

## LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD

# School Performance Review: Teacher Retention Strategies in Texas School Districts

**School Year 2024–25**

*House Bill 2, Eighty-ninth Legislature, Regular Session, 2025, established the Teacher Retention Allotment (TRA) and Support Staff Retention Allotment (SSRA) as two separate allotments for school systems to compensate and retain teachers and support staff. The strategies discussed in this report were in place before the passage of House Bill 2 and do not represent any of these changes.*

**PREPARED BY LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD STAFF**

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**JUNE 2025**

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# SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW: TEACHER RETENTION STRATEGIES IN TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Teacher retention remains a critical challenge for Texas school districts. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified long-standing issues such as compensation and workloads. These challenges continue to hinder efforts to attract and retain educators.

According to data from the 2024 Charles Butt Foundation Texas Teacher Poll, 78.0 percent of Texas public school teachers considered leaving their current jobs during the last year, a significant increase from 58.0 percent reported in the 2020 pilot poll. The teacher attrition rate, which measures the percentage of educators leaving the profession annually, also has increased, reaching a historic high of 13.4 percent during school year 2022–23, according to data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

The teacher turnover rate represents the percentage of teachers who leave their district or transition to nonteaching positions within the district from one school year to the next. **Figure 1** shows statewide teacher turnover rates for school years 2013–14 to 2023–24. Turnover rates during this 11.0-year period increased by 17.9 percent. However, the most significant change occurred during a shorter period, with turnover increasing from 14.3 percent during school year 2020–21 to 21.4 percent during school year 2022–23, an increase of 49.0 percent during those three years.

Teacher retention varies across Texas districts, and a district's designation and student demographics contribute to that

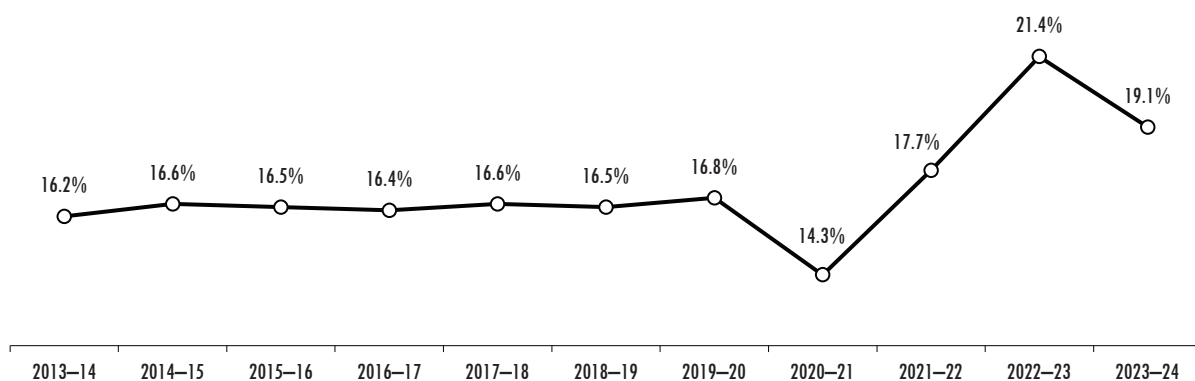
rate. **Figure 2** shows teacher turnover rates in Texas, based on district characteristics. References to rural districts apply TEA's definition of a district that has either: (a) an enrollment ranging from 300 to the median district enrollment for the state and an enrollment growth rate during the past five years of less than 20.0 percent; or (b) an enrollment of less than 300 students.

The data for district characteristics was divided into quartiles. As shown in **Figure 2**, teacher turnover rate is presented for districts in the highest and lowest quartiles for each characteristic. For example, districts with more than 76.9 percent of students identified as economically disadvantaged are in the highest quartile, and those with less than 49.3 percent are in the lowest quartile.

As shown in **Figure 2**, districts serving a higher percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged during school year 2023–24 reported a teacher turnover rate of 23.2 percent, compared to 19.2 percent in districts with lower percentages of these students. Districts that serve a higher percentage of students identified as at risk of dropping out of school or receiving special education services also experienced higher turnover rates during school year 2023–24.

Teacher turnover rates also are affected by a district's geographic designation, and rural districts often face unique staffing challenges. During school year 2023–24, rural districts reported an average turnover rate of 23.4 percent,

**FIGURE 1**  
**STATEWIDE TEACHER TURNOVER RATES**  
**SCHOOL YEARS 2013–14 TO 2023–24**



SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, Texas Performance Reporting System, school years 2013–14 to 2023–24.



compared to 19.6 percent for nonrural districts. Among rural districts, those serving a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students reported even higher turnover rates.

