ability of these students to make academic progress.

To ensure that *every* child in Texas has a fair shot at academic success, teacher talent must be more fairly distributed and funding gaps between and within districts must be closed.

Teacher effectiveness is absolutely central to student success. Groundbreaking research in Dallas over the past decade has documented how important teachers are.¹ Students who are assigned for three consecutive years to highly effective teachers make great academic strides, while similarly achieving students assigned to less effective teachers lose substantial academic ground. Studies conducted elsewhere around the country mirror these same findings: teachers matter a lot.

THEIR FAIR SHARE: *How Teacher Salary Gaps Shortchange Poor Children in Texas*



JUNE 2007

Some people believe that low-income students don't do well in school because poverty limits their academic potential. That view is dead wrong. Yes, such children often enter school behind. But instead of designing schools to help them catch up, many school systems actually stack the deck *against* their success.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the distribution of experienced and effective teachers. All of the data from Texas strongly suggests that low-income students, as in other states, are unlikely to get their fair share of the best teachers. These patterns—higher-paid teachers at more affluent schools and lower-paid teachers at high-poverty schools—add up to a substantial funding imbalance of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, of dollars per school per year.²

For example, if teachers in Austin's highest-poverty elementary schools were paid as much as teachers in the "better," low-poverty schools, Austin Independent School District would spend more than \$2 million per year in the highest-poverty schools.

How Is This Allowed to Happen?

Lock-step salary scales found throughout the U.S. increase teacher pay exclusively based on a teacher's years of experience and educational credentials. The longer you teach within a district, the more you get paid, regardless of how well you teach. Furthermore, more experienced teachers are

traditionally given flexibility in selecting the schools at which they will teach. Knowing that they'll earn the same salary no matter where they work, experienced teachers often choose assignments at more affluent schools where they believe teaching will be easier. When these more experienced teachers transfer out of high-poverty schools, they take their bigger paychecks with them. Meanwhile, high-poverty schools are forced into a cycle of hiring brand-new, lower-paid teachers year after year.

There's no denying that the traditional system of distributing and rewarding teachers is seriously flawed. It encourages strong teachers with more experience, more education and higher pay to leave the students and schools that most need their help. And it funnels more public money into the more affluent schools. Of course, there are exceptional novice teachers, just as there are ineffective veteran teachers. But concentrating novice teachers in the highest-poverty schools stacks the deck against the academic success of low-income students by failing to help their schools attract and retain a more stable, more experienced, more effective teaching faculty.

We must acknowledge what well-run businesses and organizations have always known: we need to create incentive structures that are tied to our goals. Moreover, the current compensation system demeans those teachers who work hard to achieve outstanding results for their students. Like

Average Teacher Salary Gaps Between Highest- and Lowest-Poverty Schools in the Top 10 Districts in Texas

District Name	Elementary School Gap	Middle School Gap	High School Gap
Arlington ISD	-\$2,762	-\$4,750	-\$3,194
Austin ISD	-\$2,668	-\$3,006	-\$2,413
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	-\$1,741	-\$1,076	-\$3,343
Dallas ISD	-\$1,191	+\$491	-\$1,863
El Paso ISD	+\$448	-\$1,156	-\$564
Fort Bend ISD	-\$354	-\$513	-\$1,861
Fort Worth ISD	-\$1,299	-\$2,529	-\$1,137
Houston ISD	-\$315	-\$1,018	-\$708
Northside ISD	-\$513	-\$2,475	-\$972
San Antonio ISD	-\$430	-\$264	+\$566

Note: Negative numbers indicate that the average teacher salary is less in the highest-poverty schools. For example, the average teacher in Cypress-Fairbanks' highest-poverty high schools is paid \$3,343 less per year than the average teacher in Cypress-Fairbanks' lowest-poverty high schools. In contrast, positive numbers indicate that the average teacher salary is actually more in the highest-poverty schools. For example, in the highest-poverty high schools in San Antonio, teachers are paid \$566 more on average than their counterparts in the lowest-poverty high schools.

professionals in other fields, teachers should be paid more if they are especially effective. And those teachers who have proven to be effective under the toughest circumstances should be paid more than those who choose less challenging assignments.

What Can and Should Be Done?

Both local and state officials have important roles in ensuring equal educational opportunity for all students.

Local Superintendents and School Boards Should:

- Make a firm public commitment to do whatever it takes to ensure that inexperienced or out-of-field teachers are no longer concentrated in certain schools.
- Offer a mix of bonuses and other incentives to attract and retain highly effective veteran teachers to serve in high-poverty and high-minority schools. Such incentives might include smaller classes, more time to collaborate and plan with other teachers, and more coaching.
- Cap the ability of low-poverty schools to “buy up” top teaching talent from high-poverty schools and protect high-poverty schools from being forced to hire teachers who do not meet their standards.
- Assign principals with proven records of leadership to lead the highest poverty schools, and pay them more.
- Report honestly about teacher distribution and spending patterns. Wherever schools have disproportionate numbers of novice teachers, or teacher salaries are significantly below the district average, this information should be clearly reported on the school reports that are sent to parents and the community.

