

Scott R. Muri, Ed. D
Superintendent | Ector County Independent School District

Academic Excellence
College and Career Readiness
Safe and Supportive Learning Environment
Purposeful, Timely Two-Way Communication



September 10, 2020

To: House Public Education Committee, Chairman Huberty and Vice Chairman Bernal
Re: Request for Information, Interim Charge 1, Question 1

Chairman Huberty, Vice Chairman Bernal, and Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to your request for information on Interim Charge 1: *Can the state delay implementation of the teacher incentive pay program to push it out to the next biennium? If so, what would be the impact on the current budget, as well as budget implications for the 2022- 23 biennium?*

As the community of Ector County continues to struggle with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear **the Teacher Incentive Allotment is an indispensable tool for school districts to evolve and adapt to their ever-changing circumstances.**

As the public health crisis began upending everyday life earlier this year, analysts predicted Odessa (alongside our sister city Midland) would be among [the hardest hit American cities](#). More recent estimates affirm that [over 10,000 of our city's residents will lose their jobs](#) before the year's end. Currently, Ector County has the highest unemployment rate in the state of Texas. This widespread uncertainty is sure to have a negative impact on the stability of our own human capital pipeline. But, in truth, recruiting and retaining teaching talent in the Permian Basin was a major challenge long before the pandemic.

When I arrived in Odessa over a year ago, ECISD was one of the lowest performing districts in the state. While we've already been able to make great gains, 16 of our schools are still struggling to overcome an F rating, and over half rank below a C, in spite of the best efforts of teachers and students alike. **The biggest obstacle to the success of our 34,000 students is a shortage of effective teachers.**

Last year, **ECISD had 350 teacher vacancies.** This was the largest shortage of any district in the entire state, though we have far from the largest student body. This year, **that number was reduced to 120, primarily thanks to interest generated by the Teacher Incentive Allotment** and other investments made in our teachers. It is a welcome improvement. It's also 120 more than any superintendent wants or any child deserves.

[Years of research has demonstrated](#) that teachers are the "most important school-related factor influencing student achievement." If ECISD is going to continue on its upward trajectory and better serve all students, we must have the ability to both recruit talented teachers from across the state and keep our veteran educators in the classroom. The Teacher Incentive Allotment allows us to do each, which is why we are actively engaged in the application process for Cohort C, with our first payment (pending data validation approval) in September of 2022.

We were proud to welcome new teachers from our local university last year, but given the size of the shortage we continue to contend with, **sustainability will require successfully attracting talent from outside of our community.** The TIA not only provides that incentive, but further encourages these designated teachers to serve in classrooms with larger proportions of students experiencing economic insecurity (a demographic that makes up more than half of ECISD's student body).

educate

connect

inspire

succeed

dream

When we do exit interviews with our teachers who leave the profession, one of the most common responses that we hear is about compensation. **It is difficult for teachers to simply live in our community because of the high cost of housing;** my own expense for a two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment in this community was \$4,000. The TIA will help our teachers support their families while staying in the classroom, rather than moving into administration or potentially even another occupation.

What's more, by retaining more of our veteran educators, they can then play a role in mentoring and developing newer hires. ECISD has begun work with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to encourage more teachers to continue their professional development by becoming National Board Certified. **The TIA is a critical component of this partnership, as educators now have a strong financial incentive to seek the certification.** By providing both professional growth opportunities and financial recognition, teachers can better hone their craft in spite of a hectic schedule.

ECISD has invested countless staff hours, stakeholder engagement surveys and seemingly endless data and program planning to make the TIA a reality. Continuing the program and its full funding is essential to ensuring all those resources do not become wasted time and energy.

Ultimately, what the TIA allows us to do is better honor the teaching profession. For the first time, we're able to compensate our highly effective teachers at a rate which they deserve. We know that elevating the profession to a higher status will attract more people to the many vacancies that we have. The students in ECISD deserve the opportunity to have highly effective teachers.

It's undeniably true that, as lawmakers, you are about to be faced with a number of difficult decisions. As you seek to best deploy limited resources, it will be critical that we focus on those investments that make the most significant impact on students and the future of our state. **The best way we can improve student outcomes, and ultimately recover from this economic downturn, is investing in highly effective educators.** The Teacher Incentive Allotment allows us to invest specifically in our best and brightest. The kids in Ector County, and across Texas, deserve nothing less.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

In gratitude,

Scott R. Muri, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

educate

connect

inspire

succeed

dream