**Figure 3** shows teacher turnover rates in rural and nonrural districts that serve the highest and lowest percentages of students identified as economically disadvantaged. As shown in **Figure 3**, rural districts that serve the lowest percentage of economically disadvantaged students reported higher turnover rates than nonrural districts serving the highest percentage of these students. The data suggest that a district's population of economically disadvantaged students contributes more strongly than its geographic location to its teacher turnover rate (i.e., rural and nonrural districts with smaller populations of economically disadvantaged students have more similar rates of turnover than rural and nonrural districts with larger populations of these students.)

Certain teacher characteristics also are associated with greater turnover rates. For example, teachers who complete quality preparation programs and have more classroom experience are more likely to stay in a district. In contrast, uncertified teachers and novice teachers, which are those with less than five years of teaching experience, record higher turnover rates. **Figure 4** shows turnover rates for teachers based on their characteristics.

As shown in **Figure 4**, novice teachers recorded a turnover rate of 24.7 percent during school year 2023–24, which is higher than both the overall teacher turnover rate of 19.1 percent and the 16.6 percent rate for more experienced teachers. Teacher turnover is highest during teachers' first year and typically decreases as they gain classroom experience. During school year 2023–24, the turnover rate for first-year teachers was 28.8 percent, compared to 24.0 percent for second-year teachers and 22.8 percent for third-year teachers.

Novice teachers in Texas accounted for 31.4 percent of the state's teaching workforce in school year 2023–24. Among those who began teaching in Texas public schools during school year 2018–19, nearly half had left by their fifth years. By school year 2022–23, 53.1 percent remained in teaching positions.

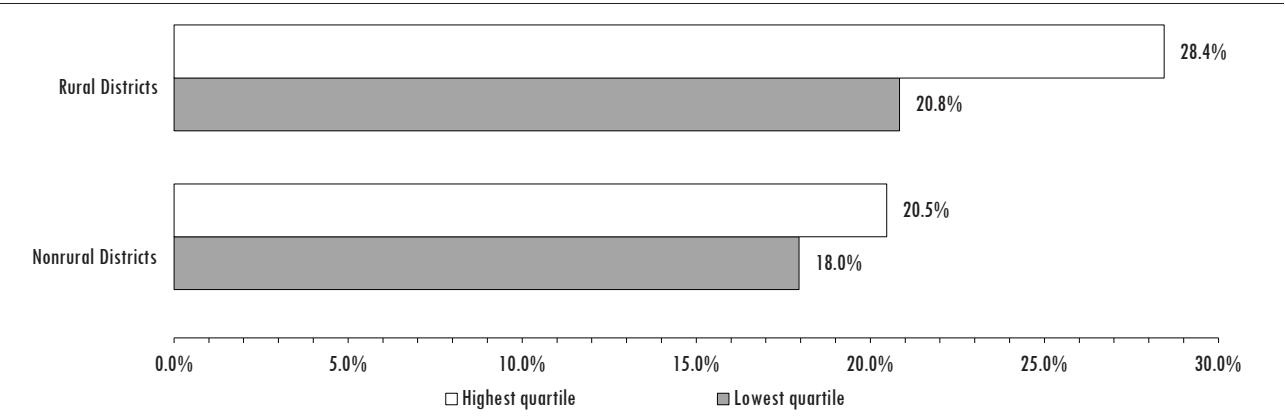
Novice teacher turnover rates are higher among uncertified teachers, who recorded a turnover rate of 30.1 percent during school year 2023–24, compared to 22.5 percent for those who earned standard teaching

**FIGURE 2**  
**AVERAGE DISTRICT TEACHER TURNOVER RATES BASED ON DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS**  
**SCHOOL YEAR 2023–24**

