



Inside the push to build a stronger teacher pipeline

Sara Jones: Hi, and welcome to Upstream. I'm Dr. Sarah Jones, evaluation officer at the Houston Endowment, and we're excited to be here today to talk about teacher certification, a really important issue right now. We're really excited to be able to share research from Learning Policy Institute on that very timely topic.

If you're in education, you know that House Bill two has changed a lot in education. It has really effectively started to phase out uncertified teachers and core subjects, but also provided incentives for teacher preparation programs like Grow Your Own in residencies. And I'm so excited to be joined here by my colleague, program officer Carlos Villagrana, and as well as a brilliant researcher and two accomplished leaders in the education space to talk about this topic.

With us today, we have Ryan Franklin from Philanthropy Advocates, who has been working tirelessly in the policy space around this issue. We also have Dr. Latonya Goffney, who is superintendent of Aldine, which serves most of North Houston and the surrounding areas. She is a nationally recognized leader who served on the governor's task teacher task force and also my former boss.

And we have Dr. Susan Kemper, Patrick from the Learning Policy Institute, who has spent over a decade looking at teacher workforce issues across the nation. And so we're really excited to have this dream team with us today. I also took a look at the registration, and I know that we have people from across the education spectrum.

We have several districts and epps educator prep programs in attendance. We have people from local and state government. We have a lot of nonprofits and other education agencies who are joining us today. And so I'm super excited to have everybody join this conversation. Before we get started, we always like to tell a little bit of a personal story, and one thing that's really unique about this table is that everybody sitting around this table today has been a classroom teacher which I think is great for this discussion.

And so I wonder if you could talk a little bit about each of your journeys to becoming a teacher. And Ryan, we're gonna start with you this time.

Ryan Franklin: Sure. Thanks for having me. I was a rural kid first in my family to go to college and I tell people, the only folks I know who had gone to college were teachers and preachers, and I didn't think I could pull off being a preacher, so I went to be a teacher.

And so I went through a traditional preparation program at West Texas a and m out in the panhandle. Came back to central Texas and was a teacher in a couple of very small, very rural districts where I got to teach a little bit of everything, things I was certified for and things I was not certified for.

Sara Jones: Excellent. And Dr. Goffney, how about you?

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: Sarah, I'm so glad to be here with you today and the rest of the team and just really proud of you and proud to have worked with you. Also it was awesome opportunity to reflect back to 1999, my first year as an eighth grade language arts teacher in Cold Spring, Texas.

Like you, Ryan, it was a population of 697. I was so excited to get that job. Being a first generation college student and thinking about how education changed my life and reflecting on the teachers who had been impactful for me was one of the reasons that I entered into the teaching profession. And I was blessed.

I went to Sam Houston State University, the best preparation program for preparing teachers. And so I felt like I was really prepared. I went through the certification program. I remember being nervous because I interviewed before I passed my English test. Oh, so when you interview, before you pass a test what do they always tell you once you're certified?

You have a job. And so I remember going and taking a test, being really nervous. 'cause I recognized that our livelihood rested on whether or not I was certified or not. And I am really grateful for the preparation 'cause, of course, the rest is history. I became a certified teacher. I was hired and just thankful for how education changed my life.

And now we get to change lives through education, but we can't do any of it without great teachers.

Sara Jones: Awesome. Susan, how about you?

Susan Kemper Patrick: So I entered teaching through Teach for America. So I had a pretty abbreviated training, very different from the traditional training that you all had. But I think what really helped me was my district that I taught in, which was about 10 miles from where I grew up.

So it was an area I was very familiar with in North Carolina. We had a great mentorship program and so I also taught eighth grade ELA. And I had a mentor teacher who also had taught eighth grade ELA, and a classic story. My last class of the day was really tough. And so she would

always come and observe me during that last class and then after school we'd sit together and I would cry and she would tell me it was gonna be okay.

But I really like to credit her for really giving me concrete strategies to really help my teaching, but also just that reassurance that this is a hard job and you're gonna be okay. And that really helped me through my first year.

Sara Jones: Carlos, what about you?

Carlos Villagrana: Yeah, so I actually graduated college from Oklahoma State University with a bachelor's degree in elementary education.

And I was fortunate to be able to get hired down here in Houston starting off in Alief ISD and my good fortune continued because I was hired to teach, at Kennedy Elementary, which at that time was an Annenberg Beacon School. And so we had so many accomplished teachers there and staff. So I really felt like I had to come in and really prove myself.

I was teaching first and second grade mixed age groups, so ten first graders, ten second graders. Different levels. They were really doing some innovative things at that time. And I had gotten great preparation, but really what got me through that first year was just amazing staff who were willing to like, invest in me.

Also just an amazing community with parents who were really supportive who wanted their best for their kids. And so I really felt like I lucked out coming to Houston and being placed there. So it's been a long journey, but I'm glad I'm still in it.

Sara Jones: Yeah. Teaching actually also brought me to Houston.

I'm also a Teach for America Corps member, but I started here in Houston. At Houston, HISD. I had my summer institute at University of Houston and taught at Edison Middle School. And then thankfully was hired at an elementary school, which was a much better fit for me at Park Place. And really similar stories.

