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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

HD Chambers, Superintendent of Schools

Alief Independent School District

Email: HD.Chambers@aliefisd.net

Texas School Districts Face Challenges in Attracting Quality Teachers due to Low Compensation and Other Factors

Each year, Texas public school districts attract fewer and fewer “new” teachers into the profession while simultaneously losing 56,000 teachers per year to retirement and other industries. This trend has continued to grow over the past several years with no end in sight. Two of the core issues causing the mass exodus of teachers is an over bearing state student testing system and teachers desiring higher wage professions. With rising healthcare costs combined with minimal or no salary increases over the last few years, many Texas teachers returned to the classroom this school year making less money than last year – and in many cases, making less money than they did three years ago.

Education in Texas is a \$60 billion industry with about 705,000 people working in public school systems. Of the 705,000 employees, teachers make up over half (360,000). Teacher (and staff) compensation is determined locally by each ISD School Board. With no additional funds from the state, many districts are struggling to find the necessary funds to fairly compensate their teachers.

Many Texas public schools have not received new funds since the 2014-15 school year while teachers have continued to carry the weight of a pressure packed accountability system. As we all know, teachers are expected and do wear many “hats” while receiving little or no compensation for the extra duties they perform outside of the classroom.

FACT: Nationwide, Texas ranks 23rd on the teacher pay scale with an average salary of \$57,830 for secondary school teachers (except special/career and technical education). Alaska leads the nation at \$85,420, and Oklahoma ranks 50th with the lowest salary for secondary teachers at \$41,880. (Source: U.S. Department of Labor – Bureau of Labor Statistics. “A Look at Teacher Pay across the U.S. in 2017.”) Over the course of a career, a Texas educator would see only a \$15,000 increase from their first day at work to their 20th year. (Source: *Texas Academic Performance Report 2016-18 State Profile*)

“Teacher pay has been falling since the 1990s — and particularly over the last five years,” said Linda Darling-Hammond, president and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute. “As it did for many professions, the recession hit teachers hard. Districts fought to hold off on



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layoffs, but the pink slips still came — and so did salary freezes and weaker state funding. Slowly, as the economy improved, school districts began hiring more teachers. But fewer people want to become teachers now. Over the last five years, there has been a 35 percent decline in enrollment in teacher education programs,” Darling-Hammond said. “Potential teachers can be lured into other fields with more promising wages like tech or waitressing and bartending.” (Source: *Time Money*. “*I Didn’t Really have a Choice. Meet the Teachers Quitting their Jobs due to Low Pay and Dwindling Benefits.*” May 2018)

Teachers have choices where they live and work. In large, metro areas like Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, Austin, San Antonio and El Paso, the market is competitive for high quality teachers. Factors such as rapid growth, the high cost of housing, no or low pay increases, increased risk and decreasing long-term job security, make it challenging for school districts to recruit and retain high quality teachers. In 2016, 1 in 5 teachers changed schools, district or left the profession. That figure doubles for Special Education teachers. Many Texas school districts now offer prospective and current employees hiring and retention bonuses or priority stipends, while some are having to provide housing. Unfortunately, that’s not always enough.

FACT: Many employees in education are leaving the industry due to higher paying jobs, better benefits and long-term income advancement in other industries. For instance, 92% of Texas districts cannot keep bus drivers due to higher paying jobs and more demand in other industries like oil and gas and commercial truck drivers.

And while Texas is experiencing a teacher shortage, student enrollment continues to rise. Texas is currently ranked #4 in enrollment in the nation. The state is expected to see a 13.7% increase in public school enrollment over the next eight years, which will result in approximately 5.9 million students in Texas schools in 2026.

FACT: Approximately 4,671,493 students were enrolled in Texas public schools during the 2007-08 school year. By 2017-18, enrollment had risen to 5,399,682. Over the 10-year period, total enrollment increased by 728,189 students or 15.6 percent. (Source: *TEA Enrollment in Texas Public Schools 2017-18* report)

“Overall, the state as a whole is seeing an increase in population growth due to new business openings, relocation and existing businesses and industries expanding throughout,” said DeEtta Culbertson, a spokeswoman for the Texas Education Agency. (Source: *Forbes*. “*Top 10 States Expecting Drops in Public School Enrollment.*” April 2018)



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For every 22 elementary students added each year, a new teacher is required. When factored across the state, we will need over 2,000 new teachers per year. With the rapid growth in enrollment the state is experiencing, there remains a great need to attract and retain good teachers. However, Texas school districts cannot compete with other industries on salaries.

FACT: Office supervisors and sales reps are ranked higher in pay than Texas teachers. Based on the top 25 occupations making above Texan median wage of \$36,168, middle school (non-special or Career Technical Education) teachers rank 16th, elementary school (non-special education) teachers rank 15th, and secondary school (non-special Education or Career Technical Education) teachers rank 14th according to salary. (Source: *the Texas Career Check on Occupation Trends*)

When it comes to retirement funding, Texas has one of the lowest contribution levels to the Teacher Retirement System in the nation. A majority of states pay into both a pension plan and Social Security. Texas is in the minority of states that only pays into a pension fund and not into Social Security for the majority of its teachers – which means most Texas teachers will not have access to Social Security benefits when they retire.

FACT: Among states across the nation that only offer a pension plan for teachers, Texas is dead last when it comes to funding its pension programs – by a lot. Texas is also one of the only states that does not contribute to social security. (Source: *The Texas Tribune. “Texas teachers’ pay is average. But their pensions are among the lowest in the country.” April 2018*)

The Texas School Alliance (TSA) encourages the community to know the facts regarding teacher compensation in Texas. Join our “Know Before You Go” movement and be informed of the facts before you go to the polls.

About the TSA:
The Texas School Alliance (TSA) is a school district member organization that comprises 37 of some of the largest school districts in Texas and educates 40 percent of the state’s total pupil enrollment. The TSA is a superintendent-led organization that utilizes a thorough process to research and consider significant policy issues. Topics range from school finance to teaching and learning to assessment and accountability. The TSA also studies specific topics and works on issues to improve educational quality for Texas students, particularly those in large and urban districts. Learn more at <http://texasschoolalliance.org/>.

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