CHARACTERISTICS	AVERAGE DISTRICT TURNOVER RATE
<b>All Texas districts</b>	<b>21.4% (1)</b>
<b>Geographic designation</b>	
Rural Districts (2)	23.4%
Nonrural Districts	19.6%
<b>Economically disadvantaged (3) student enrollment</b>	
Highest quartile (more than 76.9%)	23.2%
Lowest quartile (less than 49.3%)	19.2%
<b>At-risk (4) student enrollment</b>	
Highest quartile (more than 56.5%)	22.6%
Lowest quartile (less than 32.2%)	19.6%
<b>Special education student enrollment</b>	
Highest quartile (more than 17.1%)	22.0%
Lowest quartile (less than 12.0%)	20.9%
NOTES:	
(1) The average district turnover rate differs from the average teacher turnover rate. District turnover represents the average rate across all districts; teacher turnover represents the percentage of individual teachers from the previous year who did not return to their positions.	
(2) The rates of average teacher turnover for school year 2023–24 and statewide teacher turnover for school year 2022–23, as shown in Figure 1, both calculate to 21.4 percent. These rates measure data differently, and each has been calculated separately.	
(3) The Texas Education Agency defines a rural district as one that has either: (a) an enrollment ranging from 300 to the median district enrollment for the state and an enrollment growth rate during the past five years of less than 20.0 percent; or (b) an enrollment of less than 300 students.	
(4) A student is classified as economically disadvantaged if the student is eligible to participate in free or reduced-price lunch programs or other public assistance programs.	
(5) A student is classified as at risk if the student meets the criteria outlined in the Texas Education Code, Section 29.081(d)(1), for students at risk of dropping out of school.	
(6) Data excludes charter schools, which recorded a turnover rate of 33.8 percent for school year 2023–24.	
SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Performance Review Team, October 2024; Texas Education Agency, school year 2023–24.	

certificates. This turnover rate is relevant because uncertified teachers now represent the largest group of newly hired educators by pathway. During school year 2023–24, uncertified teachers accounted for 34.5 percent of all new hires, which is a significant increase from 7.5 percent during school year 2014–15.

**FIGURE 3**  
**TEACHER TURNOVER IN RURAL AND NONRURAL DISTRICTS BY ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED POPULATION**  
**OCTOBER 2024**



NOTES:  
(1) Districts in the highest quartile serve a student population that is more than 76.9 percent economically disadvantaged; districts in the lowest quartile serve a student population that is less than 49.3 percent economically disadvantaged.  
(2) The Texas Education Agency defines a rural district as one that has either: (a) an enrollment from 300 to the median district enrollment for the state and an enrollment growth rate during the past five years of less than 20.0 percent; or (b) an enrollment of less than 300 students.  
SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Performance Review Team, October 2024; Texas Education Agency, school year 2023–24.

METHODOLOGY

In October 2024, the Legislative Budget Board’s School Performance Review Team analyzed Texas school district data and practices to identify strategies that districts use to retain teachers. This report specifically examines the strategies employed by identified districts that maintained low teacher turnover rates despite exhibiting characteristics typically associated with higher turnover.

To determine effective teacher retention strategies, the review team identified districts with the lowest teacher turnover rates in the state. These districts were then grouped based on characteristics associated with higher teacher turnover (e.g., district demographics and teacher characteristics) and further categorized by student enrollment size (very small, small, midsize, and large). The review team also identified districts with average teacher turnover rates, provided those districts serve a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students and their turnover rates had improved significantly over the previous five years.

Using this framework, the review team identified 83 school districts, and leadership from each was invited to complete a teacher retention survey. At the time of selection in September of 2024, school year 2022–23 data was the most recent available. Since the district selection process, more current data have been released and are included in **Figures 2 and 3**.

**FIGURE 4**  
**TEACHER TURNOVER RATES IN TEXAS BASED ON**  
**TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS, SCHOOL YEAR 2023–24**

CHARACTERISTICS	TURNOVER RATE
All teachers statewide	19.1%
Teachers with less than 5 years of experience	24.7%
No Standard Certification	30.1%
Standard Certification	22.5%
Teachers with 5 or more years of experience	16.6%

NOTES:  
(1) Data includes teachers at charter schools.  
(2) Turnover rate is the percentage of teachers who leave a district or transition to nonteaching positions within the district from one school year to the next.  
SOURCES: Legislative Budget Board School Performance Review Team, October 2024; Texas Education Agency, school year 2023–24.

District leaders from 36 of the surveyed districts responded and ranked the effectiveness of the teacher retention strategies they had implemented. The review team then conducted 13 follow-up interviews with administrators based on the strategies they had implemented.

**Figure 5** shows the 36 districts that responded to the survey, including the 13 that were interviewed, along with their school year 2023–24 teacher turnover rates and other district characteristics.