I started feeling not super prepared—that one month crash course in the summer from Teach for America—but had a really great team at Park Place Elementary School of admin and of teachers who just really supported me through that first year of teaching and into that second year. So I think it's really exciting that we all come to this from the perspective of former teachers and with different pathways.

There is actually some really great new data that has just dropped around teacher certification from the Texas Education Agency. And I'd like to start with that. Ryan, I know you've been following this data really closely. I'm wondering can you unpack some of that new data for us?

Ryan Franklin: Yeah, so excited to dive in a little bit.

So we know that one year does not necessarily make a trend, but I think there are some slight reasons for optimism in the new data. I think one of the things TE has started looking at is where all the new teachers come from in a given year. And one of the things that really jumped out this year is we have more experienced teachers returning to the classroom after having been out of the classroom.

Largest population of those teachers on record. And I think that's a good sign that our experienced teachers are willing to come back to the classroom and to come back to teaching 'cause they know what they're getting into. And so that's a good sign that they're coming back. We also, it feels like we've seen the trends start to level off or start to decrease around the increase in hiring uncertified teachers.

And so still that's the largest population of brand new teachers is that uncertified teacher population. But for the first time in a few years, starting to see that number start to decrease and that feels encouraging. On the whole, we saw more teachers earn certification last year having completed a preparation program.

Still a long way to go between the supply and the demand we have, but that's a positive. And also teacher attrition has declined again, so that's another sign we've gotta do what we can to keep the teachers we've got and to grow them while also building the supply of well-prepared teachers.

Sara Jones: Yeah. I'm sure a lot of factors are going into that data. What are some of the forces at play in some of these?

Ryan Franklin: I think one of the things is districts have been put on the clock with House Bill 2 around phasing out uncertified teachers. And so I think decisions are starting to be made there.

I think there's always also larger market forces that impact the teacher workforce. And so where the job market is good. Other places that can draw from our teachers. And but when the hiring market slows down or there's some uncertainty there, we tend to be able to hang onto our teachers a little better.

So those things all play into the teacher workforce.

Sara Jones: Yeah. So these are some promising data, at least. I know we can't have trends after one year, but any other thoughts on this data or things that you're seeing from anyone else?

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: I know in Aldine we are seeing an uptick in making sure that we have the resources and supports in order to grow on teachers.

Because when I think back to COVID and post COVID what was important to us, and I'm guilty of saying it, and you might have heard it, we just wanted a caring adult in every classroom because we saw an uptick in those who were leaving the profession. And so when I think about

the different supports and the ways in which, which are making sure that we are growing our own students, starting with high school students literally in 2019. When I entered in 2018, when I entered Aldine, we started at Rosa Avalos P-Tech, and one of the pathways is a teacher training. We're gonna train our own, grow our own teachers. One of the things that has existed for many years is each pathway at the high school has teacher training.

And so we have an educator signing day, and we just recently had our educator signing day, and we were so grateful. When you look back 2018, we had 40, and this year we had historic 114.

Sara Jones: Amazing.

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: And so that's amazing. But it's also is showing that we're turning the tide in addressing the needs of our district, because we've decreased the number of uncertified teachers that we're hiring, we're making sure to, and providing that preparation.

As we all alluded to, we went through the certification program. Whether you went through a TFA or a traditional program, you had a process, you had mentors, and we have to recreate those things at the local level.

Sara Jones: Yeah.

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: Fortunately or unfortunately, and we have to have the funding in order to make that happen. And that's what I'm grateful that House Bill 2 has done.

Carlos Villagrana: I think the other thing I would add is just that I think we're so fortunate in Texas to have access to the data that we have. I know that doesn't exist everywhere—to be able to monitor how this is playing out and be able to respond to it.

And I think we've seen similar things in the Houston region all the kind of, one year trends, if you will, that we kinda highlighted here. We're seeing our district partners or EBP partners start to mention that, it does feel like we're maybe turning the corner around it. I think it's promising and optimistic about what's to come.

Sara Jones: So we chose a Learning Policy Institute this year to partner and really think about. The workforce in Texas because they have national expertise with the teacher workforce. And so Susan has done some research here in Texas around this issue. And I'd like you to talk to us just a little bit about why Texas is so ripe for this research.

Susan Kemper Patrick: So as you all know, Texas has the largest teacher workforce in the country. And I feel like a lot of the things happening in Texas are happening in other places, but maybe to a smaller extent.

Like when you think about teacher certification, the ways people become teachers in Texas are similar to what in other states. You have folks going through pre-service prep. Getting a

standard certificate going into the classroom, like we've already heard about. You have folks on intern certificates who are teaching and learning at the same time, and then you have emergency permits.

But I think what does set Texas apart and why we're here today to talk about it is, that really large proportion of people who are coming in without any certification at all. There are a few other states that are playing with those sorts of policies that we're gonna hear about from the districts of innovation policy.

But I think Texas is unique in kind of the policy landscape around certification. And especially thinking about how dramatic that change has happened, how quickly it's happened in Texas, a decade ago, maybe 2,500 folks were entering every year without any certification.

In the last four years, it's been over 12,000. It is going down, which is great, but it's still a lot of people. And so I think that's why it's a really good space to be doing a lot of research to really understand what's happening. There's a really wonderful and large group of Texas researchers who have good data, who are really able to speak to a lot of important questions that not all states can speak to.

