

Teacher Certification in Texas

District Strategies to Recruit and Retain a Credentialed Workforce



Susan Kemper Patrick, Chazz Higginbotham, Ryan Saunders, Tiffany S. Tan, and Steve Wojcikiewicz

Summary

Texas faces persistently high teacher attrition and declining enrollment in university-based preparation programs. Between 2019–20 and 2024–25, the share of uncertified teachers (i.e., teachers without any state certification) more than tripled. Despite this statewide surge, district-level certification rates varied considerably across contexts, with some districts maintaining high teacher certification rates. Interviewed leaders—from districts selected for having high certification rates and/or noted success in supporting the certification process—highlighted key strategies to prioritize certification: (1) preparation partnerships to increase the pipeline of new certified teachers, (2) prioritization of certification in recruitment and hiring practices, (3) salary incentives along with tracking and dedicated staff to support uncertified teachers toward certification, and (4) retention of new teachers through mentoring and specific supports. House Bill 2, landmark legislation passed by the Texas legislature in 2025, offers districts unprecedented financial investments in recruitment, preparation, certification, and mentoring that can increase the rate of certified teachers.

Introduction

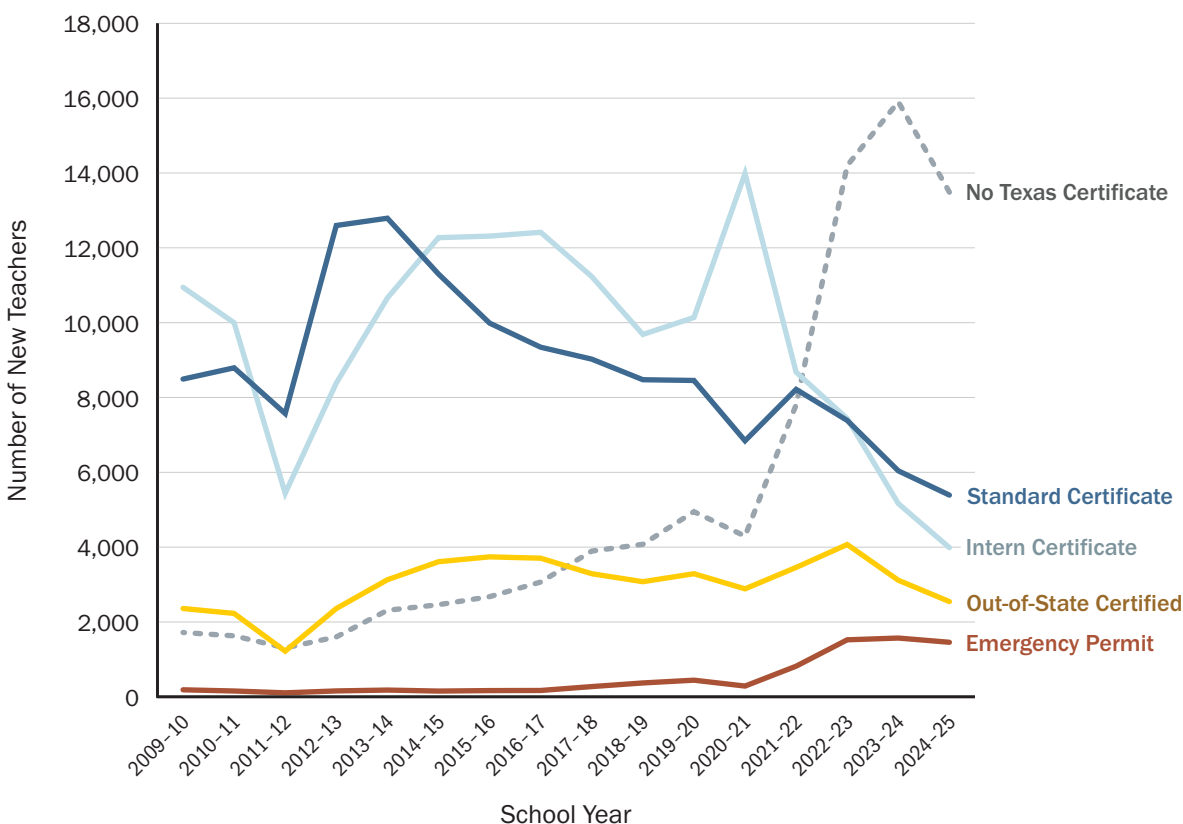
Texas employs the largest teacher workforce of all states in the United States, and the state consistently posts [teacher attrition rates](#) higher than the national average. Texas schools have had to hire more than 40,000 teachers per year to replace those exiting the profession. In the 2022–23 through 2024–25 school years, more than two thirds of these [newly hired](#) teachers entered the profession either on emergency permits, while completing preparation (i.e., interns), or without any state certification (i.e., uncertified). While teachers entering through such pathways can fill classroom vacancies quickly, Texas-based research has found that they are less likely to stay in the profession and tend to be less effective than other new teachers.¹ Given the growing rates of uncertified teachers across Texas, this study sought to identify districts with higher rates of certified teachers and understand the local contexts that might encourage hiring and retention of certified teachers.