**FIGURE 5**  
**TEACHER TURNOVER RATES FOR SURVEYED DISTRICTS, SCHOOL YEAR 2023–24**

DISTRICT	INTERVIEWED	TURNOVER RATE	ENROLLMENT SIZE (1)	REGION
<b>Statewide Average (2)</b>		<b>21.4%</b>		
Bay City ISD		15.6%	Small	Region 03: Victoria
Bland ISD		13.1%	Very Small	Region 10: Richardson
Calhoun County ISD	X	10.7%	Small	Region 03: Victoria
Cameron ISD	X	15.5%	Small	Region 06: Huntsville
Clint ISD	X	15.5%	Midsized	Region 19: El Paso
Cotulla ISD	X	11.8%	Small	Region 20: San Antonio
Dalhart ISD	X	13.1%	Small	Region 16: Amarillo
Denison ISD		14.7%	Small	Region 10: Richardson
Donna ISD		12.0%	Midsized	Region 01: Edinburg
Eastland ISD		14.1%	Small	Region 14: Abilene
Ector County ISD	X	19.4%	Large	Region 18: Midland
Edna ISD		13.1%	Small	Region 03: Victoria
Eustace ISD		14.7%	Small	Region 07: Kilgore
Fairfield ISD		13.9%	Small	Region 12: Waco
Freer ISD	X	10.9%	Very Small	Region 02: Corpus Christi
George West ISD		14.3%	Small	Region 02: Corpus Christi
Gorman ISD		14.7%	Very Small	Region 14: Abilene
Keene ISD		12.5%	Small	Region 11: Fort Worth
Kountze ISD		16.8%	Small	Region 05: Beaumont
Kress ISD	X	14.3%	Very Small	Region 16: Amarillo
La Feria ISD		9.2%	Small	Region 01: Edinburg
La Joya ISD	X	10.3%	Midsized	Region 01: Edinburg
La Vega ISD	X	17.0%	Small	Region 12: Waco
La Villa ISD		9.9%	Very Small	Region 01: Edinburg
Laredo ISD		9.3%	Midsized	Region 01: Edinburg
Luling ISD (3)		25.2%	Small	Region 13: Austin
Lytle ISD		14.7%	Small	Region 20: San Antonio
May ISD		14.6%	Very Small	Region 15: San Angelo
Memphis ISD	X	13.6%	Very Small	Region 16: Amarillo
Nueces Canyon CISD (4)		10.4%	Very Small	Region 15: San Angelo
Pearsall ISD (5)		20.3%	Small	Region 20: San Antonio
Plains ISD	X	4.2%	Very Small	Region 17: Lubbock
Rice ISD	X	15.3%	Small	Region 12: Waco
Robert Lee ISD		3.9%	Very Small	Region 15: San Angelo
Southside ISD		12.2%	Small	Region 20: San Antonio
Ysleta ISD		9.6%	Large	Region 19: El Paso

## NOTES:

- (1) The Legislative Budget Board used the following enrollment size classifications - Very Small: 131–999 students; Small: 1,000–9,999; students; Midsized: 10,000–29,999 students; Large: 30,000–99,999 students.
- (2) The statewide average reflects the average teacher turnover rate across all districts in Texas and differs from the average teacher turnover rate, which represents the percentage of individual teachers from the prior school year who did not return to their positions. This average excludes charter schools, which reported an average turnover rate of 33.8% for school year 2023–24.
- (3) Luling ISD reported a teacher turnover rate that was greater than the state average rate; however, the district has decreased its teacher turnover rate by 46.5% during the previous five years. The Legislative Budget Board selected this district to learn about the actions it implemented to address turnover.
- (4) CISD=consolidated independent school district.
- (5) Pearsall ISD's teacher turnover rate approached the state average rate; however, the district has decreased its teacher turnover rate by 27.5% during the previous five years. The review team selected this district to learn about the actions it implemented to address turnover.

SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board School Performance Review Team, October 2024.

## RESULTS

The following sections are the results of the review team's analysis of the teacher retention strategies identified in the survey responses and the district interviews. The data highlights those strategies the districts reported were successful and contributed the most to their lower teacher turnover rates. The retention strategies are organized into the following three categories:

- compensation;
- training and support; and
- school culture.

The review team aimed to survey and interview administrators who represent a range of district sizes, geographic locations, designations, and student demographics. The insights they shared may be useful to other administrators, who can identify peer districts with similar needs or priorities when considering these strategies.

# COMPENSATION STRATEGIES

Districts identified compensation strategies as one of the most effective approaches to retaining teachers, a finding that is supported consistently by research on teacher retention.