So I think that's really important. One other thing that I think is where Texas has led the way for better or worse, is on online teacher preparation. I think this is something that's happening nationally. Yeah. Preparation is moving online across the country, but I think Texas, it happened earlier and it's happened faster.

And there's a lot of good things about online preparation, right? It's much more accessible. Folks who live in rural areas or career switchers who are parents—it really creates a lot of flexibility and opportunities. But there's also this growing research base that gives us some pause, right?

That online prep may not be as effective, especially if it's asynchronous module based. You're not necessarily getting clinical experience or mentorship. And so I think that's another place where tech, we can really learn from what's happening in Texas and that's gonna really inform the national conversation about what good online preparation could look like.

Sara Jones: Thanks. Ryan, she mentioned that Texas has had this big kind of swing. Can you tell us a little bit about the policies that kind of got us here or. Helped us get here.

Ryan Franklin: So in 2015, the legislature passed the legislation that allowed districts to have what we call the districts of innovation.

And really that is extending the flexibility that our public charter schools have to our districts in many areas. And one of those was hiring uncertified teachers. I think Susan makes a really good point that even before that, the majority of new teachers in Texas were coming in through fast track online alternative certification program. I think people tend to think that the norm is a traditionally prepared person that does their semester of student teaching and knows all their life that they wanna be a teacher. That hasn't been the norm in Texas for a very long time.

So even before districts had the flexibility to hire uncertified teachers, the majority of new teachers were coming through those routes. So that policy passed in 2015, we saw a slight uptick in districts hiring, but really it was coming out of the pandemic. And then that much higher record teacher attrition levels and the struggle to attract people to the profession.

That caused the massive shift that we've seen over the last few years where we've seen over half of all new teachers hired have been uncertified. So I think those are the factors. At the same time we saw higher, it was kinda became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because those teachers weren't prepared and they weren't staying in the classroom.

And so it was fueling continued higher attrition and we saw struggling student outcomes as a result and tied to that too. So it all kinda tied together and was the perfect storm leading into the moment we're in now.

Sara Jones: And what does that mean, Carlos? For districts, funders, education prep providers?

Carlos Villagrana: In many ways, thinking back to 2023, it felt like we had just come out of a storm, a crisis, and we were trying to figure out where do we go from here? Unfortunately the Houston region has experienced this too often, with a storm or some sort of situation.

And I think in our best moments, what we've done is we've come together as a community and figure out, hold on, how do we support one another? How do we move forward so that we're actually coming out stronger? From this experience and in many ways, I wanna say that, we actually were able to do some of that back in 2023.

We had been funding lots of different districts, some EPP programs, but we hadn't really brought everybody together into the same room to have kind of broader conversations, deeper conversation about hold on, if we could reimagine a future, what would that look like? And so it looked like a less siloed and a more integrated type of system.

And so that's what we did. We started the Community of Practice. We partnered with the Powell Foundation to start that. Initially there was some reluctance from, hold on, you want me to come together with other districts and kind, pull back the curtain and tell what's happening.

You want to have EPP programs, both ACP and university in the same table. That might be cause for some fireworks, but I think what we realized when we looked at the data. There was not gonna be a way for one entity to solve it or a couple to solve it. We were gonna have to really think about how do we work together to actually come out of this stronger.

And just to keep a couple of highlights that came outta the community practice when we looked at the data, the districts very quickly said we need to get this uncertified teachers reigned in to be able to have a more stable teacher workforce.

And so one of the working groups was how do we reduce the number of uncertified teachers? The second working group that formed from there was, we have a lot of people who are interested in becoming teachers. If you take a look at the people number of people that sign up for an associate's degree in teaching, we have a lot of people get enrolled in preparation programs, but we only have about 32% of the people that sign up to become teachers actually make their way all the way to the classroom, get certified. So we knew that there was something that we could do there. The last thing I'll point out is that, that resulted in starting teacher apprenticeship programs.

It also meant that we could start doing some university-based programs at a community college where you could actually get a bachelor's degree at a community college, lower cost. All in the same system. We also are seeing the launch of competency-based programs as well.

And so it's been great to see just the innovation, how districts have been able to partner with EPP programs so that there's a much more integrated approach to the work. And really the last thing I'll say on this is that we were able to partner with researchers to really figure out what's working. Is there anything that's moving the needle? Bringing our grantees together, our partners, and we were able to take some of that learning and partner with our policy grantees to then take some of this understanding and knowing back to the state to help inform better policy. So I'm excited.

Where we're at now. But it took everyone pulling together from a community standpoint to get us to this place, and now for us to have the opportunity that we have now.

Sara Jones: I'm so excited to have you with us today for this, the district perspective. Aline has been such a standout in this work, and I'm so thrilled that you're here to talk about it because I remember I was there and coming out of COVID. And I remember there were teachers quitting. They weren't showing up. We were building dashboards to see who, which classrooms had a teacher. What day? I was the data team and we were subbing sometimes and so it was really like, how do we make sure that there are teachers in the classroom that there are adults who care for these kids in the classroom. And Aline has come so far from that. And so I'd love to hear some of the things that you guys have done. Just building the pipeline and just supporting teachers there on the ground.