States set certification requirements for their teachers and determine the circumstances under which districts are allowed to hire teachers who are not fully certified. As in most states, Texas has multiple pathways into the profession, including preservice routes in which teaching candidates

complete preparation before receiving their standard teaching certificate and intern routes in which new teachers complete preparation while serving as a teacher of record. Texas also allows teachers to work under emergency permits—1-year, temporary permits—under certain circumstances, and the state enacted the [Districts of Innovation \(DOI\)](#) policy in 2015, which allows participating districts to bypass state certification and hire teachers without any state certification at the discretion of their school boards.

Against this backdrop, Texas has experienced rapid growth in the number of uncertified teachers. Overall, the share of [uncertified teachers](#) in the Texas teacher workforce more than tripled between 2019–20 and 2024–25, increasing from 3.8% to 12%. As of 2024–25, there were 42,103 uncertified teachers across the state, with more than half teaching [foundational subjects](#) (English language arts and reading, math, science, social studies).

Figure 1. Newly Hired Texas Teachers by Certification Across Time



Note: Figure includes newly hired teachers who were new to the profession in the respective school year. It excludes newly hired teachers reentering the workforce and those who were previously working part time.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of Texas Education Agency newly certified and new teacher hire data. (2026).

As shown in [Figure 1](#), there have been marked changes in the number of newly hired teachers holding different certification types over the past decade:

- **Standard certificates** (i.e., those completing preservice preparation) dropped by more than half, falling from 11,300 in 2014–15 to 5,391 in 2024–25.
- **Intern certificates** (i.e., those completing preparation while teaching) dropped by almost 70%, from 12,271 in 2014–15 to 3,987 in 2024–25, despite spiking during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Uncertified** (i.e., no Texas certificate) increased more than fivefold, from 2,462 in 2014–15 to 13,486 in 2024–25.

Since 2022–23, the number of uncertified new hires each year has been more than double the number of new hires with standard certificates.

Despite these overall high rates of uncertified teachers across the state, Texas districts vary widely in the extent to which they rely on uncertified teachers to fill open positions. Given the average lower retention and effectiveness of uncertified teachers, this study identified districts with higher certification rates to understand their local context and policies. Using district-level data from the 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years, this study examined whether students have equitable access to certified teachers and identified contextual factors associated with higher teacher certification rates. To illustrate how district policies, practices, and partnerships can support certification, this report presents findings from interviews with leaders in six districts with noted success in maintaining high certification rates and/or supporting their uncertified teachers to become certified.

Texas Teacher Certification and Preparation Policies

Over the past 2 decades, there have been significant shifts in Texas state policy and investments around teacher certification and preparation that have allowed more teachers to enter the profession with little to no training. These changes, including the Districts of Innovation policy and regulatory changes related to educator preparation programs, enabled the rapid increase in uncertified teachers as well as the increasing share of new teachers trained through for-profit providers that primarily rely on asynchronous, online instruction. To counter these trends, recent state investments in the teacher pipeline are meant to incentivize high-quality preparation and increase the pool of fully prepared and certified new teachers.

[House Bill 2](#), landmark legislation passed in 2025, included more than \$400 million annually for statewide investments in recruitment, preparation, certification, and mentoring, and an estimated \$4 billion for teacher and staff pay raises aimed at retaining teachers in the classroom. A part of the legislation established the new Preparing and Retaining Educators through Partnership (PREP) Program Allotment, which will provide ongoing funding to support teacher preparation and mentoring programs for new teachers. House Bill 2 also revised some of the certification flexibilities enabled by the Districts of Innovation policy. By 2027–28, all teachers in all foundational subjects (i.e., English language arts and reading, math, science, social studies) must be certified, with an option for districts to apply for an extension until the 2029–30 school year. As of March 2026, just over half of traditional school districts had been granted an extension, postponing meaningful implementation of these new certification requirements. House Bill 2 also includes incentives of \$1,000 per teacher for districts whose uncertified teachers become certified by August 2027.

