

Sept. 30, 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?*

Texas lawmakers stepped up to close the achievement gaps for our students with the greatest needs when they passed the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA), a program that rewards our top teachers and incentivizes them to enter hard-to-staff urban and rural classrooms, continuously refine their craft, and deliver high quality instruction. My name is Katie Benningfield, and I teach 6th and 7th Grade Pre-AP science at the School for the Talented and Gifted in Pleasant Grove in Dallas ISD. In my time as a teacher, I have witnessed how highly-qualified teachers make the greatest impact on closing student achievement gaps. Thanks to the passing of TIA, districts across the state are able to more easily identify these top teachers and equitably distribute them in ways that positively impact the culture and climate of our schools.

Seven years ago, I entered the doors of Annie Webb Blanton Elementary School, one of the lowest performing campuses in the state. My students needed a teacher who could meet them where they were, support their needs, provide social emotional development, and maintain high expectations in order to help our students develop critically important skills to improve their achievement. It wasn't long into the school year that I knew I was not that educator, yet. Despite my best efforts, I wasn't helping my students grow.. I was not an effective teacher. I struggled with classroom management, engagement, and rigor. As a result, only 43% of my students passed their fourth-grade math STAAR assessment. I had failed them. I felt defeated and thought that education was not meant for me and considered leaving the profession.

Thankfully, in my second year, Dallas ISD leadership began the Accelerating Campus Excellence, ACE initiative, which brought the best educators and leaders in the district to my campus. Our district teacher evaluation system, which is similar to TIA, played an invaluable role in ensuring that my principal recruited the top teachers to our campus. For the first time, I saw what best teaching practices looked like. I watched excellent educators make incredible academic gains with the same students I'd watched struggle to just stay in the classroom the

previous year. I saw that EVERY student was capable of succeeding despite the obstacles set before them and I knew that I wanted to be a part of that positive change.

The highly effective teachers that moved to our campus brought with them a wealth of skills and knowledge that allowed them to rapidly push the needle on student achievement. It was also the same wealth and knowledge that I was able to use and grow my own skills so that I could improve as an educator. Over the next two years, I learned from these talented educators, refined my craft, and watched as my student achievement scores more than doubled on our state assessment compared to my first year.

I am honored by my Exemplary TIA rating because it reflects the hard work and effort my school leadership, fellow teachers, and I put into my teacher development. It also reflects the growth I still have to make as I aim to become a “Master Teacher” in order to ensure that I am providing the best possible education for my students. **If my school district had not implemented their teacher evaluation system to identify those highly qualified teachers and incentivized them to move to my campus, I doubt that I would still be in education today.**

I truly believe the most effective way state lawmakers can invest in our students, and our future, is by investing in effective educators especially in these challenging times. The current pandemic has brought unforeseen financial and educational challenges that are negatively impacting our students. Now is not the time to give up on them. If we are to ensure the success of our most at-risk students at this time, then we need to financially support school districts by funding the Teacher Incentive Allotment. **I must implore the Legislature to honor the commitment made to our students and Texas teachers like me by maintaining full funding for the Teacher Incentive Allotment without delay.**

I appreciate your time and commitment to our students.

Sincerely,

Katie Benningfield, Exemplary Teacher

Dallas ISD Teacher of the Year