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: Oh, Sarah, you making me anxious as I think about those times because it was such a tough time.

I've elected to serve in hard to staff areas. Back in the day it was in Cold Springs, the rural area. And I do remember when certified teachers were able to go online and get certified. That was a huge "do you hire them?" That was a conversation. And so when I think about where we were at that time and where we've been, it's really important to set the context when you think about districts in that serve urban areas.

And that's what Alinedoes. 73% Hispanic, 23% African American, 90% economically disadvantaged, a hundred percent. Title one. When teachers have choices that may or may not be their first choice. So when you think about the challenges, coming outta COVID, we had lofty goals, had launched the 2019 strategic plan, had launched high quality instruction materials, and done all those things that were gonna help us to move the needle and grow every kid.

But if we don't have good teachers, that's not gonna happen. So we had to be strategic, had to think about how are we gonna move beyond just having a caring adult. And so I'm grateful for the partnerships and we had to look around. I talked earlier about how we were growing teachers from those who are in our classrooms getting them to think about it. That's a long-term investment. And then we looked around even at our paraprofessionals and looking at the work, and many of our paraprofessionals had, as you alluded to two years of college. And so how can we encourage them who already have experience working with our kids to become certified.

And so we have partnerships with Texas Women University for our paraprofessionals as well as UHD to help get our paraprofessionals certified. And then we had to make sure that we did have some teachers who, just did a little push. They were doing a great, a decent job for our first year teacher, a new teacher in the classroom, but they weren't really working towards becoming certified, and we wanted them to become those certified teachers.

So working to provide the supports because you didn't have expectations. But without the supports and without the coaching and the mentorships that we were all benefited from, it was really important. Additionally some of the other things that came outta House Bill two, including TIA that was a game changer. And when we think about the governor's goal and the commissioner's goal of having teachers make six figures, that was real for us because that was gonna help us to attract more students considering, I told, I said 90% economically disadvantaged, so TIA was gonna be worth more in Aldine ISD.

And so when we look at, as we're trying to accomplish all these other goals, how we're growing and supporting teachers, and how we're aligning our different systems it's been a blessing. When we look at we have 695 TIA designated teachers today. Wow. And we have 395 that are gonna be announced. So over a thousand right now. And then with the announcement, the knowledge that the level is gonna cause even more. And although that's not where we want our teachers to stay, it's a pathway into becoming the recognized and master's level. And so I think the more time and attention that we can put on growing our teachers, the better our student outcomes are gonna be and the more we're gonna be able to accomplish the goals and some of our districts that have lots of challenges as well.

Sara Jones: Yeah, I think that's great. I actually was out to dinner the other day with friends and someone asked, we were talking about past jobs and someone said, I had mentioned that I had worked at Aldine, and someone asked about that, and another person at the table said, oh, I heard. If you're a teacher at Aldine, it's great. They're gonna support you a lot, but you better be ready to work because they're gonna support you. And you're gonna do good work for the kids.

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: That's right on. But what's good about some of the supports that have come outta that House Bill 2, they're getting paid it as well.

Sara Jones: Yes.

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: We have over a hundred teachers who make six figures, and so I'm proud of that our teachers who used to be forced to enter into administration quicker than they probably planned because they have a passion for teaching, now we can invest that money in our teachers.

Sara Jones: That's amazing. You also served on the vacancy task force. Can you tell me a little bit about that and what were some of the recommendations that came out of that?

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: Listen I just remember we were at a meeting and the commissioner was there and we were talking about how we needed to focus on these vacancies. This was post COVID, right?

It was top of mind for most leaders, but it was really top of mind for me for the reasons that you alluded to with the dashboard and making sure we had more than just a caring adult in the classroom, but a competent, caring, high capacity teacher in every classroom and wondering who's gonna be talking about this?

And I was so grateful and thankful that when the governor put out the call about the teacher vacancy task force, that I was on the list and got to serve and convene with educators from all over the state, including teachers and superintendents and others who were facing this crisis. 'cause at that point, nobody was really talking about it, and it was a conversation that started, and while pay and compensation was top of the list and there were benefits and different things that were discussed, one of the things that as a superintendent who participated, I got to listen to the teachers. It was also about the conditions in which teachers were serving.

And so what was an aha while compensation was important, but also again, addressing time. Teachers wanted more time to be able to take on some of the additional tasks they were responsible for. They also talked about benefits and different things of that nature. And so it was a real opportunity here, like grassroots level.

And then it was encouraging to see how it showed up in house bill 2. And one of the things that I found enlightening too 'cause sometimes we forget that teachers are learners.

Sara Jones: Yeah.

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: She (Susan) shared it. And I hate that I left out all my mentor teachers that I had my first year. That's powerful.

And so to have teachers who say, Hey, I struggled my first year, I would've benefited from a mentor. I would've benefited from additional training, additional support. I did not go through a

traditional program, so I didn't have X, Y, and Z. And instead of having to independently as a campus or a district to address what those supports look like, to have it universally show up in house bill 2 has been a blessing.