Teacher Certification Rates Across Texas

While 88% of all Texas teachers had any certification in the 2024–25 school year, teacher certification rates (i.e., the percentage of teachers in a district who have any state certification) varied tremendously across the state’s nearly 1,200 districts. Despite the large statewide increase in the numbers of uncertified teachers, a subset of districts have maintained very high teacher certification rates. Overall, just over 250 Texas districts, including 243 traditional school districts and 9 charter school districts, had teacher certification rates over 95% in 2024–25.

Using data from the Texas Education Agency, our analysis found that 2024–25 teacher certification rates varied:

- **By Governance.** Charter schools are often exempt from state certification policies, and only teachers teaching in bilingual, English as a Second Language (ESL), and special education programs are required to be certified. In 2024–25, the average certification rate in charter school districts was 52%, much lower than the 87% average certification rate in traditional public school districts.
- **By Geography.** Certification rates were typically higher in larger, more urban districts compared to smaller, more rural districts. Geographically, school districts in North and Central Texas had higher certification rates, on average, while districts in West Texas tended to have the lowest certification rates.
- **By Student Composition.** School districts with lower certification rates tend to serve more Black students, Hispanic/Latino students, and economically disadvantaged students. Given the growing evidence that students of uncertified teachers exhibit lower average achievement growth, disproportionate exposure to uncertified teachers may contribute to achievement gaps among student groups.
- **By Subject Area.** Of the more than 42,000 uncertified teachers working in 2024–25, more than half were teaching in foundational subjects (i.e., English language arts and reading, math, science, and social studies). Interviewed district leaders further emphasized their challenges with hiring certified special education and bilingual teachers.

How District Policies Prioritize Certification

Despite the challenges in the supply of new teachers statewide, interviewed Texas district leaders identified different approaches supporting certification in their recruitment, hiring, and district programs for new teachers. Six districts participated in this study: Channelview Independent School District (ISD), Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Dallas ISD, Denton ISD, Hutto ISD, and Mesquite ISD. These districts were identified for having relatively higher certification rates and/or effective district strategies that prioritized certification and supported their uncertified teachers through the certification process.

Increasing the Pipeline of Certified Teachers. All six participating districts have partnerships with at least one teacher residency program and at least one Grow Your Own program targeting high school students and/or paraprofessionals (see [Preparation Partnerships Increasing the Pipeline of Certified Teachers](#)). Interviewed leaders emphasized the value of having multiple partnership programs and preparation

options to bring certified teachers into the district and noted the value of varied program models that may appeal to different types of teacher candidates. Multiple districts intentionally built pipelines so their K–12 students interested in education could start their teacher training during high school, attend subsidized university-based preparation, and then return to the district as new teachers.

Preparation Partnerships Increasing the Pipeline of Certified Teachers

Teacher residency programs, developed in partnership between school districts and teacher preparation programs, typically include a yearlong clinical experience in which a resident works alongside an expert mentor teacher while receiving financial support. Texas-based research has found that residency-trained teachers are, on average, more [instructionally effective](#) than other new teachers and more likely to [stay in the teaching profession](#).

Grow Your Own (GYO) programs create a new pool of teacher candidates who have already been learning, working, and/or training in the district. High school programs can include a teacher education pathway through the [Pathways in Technology Early College High School \(P-TECH\)](#) program, in which high school students can take up to 60 hours of college credit. Programs targeting paraprofessionals or other district staff include district-subsidized programs in which staff get their bachelor's degree and teaching certification, as well as [registered teaching apprenticeships](#) in which candidates work as paid apprentices, with gradually increasing responsibilities, while they complete their training.

Prioritizing Certification Through Recruitment and Hiring. All six participating districts prioritize recruiting and hiring certified teacher candidates. The districts use candidate screening and hiring requirements that favor certified teachers or limit hiring of uncertified teachers to those who have prior experience in schools or who have already begun the certification process (e.g., by being enrolled in preparation or having taken certain certification exams). For example, one district leader explained, “If [a candidate] has not ever worked with kids before, we typically will not interview [them].” This approach reflects [statewide research](#) that found uncertified teachers with prior classroom experience were more effective than those without classroom experience.

Incentivizing and Tracking Certification. All participating districts set time limits for their uncertified teachers to get certified, with some formalizing deadlines for each part of the process. Two districts incentivize certification through significant salary differentials for uncertified teachers (with commensurate increases when they become eligible for intern credentials). District leaders emphasized the value of having designated staff to track and support certification, such as certification specialists in the district office or new teacher mentors knowledgeable about the process. As explained by one district leader, designated district staff “are able to lean into the certification processes and take it on as their personal mission to see their people get certified.”