The State Commissioner and Board of Education Should:

- Send a clear signal to all Texas school districts that an uneven distribution of novice or out-of-field teachers is unacceptable.
- Require districts to report annually to the community about their teacher distribution and spending patterns. Wherever schools have disproportionate numbers of novice or out-of-field teachers, or teacher salaries are significantly below the district average, districts should be required to include this information on the school reports that go home to parents.
- Monitor district progress in rectifying current imbalances, and intervene swiftly when progress is inadequate.

TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS

Summitt Elementary and Wooten Elementary schools are both located in the Austin Independent School District, but they serve very different populations of students. Almost all the students in Wooten (96 percent) qualify for the free or reduced-price lunch program. Summitt, on the other hand, serves far fewer low-income students (35 percent). Some say this helps explain why Summitt has earned a “recognized” designation from the state, while Wooten is rated only as “academically acceptable.”* But this rationale ignores an important fact: teachers at Summitt are paid an average of \$3,819 per year more than teachers at Wooten.

If Wooten spent as much on teacher salaries as Summitt did, the Wooten budget would grow by more than \$150,000[†] per year—money that could go a long way toward improving instruction. These schools are not isolated examples. Looking across the city, teachers in Austin’s highest-poverty elementary schools earn \$2,668 less on average than teachers who work at the elementary schools serving the fewest poor children.

Students at Summitt are also taught by more experienced teachers than students at Wooten, with the teachers at Summitt having almost twice the average years of experience as teachers in Wooten.[‡] In fact, Summitt also has almost twice as many veteran teachers as Wooten, teachers who can bring more than 20 years of teaching experience to bear in student instruction every day.

The widespread salary gaps in Austin may help explain why the academic ratings from the 2005-06 school year indicate that 94 percent of the city’s lowest-poverty elementary schools have earned high marks for student academic performance—rated as “recognized” or “exemplary”—while only 17 percent of Austin’s highest-poverty elementary schools have attained these performance levels.

* The accountability ratings range from “exemplary” to “recognized” to “academically acceptable” to “academically unacceptable.”

† $(40.0 \text{ Full-Time Equivalent positions in Wooten}) \times (\$3,818.58 \text{ salary gap}) = \$152,743.2$

‡ Summitt = 17.1 average years of teacher experience; Wooten = 10.4 average years of teacher experience. Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) 2006 campus report. Available: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2006/campus.srch.html>

- Require districts submitting applications under the new state-authorized teacher compensation fund (Subchapter O Teacher Incentive Grants) to show, first and foremost, how those funds will be used to address inequities in teacher distribution and to assure that more high-performing teachers teach the students who need them the most. Any district submitting an application that either does not address this issue or that proposes activities likely to exacerbate current inequities should be turned down, with the funds redistributed to school districts that are more serious about meeting the needs of *all* of their students.
- Make immediate changes to the statewide data system to provide the capacity to connect teachers to their students' learning growth over time. Some Texas school districts already have this ability, but the remainder need it to identify their strongest teachers, to make certain that those teachers are fairly distributed and to identify less effective teachers who need additional support.
- Assure that teachers whose student growth measures are weak have the high-quality professional development they need to improve.

Conclusion

This is a moment of real opportunity in Texas. There is greater recognition that current patterns of spending *and* assignment of teachers are a big part of inequality of opportunity in our public schools.

Addressing this inequality demands a combination of state leadership and local action. As the state invests in reducing inequities between districts, it must require districts to resolve inequities within their systems.

The truth is that more progress has been made in equalizing resources *across* districts, while inequity *within* districts remains unchecked. Nowhere is inequality more glaring, or more damaging, than in the area of access to high-quality teachers.

For public education to succeed in a state as diverse as Texas, quality and equity have to go hand in hand.

¹ Jordan, H., Mendro, R. and Weerasinghe, D., The Effects of Teachers on Longitudinal Student Achievement, Dallas (TX) Independent School District, 1997, p. 9, available at: http://www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/research/articles/Jordan-Teacher-Effects-on-Longitudinal-Student-Achievement-1997.pdf.

² Analysis of publicly available 2005-2006 data from the Texas Education Agency's Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) by Dr. Ed Fuller, University of Texas at Austin. District size is determined by total student enrollment. The analysis of the highest- and lowest-poverty schools compares those schools in the highest and lowest quartiles. Quartiles were determined by ranking the schools within each district by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in each school. The quartiles were divided to ensure approximately the same number of students in each.



This report was made possible with the generous support of the Broad Foundation.



ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST

The Education Trust, Inc. was created to promote high-academic achievement for all students, at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college. While we know that all schools and colleges could better serve their students, our work focuses on the schools and colleges most often left behind in plans to improve education: those serving African-American, Hispanic, Native American and low-income students.

The Education Trust works side by side with policymakers, parents, education professionals, community and business leaders—in cities and towns across the country—who are trying to transform their schools and colleges into institutions that genuinely serve all students. We also bring lessons learned in local communities back to Washington to help inform national policy debates.