Sara Jones: Yeah. And Ryan, you were also, you were in Austin working around the same time as the task force issues on teacher workforce issues. Can you tell us a little bit about what you were doing there in your time there?

Ryan Franklin: Yeah. One of the most compelling things about the work that Dr. Goffney and the other task force members did was to think holistically about the teacher workforce. And not to just think about just compensation, just working conditions, just preparation, but really to think about it all. And so I think that gave those of us in the advocacy space a strong jumping off point to help tell the story and say, it's not enough to just pull one lever. We've gotta pull all the levers and we've gotta go all in to change the way to become a teacher and then how we support our teachers once we get there. So I think that was a strong jumping off point. I think people had a real hard time even imagining that this population of uncertified teachers was happening.

It didn't matter how many times we would meet with legislators or with legislative staff. It just was so far from their experience. And so we had to really stay on top of telling that story and elevating the local experience. And one of the things that we had was foundations from all around the state who had seen the need in their local communities and who had invested in promising practices.

And so we were able to marshal those stories, bring those together to help tell the story that, hey, if the legislature will come along and support the changes that local districts are making and local communities are doing supported by philanthropy, we can drive change at scale. And really it was the combination of the all of every lever, everything we could do.

And we got in 2023, we got to the one yard line of getting policy passed, but we didn't get across the finish line. And so we had to come back and retell those stories and re-seed that to get the impact and to get over the finish line in 2025.

Sara Jones: Yeah, I think we have a clip of you doing just that.

Ryan Franklin: This is an historic piece of legislation as House Bill 2. Invest nearly \$8 billion in funding for our public schools. That is a larger investment for Texas public Schools and our education system than any other legislation we filed in the history of the state of Texas. I think we were really fortunate to have strong leadership from the governor, from our chair on the senate side, from as we heard our chair on the house public education side with Chairman Buckley, really helping champion these issues and ensure that we were able to get across the finish line on that second attempt.

Sara Jones: And so now we do, we've had some promising practices and Susan, I know you've done some research. Can you tell us a little bit about the research that you've been doing around this issue?

Susan Kemper Patrick: Absolutely. We started by looking at the data and we looked at the 24-25 data, and as we've heard, like the statewide numbers tell one story and you can look statewide and you'll see that in the 24-25 school year, about 12% of teachers had no certification at all.

But that really obscures what's happening at the district level, right? And it's very different across the different districts in the state. And so we started by looking at these district level data to say where the districts that have maintained really high certification rates or that are places where they may be hiring uncertified teachers, but they're really investing to make sure that those teachers get through the certification process.

So that's what we wanted to do in this study. And so we did it in two ways. One was looking more just at the data to understand, if we look at the district level, what kind of factors are gonna be associated with higher certification rates? So we looked geographically, we looked at things like district size or beginning teacher salary, just to understand those relationships.

But then I think what was the more important and more informative part was like getting into the districts, right? And so we wanted to identify districts that had, really figured out some good practices that where he is gonna, keep certification rates high or, have un certified teachers, but really get them through certification.

So we ended up interviewing district leaders in six districts that were identified both by the data and by kind of leaders throughout the state. So we interviewed the district leaders in those districts who were, in charge of hr, in charge of hiring, recruitment and support to really understand their practices.

Sara Jones: Awesome. What were some of the key takeaways from those?

Susan Kemper Patrick: Yeah, so we ended up with a cut and a couple different ones. And so one I think we'll start with is around the importance of retention. And so I know we have a graph to show on that, and so I'll let that come up. But, as we've already heard, like keeping teachers in the profession is the most important thing you can do to address teacher shortages.

The biggest driver of teacher shortages is teachers leaving the profession before retirement. That's true nationally. It's true in Texas as well. And so that was a really big insight from the quantitative and the qualitative data. So in the quantitative data, as you can see here, what we looked at is we looked at the 23-24 teacher turnover rates.

How many teachers left your district in 23-24? That is strongly associated with your teacher certification rates in 24-25. This makes sense, right? This is logical to folks. Some of this is

driven by charter school districts. Charter school districts typically have high teacher turnover and low certification rates, but it's also true in the traditional school districts too.

And there's something happening in those districts that are able to keep their teachers where they don't necessarily need to hire that many new teachers and they can really prioritize certification. They're not necessarily having to go and look for uncertified teachers to fill open positions.

This was also really reflected in what we heard from district leaders. One leader from Dallas ISD said, the best recruitment method is retention. That is the number one thing. And all of those things that we just talked about, that they're gonna support retention, working conditions, salaries, mentorship, new teacher supports, those are all really important.

And district leaders really emphasize their value.

Sara Jones: I know that you came away with four policy priorities. Can you mention those?

Susan Kemper Patrick: Yeah, I'd love to talk through and just mention a few practices that kind of undergirded those policy priorities. So the first one was around strengthening certification pathways in partnership with preparation programs.

And so for districts to think about how can they do two things at once, one build a pipeline as we've already heard about, that's gonna bring fully certified, fully prepared new teachers into the district. All the districts that we interviewed had teacher residency programs. They had grow your own programs, paraprofessional or high school students.

They're really thinking creatively and they're investing in those programs. So districts like Cypress Fairbanks investing in their teacher residency program, or Mesquite, which has a paraprofessional program that the district is investing in. That's a long-term strategy. But there's also a short-term need.

