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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?*

My name is Karla Smith and I'm an 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science teacher in Dallas ISD. During over two decades with the district, I've taught at some of Texas' lowest performing schools. Though these high priority campuses require the most time, effort, commitment and resilience from teachers, historically no additional compensation was available for those who choose to support the most at-risk learners. In 2014, that changed when DISD implemented the Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI) performance-based compensation system. **Teachers like me have been given the opportunity to earn as much as a six-figure salary without leaving the classroom to find higher paying administrative positions.** Though money has never been my focus, being paid a salary commensurate with my passion and performance has been nothing short of life-changing for me and my family.

As a single parent of four daughters, I used to struggle to make ends meet. **I held down several moonlighting positions to pay the bills and keep food on the table.** I could barely cover necessities, much less afford indulgences such as vacations or travel. I dreaded unexpected car or home repairs that always threatened me with financial ruin. I even neglected my own much-needed medical care because I couldn't afford the copays or deductibles that insurance didn't cover. One chronic condition I had progressed into a precancerous diagnosis, largely due to my inability to fit the preventative measures into my budget. I was diagnosed with Barrett's Esophagus in 2013 and was told if my condition remained untreated and left to progress, I'd have a 17% chance of surviving twelve months.

Happily, with the implementation of TEI in 2014, I began receiving handsome annual pay increases based on my exemplary performance in DISD. This allowed me to afford the lifesaving medical treatment I desperately needed for so long. I am proud to report that my health has drastically improved along with my salary. **The \$29,000 I once scraped by on as a beginning teacher nearly tripled to a whopping \$89,000 thanks to TEI.** That compensation, equal to or above that of many administrators, not only sends a message to teachers like me that we are seen, valued and supported, but it has literally changed (even saved) my life. Yes, it's nice to finally be rewarded for a

job well done, but in my case, it was much more than that. **I never would have had the resources to obtain the medical treatment I so desperately needed if it wasn't for TEI's performance-based compensation.** I can't express how thankful I am that DISD has given teachers like me the respect and reward we deserve for closing the achievement gaps for all students.

The Texas Legislature was watching DISD's innovative approach to compensation, and in 2019 chose to follow their example by passing the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) as part of House Bill 3. **By passing TIA, the Legislature took a stand and said that teachers across the state deserve to be recognized and rewarded for standing in the gap on behalf of all students, particularly students in our most impoverished and underserved communities.** In this, an already challenging and unprecedented year, it is more imperative than ever that teachers are supported in their efforts to counter increased loss in learning attributed to the pandemic, in what is being deemed the "Covid-19 Slide". As daunting as that task may seem, the first Cohort of TIA teachers across Texas has been afforded the opportunity to drastically increase their earnings based on this year's teacher and student performance, despite current challenges and uncertainties. This is an opportunity for hard-working teachers to counter the existing pay scale that is on average \$6500 less than the national average. **In addition, highly effective teachers across the country are being drawn to Texas to join forces with the vast level of expertise already here.** This vital new talent will contribute to a proven system shown to improve both student achievement and teacher retention rates, thereby elevating the quality of classrooms across the state. For schools suffering from the most dismal rates of underachievement, the additional TIA stipends at High Priority Campuses (HPC's) attract these top teachers to bring their much-needed innovation to spark long-awaited change where it's needed most.

There are many teachers like me who refuse to stop fighting to rescue our educational system from the throes of injustice that continue to pervade it at every level. We need the nation's finest in the trenches, and there's no time to waste. For this reason, I implore the Texas Legislature to honor its commitment to standing in the gap NOW for those whose outcries deserve to finally be heard. **The Teacher Incentive Allotment must not be reduced or delayed, as Texas is counting on you to send the very resources that will stop the bleeding of a wounded education system. TIA will bring the right teachers to intervene on behalf of the students who need them most.** We need more heroes fighting the good fight and we need to pay them commensurate with the level of performance we expect. It's time we put our teachers and our students first before we look back and wish we had.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Karla Smith

Exemplary Teacher