Supporting and Retaining New Teachers. District leaders emphasized the importance of retention, with one leader explaining that “our best recruiting method is going to be retention.” Leaders highlighted how mentoring and induction programs can improve retention of all new teachers. These programs, along with targeted supports around certification exams and preparation costs, help uncertified teachers get through

the certification process and stay in the profession. The quantitative analysis reinforced the importance of retention, with higher average certification rates in districts with lower teacher turnover in the previous year. District leaders also noted the importance of salaries, including funding available through the [Teacher Incentive Allotment](#), in retaining all of their teachers.

Looking Ahead to House Bill 2 Implementation. The implementation of House Bill 2 provisions related to teacher preparation and certification was top of mind for all interviewed district leaders. District leaders were enthusiastic about the PREP Program Allotment, the new state funding for teacher recruitment, preparation, and mentorship included in House Bill 2. Three programs from the PREP Program Allotment start in the 2026–27 school year, and [575 districts](#) (48% of all districts in the state) will receive at least one of these allotments. PREP program uptake varies considerably across the state, with highest uptake among the state’s largest and most urban districts and lowest among rural and charter school districts.

Policy Considerations

The findings from this report offer some key considerations for school districts and preparation programs as they work to address pervasive teacher staffing challenges driven by low certification rates, especially in light of significant investments in the teacher pipeline and preparation recently enacted in House Bill 2. Yet there are notable short-term constraints facing districts as they work to get uncertified teachers in foundational subjects certified within the next few years. In particular, given the day-to-day workload of any new teacher, uncertified teachers may opt for preparation programs that offer the shortest and least onerous route to certification. However, a growing body of Texas-based research suggests that teachers trained through asynchronous, online instruction—often run by for-profit providers—are less effective and more likely to leave the profession than new teachers trained in other preparation models.²

Districts can try to manage these short-term constraints while working to connect uncertified teachers with preparation experiences that are most likely to support their success. They can do the following:

- **Strengthen certification pathways in collaboration with preparation partners that offer high-quality training and meaningful support.** Districts can prioritize collaboration with preparation partners to manage short-term and long-term planning, create cohorts of uncertified teachers working toward certification, and better integrate certification processes with mentoring and induction already provided to new teachers.
- **Build district capacity and allocate district staff to support certification efforts.** Districts can invest in high-touch supports, in which district staff work directly and regularly with uncertified teachers, as a high-leverage strategy to support certification.
- **Communicate expectations and incentivize certification through district practices and policies.** Districts can create clear certification timelines and steps for their uncertified teachers and can encourage or financially incentivize uncertified teachers to enroll in higher-quality preparation options.
- **Improve district hiring practices and personnel management.** Districts can streamline their hiring practices to ensure that recruitment and hiring happen as early as possible with the best possible information for decision-makers.

Education preparation partners can also help support certification efforts by providing more targeted supports to help uncertified teachers earn certification and communicating candidate progress with relevant district staff to ensure shared tracking of individual timelines.

In the long term, districts stand to benefit from building a sustainable pool of well-prepared and certified teachers in partnership with preparation providers. Across Texas, a range of efforts have been underway to build sustainable pathways into the profession. This includes the state's investments in sustainable teacher residencies fueled by strategic staffing models and, more recently, efforts to seed and scale registered teacher apprenticeships. Building on these successes, districts and educator preparation programs can now leverage new state funds available through the PREP Program Allotment introduced in House Bill 2. They can leverage funds from the following:

- **Preservice Residency Program.** Up to \$39,500 per candidate to cover resident stipends, cooperating teacher stipends, and preparation provider costs.
- **Grow Your Own Program.** Up to \$12,000 per candidate for high school students taking career and technical education courses or paraprofessionals or other district staff pursuing a bachelor's degree in order to become a teacher.
- **Mentorship Program.** Up to \$3,000 per beginning teacher to implement mentoring and induction programs and at least \$1,000 for mentor teachers per mentee they support.

These new state funds can support districts to build or grow a more sustainable pipeline of well-prepared and fully certified teachers that can help reverse the trends in certification and preparation seen across the state in the past 2 decades.

Importantly, the PREP Allotment establishes state funding that is accessible to all interested districts, with funds from some portions of the allotment first disbursed in the 2026–27 school year and funds from other portions in the 2027–28 school year. Early feedback from leaders in the state indicates strong district interest in the PREP Allotment, with close to 600 Texas districts receiving funding for at least one of the three programs available for the 2026–27 school year. Working across the different allotments creates opportunities for districts to strengthen their broader preparation and professional learning infrastructure, and a growing number of tools and technical assistance supports are now available to support that strategic planning. Ultimately, Texas districts can support teacher certification through their policies and practices by balancing high-leverage, short-term strategies to support uncertified teachers with longer-term investments in building their teacher pipeline and improving retention through mentoring and other supports for beginning teachers.

Endnotes

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