There are over 40,000 uncertified teachers. In classrooms right now. And they also need support. And so I think the other thing that districts can do is really think about how can we work with preparation providers to serve those uncertified teachers? And that can happen in a lot of different ways.

But I think one of the kind of valuable things for districts to think about is how can we steer folks into programs that are gonna support them that align with our own professional learning goals. And can we do things like create cohorts within our district if we have a set of uncertified teachers who are all trying to get certification at the same time, can we bring them together?

Can we offer them support? So I think those were two big things that districts can be doing to strengthen those certification pathways in partnership. The second one was on district capacity. Thinking about specific district staff. I think often, historically we've thought about teacher preparation as an individual person who is gonna go figure this out on their own.

And I think the times have changed. And in fact, we need to be building systems to say, okay, that is not the way forward. And that actually, if you want people to get through this process, you need to have someone there to help them. And so this looked different in different districts, right?

Smaller district, Hutto ISD, they have certification staff in their central office. They're working directly with their uncertified teachers. Figuring out the exams, figuring out all the details of the certification process can be pretty complicated. And a school principal might not be the right person to do that.

So can we find other district staff who can do that? Another thing that was happening is thinking about certification exams. We often hear this is a barrier for folks. And there are districts like Channelview where they're like, okay, we have candidates. We have bilingual teacher candidates that need to make it through these certification exams. So our district staff and the bilingual department, they're gonna support that process.

And so I think that was another big thing that districts can be thinking about. The third policy priority was around expectations, communicating expectations clearly, and incentivizing certification. And every district that we interviewed, they did have specific timelines that people had to get certified under.

That's something that's unique about the District of Innovation policy is there's no timeline. You can be uncertified indefinitely under that policy. But these districts were like, no, we're not gonna do that when we hire you. You have to be certified by this time to keep your job, but it's not just an expectation.

It's the support that goes with it. So one of the things that a couple of districts that we interviewed were trying and Channelview was, we're gonna pay, if you're uncertified you are gonna make less money and it's gonna be significantly less money. And that was very, that was a big incentive.

People are like, I wanna get the full teacher salary. And that was a big incentive. And something districts can be thinking about, right? Is okay, there may be some savings from that. Can we reinvest that in preparation, in support? And then the final one was just thinking more broadly about your HR policies.

Obviously this is a hard environment, right? To find good teachers, but are there ways that you can think about recruitment and hiring so that you're hiring with the best possible information and you're hiring as early as you can? And so some of the districts were trying different things at the district level.

So for example, in Dallas ISD, they're doing some district level screening and giving their principals priority candidates. You don't have to hire these folks, but you're giving them like, they

need help wading through sometimes a large candidate pool for some of the for some of the large districts.

And so providing better information earlier so that you can have the best information for principals when they're trying to hire.

Sara Jones: And that's really interesting that some of the things that you mentioned about having the districts do, we're also doing some research from the teacher candidates perspective, the uncertified teachers and things like being called a teacher instead of an associate teacher or some other kind of name that professionalization has really meant a lot to them.

And the same with the salary in the districts where the uncertified teachers are saying, I want that extra salary bump, and so I wanna finish this certification program as soon as I can.

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: It makes all the difference. We had to tweak, as I stated, post COVID. We hired 'em as teachers, we associate teachers, but we hired 'em at the same salary.

And one of the things that we tweaked a couple of years ago is we decreased it a little bit, and so there's the additional incentive to become certified. In addition, I love what you said about providing support for the certification, right? Because that's made all the difference as well.

And so our HR department designed a program to help our teachers become certified and utilizing the strength of the people who are in our districts and the multilingual department to help with our bilingual certification and special ed department to help with our special ed certification.

So all those things they definitely work. And we've seen it move the needle here in Aldine.

Carlos Villagrana: I couldn't help but think, as you were playing it out how all these different strategies that are trying it used to be that hey, hiring the teachers that's the HR function.

Yes. You go out, recruit 'em, hire 'em, bring them in, and then we'll take it from here. But I think the districts who are trying to get ahead of this and you are pointing this out, highlighting it, there's all districts who are thinking about, hold on, we need to think about this more comprehensively as a talent strategy. Including not just our finance folks, but if we're gonna decrease compensation a little bit, how do we take that money and reinvest it? Provide supports to keep 'em in the classroom long enough so they can actually get certified and be successful. And so it just speaks to that idea of how this kind of changing how talent's playing out in a district. And I think there's some districts who already have gotten this and are already, yep, this is gonna be the way we do it here. But I think there's still more work to be done and more, maybe more research to figure out, what about that accelerates teachers getting certified. So more to come probably.

Sara Jones: I know you had interviews with district leaders. Did House Bill two come up? Or how did that come up in the conversation?

Susan Kemper Patrick: Oh, definitely. Yes. This was last fall, so everything had passed, the new information was trickling out, right?

So everyone was like, I'm on the webinars, I'm looking for all the emails. Yes. I would say two things came out of those conversations about House Bill two. I think one was a lot of excitement about the prep program allotments. These are all districts that had already been investing in pipeline, already been investing in mentorship, but they were really excited.

They were like, this is a great new investment. We'll be able to strengthen our programs in some cases, expand our pipeline programs. So a lot of excitement about prep program allotment. I would say a little more like caution around the new certification requirements. They were starting to look at all their numbers to think about, okay, what does this mean for us?

And I think about a couple things, in some districts they were reassessing their timelines for certification. So they were thinking about, okay, like first we need to think strategically about we have this population of the K-5, uncertified teachers and we really need to move them through the certification process quickly.

But I think definitely some trepidation of okay, this is a change. Are we gonna be able to do this on the timeline? And then I think about the waiver process, like there, that was an option and I think districts were weighing whether they go forward with a waiver or try to stick to the original timeline with having the two years to phase out the uncertified teachers and foundational subjects.

Sara Jones: Ryan, we've had those waivers come through now. Yeah. You wanna talk a little bit about where we are? Now with that or,

Ryan Franklin: So I think we've seen a lot of districts say we're gonna need some more time to make the shift because it really is a, we're having to build a whole new infrastructure and supply and it's gonna take time for the other sort of incentives and funding structures from House Bill two to kick in.

So I think we've seen over half of districts ask for more time, ask for the waiver and the flexibility there. But we've also seen about half of districts and charters raise their hand and say, we wanna be part of this prep allotment. We want the first year of something totally new. And totally different with a fair number of hoops to jump through to have about half the school system and the state raise their hand and say, yes, we wanna be part of this. From the start. And this first year it will be, the mentorship funding will be available, the grow your own funding will be available, and then the funding for residencies will be available.

And then several other funding streams will become available in the next school year. But this is an encouraging start for districts saying, we're gonna jump in and do this.

Sara Jones: I know there's some urgency about meeting those mandates, especially for those who haven't asked for that waiver.

So I just wanna go back to the four policy recommendations that Susan highlighted a little bit earlier. Which are to strengthen the pathways in collaboration with partners that offer high quality training and meaningful support to build district capacity and allocate district staff to support certification efforts, to communicate expectations and incentivize certification through the district practices and policies, and to improve hiring district practices and personnel management beyond just House Bill 2.

With those four recommendations, if you had a magic wand and we could pick one to like fully implement with no funding issues, which of those would you start with? This is for everybody.

Carlos Villagrana: Yeah. I'll kick us off. I think what I'm really encouraged by is this idea of strengthening preparation of our teachers by the partnerships that are formed with EPP partners.

And I think, House Bill two is a prep allotment call for that, right? If you want the residency dollars, then you have to have a partnership with an approved residency approved vendor, right? And so I think we're starting to see lots more conversations happening that bring people to the table around what do we want to be true about our first year teacher, maybe like in their first nine weeks of the classroom.

What things are you, will you be doing to support them? Once they're doing the student teaching or residency. And here's the things that we could be doing as well. I think at the end, that means good things for teachers because it brings people together, eliminates redundancies, and really maximizes the resources that we're providing to support those folks.

So for me I'm excited about all of it. But I will say, I think I'm excited about being able to bring people together and figure out how we work together to maximize resources and really make sure that we're providing a great support system for our teacher candidates.

Susan Kemper Patrick: Yeah. I can jump in too.

I obviously wrote the recommendations so we just got final. But I think this first one, we've done a lot of research in Texas and other places about teacher residency programs and how that partnership between EPPS and districts really changes the game. It's, it takes it from being well prep programs, they sit over here, they do their own thing, and then the teachers come to the districts and then the district starts from there, right?

And I think we've just decided that doesn't make sense. We're all in this together. We have similar, we should have similar goals, we should have the same goals. And I think that partnership really changes not just the individual, like new teachers experience. It changes the whole landscape.

And I think that's where this new funding is so exciting 'cause it really creates the opportunity to do that at a state level that I don't think we've ever seen in any other state.

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: And I'll just jump in 'cause I totally agree and it's hard to choose one. I think we have to all of them.

So great job on those recommendations. I see them working in tandem perhaps, but partnerships is the most important because we can't do this alone. We just can't. And without the EPPs and others on board. Where we're not just handing off and starting over where it's a seamless transition is where we're gonna really be able to impact the numbers and have a more prepared teacher job force.

Ryan Franklin: I'm just gonna join the course. It's about partnerships and really to do this work differently and partnership is in the name of the prep. And so it really requires districts and preparation programs to think as partners. And to work with the same students toward the same goal in a way that's never been true.

Districts have so often been almost the victim of whatever preparation produces. And this is a way for them to be in the driver's seat and think this is what we need and being, being in that control seat as the, as a consumer of preparation, as a true partnership.

Sara Jones: So House Bill two passed, but we know that it's just beginning. So I'm wondering Susan and Ryan especially, what do you guys see in the policy space as hospital two continues to roll out or other things that may be coming.

Ryan Franklin: I'll start. I think this is so much change and so many new things, like the mantra I'm trying to adopt is let it cook.

I think we've gotta let some of these new things marinate. I think school districts have gone through so much change all at once that we really need to sustain this and we need to make sure we've got the proof points to prove this up. I think we will have them, but we need some time for the system to catch up and to make some demonstrated growth.

And I think we'll see that growth in teacher retention. I think we'll see that growth in student outcomes. That's right. And so I'm excited about seeing that, but we've gotta let some of this simmer a little bit to get there. We can't go in expecting big changes every session and expect the system to meet that.

Susan Kemper Patrick: Yeah, and I'll say two things that I think build on earlier points. I think one of them is. This idea of a system, the districts need to build a system. And the legislation offers a lot of pieces. Yeah. And but it's not just, it's not a simple thing that you're just checking off a box and, okay, we're doing these four things and now we're good.

This is about how districts are thinking strategically and creatively about how to create these partnerships to, to use this investment. And that is hard work. And so I think identifying what

districts are doing it well and holding up those models, and especially districts that don't have all the resources of some of the big, large urban districts do.

I think the second thing is thinking about the candidates and thinking about candidate choice. I think the idea behind the prep allotments is that hopefully it's gonna really incentivize people to say I do want to do full traditional pre-service preparation. For a potential teacher, they could walk into a classroom and make a full teacher salary right away and do online training and that does sound appealing. And I understand the appeal and so can these incentives kind of change people's thinking about what type of preparation they might be interested in?

I think that's a really important point and something that will be really good to watch.

Sara Jones: We only have about 10 minutes left and we have gotten a couple of audience questions both previously and we're getting some live. And one is for you Ryan, and the question is really as household two continues to roll out and imp have implementation, what are some of the data that people are gonna be looking at to really evaluate the implementation of that?

Ryan Franklin: I think there are a lot of pieces. I think that. The teacher attrition data, the teacher turnover data. I think that's something that's an overall indicator of the health of the profession. I think there's a lot of things that go into that, but I think that's a big one. Another, I think, is the percentage of traditionally prepared candidates.

We're at a very low number of teachers coming through our traditional preparation programs, whether that's student, teacher or residency. That number needs to start climbing by a lot. We need to double or triple that number and that number needs to start trending positively pretty soon. This should support this.

This is a line, but that's a very low number, and to me that's an indicator that the incentive is working. And then I think things like the overall percentage of uncertified teachers. These kind of things are things we'll watch, but to me, at the end of the day, it's about student growth and student impact.

And so we will know if this is working when our student achievement results and our student growth results start trending in a positive direction.

Sara Jones: Any other thoughts on hospital implementation and how we might think about the impacts?

Dr. LaTonya Goffney: When I think about my, this childhood experience, growing up in poverty and when I went to school, I could still remember Ms. Freeman, my kindergarten teacher, Ms. Ledley, my second grade teacher, Ms. Bradford, my fourth grade teacher. And I share that because I looked up to my teachers, and I remember having my first African American teacher and I was like, oh my gosh, I wanna be just like her. I wanna wear my hair like her. The idea of being a teacher was highly regarded. So when I told my grandmother, or I told anyone that I

wanted to be a teacher, they were proud. And so I think in addition to some of the policies and some of the resources that are building this ecosystem or providing this whole approach to supporting the new teachers, right?

We've also gotta somehow work to elevate the profession. I believe that our teachers are doing great work, and I believe that 80, 90% of our teachers are incredible, and the remaining ones we've gotta get them to support. But in order to continue to attract teachers who want to go through that traditional pathway or attract teachers who want to be teachers that aren't I think I'll do a teacher if this doesn't work out right?

You gotta continue to elevate the profession.

Sara Jones: Yeah. That's great.

Carlos Villagrana: Yeah. And just something that kind of, I keep thinking about is going back to what we said earlier, there's a lot of folks who raise their hand to say, I wanna become a teacher, and how do I figure out a pathway to get there? And I think we're still early on.

Some of the models that we're gonna be using in the future are just now being built. They're just now being put together. And so think about some of the high school students that you all have. The partnerships that you have with your community colleges to offer NOCO Pathways to get an associate's degree.

Now we need to figure out how we take other resources from the state, how school aids with community college funding to help, augment and help provide an opportunity for a no cost or low cost pathway to becoming a teacher. And so all that to say, I think we will also wanna pay attention to how, what's the overall health of these new pathways, apprenticeship programs, that sort of thing. So I think a lot to keep an eye on.

Sara Jones: Awesome. Susan, before we wrap up we learned a lot about your research. Can you tell us where to find that research?

Susan Kemper Patrick: Yes. Yeah learning policy institute.org. Come on over. We have a lot of great stuff. But this is newly released and we're gonna have more coming soon with the brief is up. It's eight pages. It's pretty short, easy read. And then the full report, if you love digging into the details, will be up soon.

Sara Jones: Excellent. Thanks. We will also have the report when we put upstream our, it will be linked there at houstondenowment.org/resources. Ryan, Dr. Goffney, Susan, Carlos, I'm just so glad that you guys were here to have this conversation with us today.

I just thank you so much for sharing your work and your insights with this audience. It has been just a great conversation. If you are watching online, we'd love you to fill out the survey. There'll be a QR code or a link in the chat for you guys. Thank you for this conversation today. I also

wanna thank our comms team who has put all this together and our newly minted Dr. Helen Clancy, who didn't know I was gonna do that.

Join us next time on Upstream where my colleague Robiel will talk about building capacity in nonprofits. Until next time, I'm Sarah Jones. And this is Upstream.