According to data from the 2022 Charles Butt Foundation Texas Teacher Poll, 41.0 percent of Texas teachers reported working additional jobs outside of their school employment due to financial need. These financial concerns contribute to teacher turnover, highlighting teacher compensation as a strategic opportunity to improve retention.

In the review team’s survey, school district leaders identified specific compensation strategies that have improved teacher retention within their districts. **Figure 6** shows survey results regarding the compensation strategies leaders most frequently ranked among the most effective for retaining teachers. The percentages represent the share of district leaders who ranked a given strategy among their top three most effective approaches.

Survey results indicate that district leaders regard increases to salary schedules as the most effective strategy for retaining teachers, followed by implementation of the state’s Teacher Incentive Allotment program, affordable housing initiatives, and childcare programs.

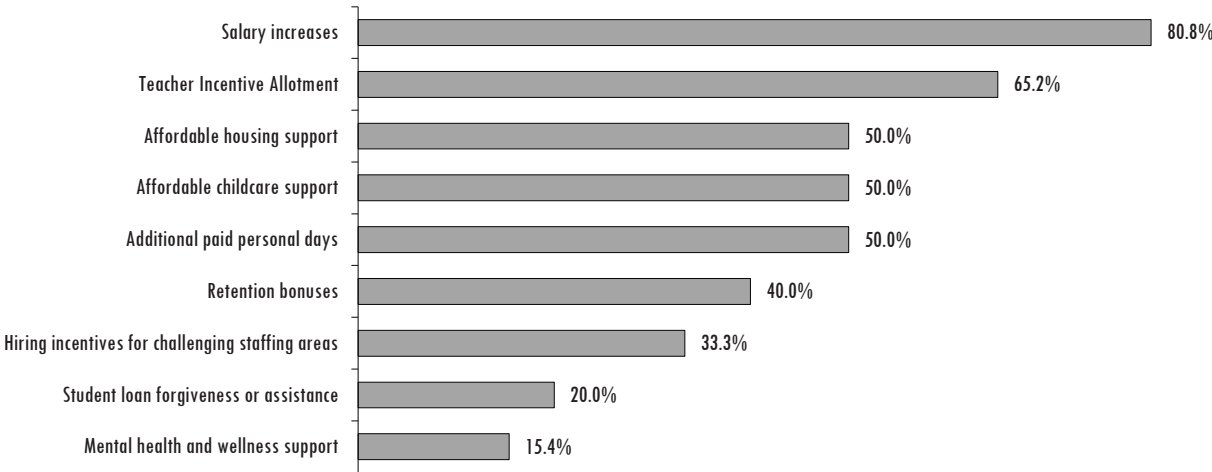
The following sections explore these compensation strategies and highlight key practices and considerations shared during interviews.

## SALARY INCREASES

Surveyed district leaders reported that salary increases are one of their most effective compensation strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers. The Texas Education Code, Section 21.402, establishes a minimum, step-based salary schedule for teachers and authorizes the Commissioner of Education to determine a salary schedule that aligns with the basic allotment. Districts are required to pay teachers the higher of the two. According to TEA, the current minimum salary schedule for teachers starts at \$33,660 and increases to \$54,540 by the teacher’s twentieth year of credible service. Each school district has broad authority to develop a salary schedule that meets the state’s minimum pay requirements. To remain competitive and attract and maintain teaching staff, most interviewed administrators reported that their districts provide compensation above the minimum salary schedule.

Additionally, all interviewed districts reported that they review salary schedule data from neighboring districts and the Texas Association of School Boards’ annual salary survey

**FIGURE 6**  
**HIGHEST-RANKED COMPENSATION STRATEGIES AMONG SURVEYED DISTRICTS**  
**OCTOBER 2024**



NOTE: The percentage represents the share of district leaders who ranked a given strategy as the most or second-most effective among those they reported implementing.  
SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board School Performance Review Team, District Survey, October 2024.



of all Texas school districts. District leaders reported comparing these data to their compensation packages periodically to adjust their salary schedules.

Some interviewed district leaders prioritized competitive starting salaries when adjusting their salary schedules. By offering higher initial pay, these districts aim to make the teaching profession more appealing to recent graduates and career changers, particularly in a job market in which education competes with many industries for qualified professionals. For example, Cotulla ISD, a geographically isolated district in south Texas, recruits teachers primarily through generous sign-on bonuses of up to \$22,000, rather than increasing base pay. District leadership reported that offering bonuses allowed the district to provide additional compensation while maintaining base salaries. This strategy protects the district's financial interests in the event of an economic downturn.

While increasing starting salaries can improve new teacher recruitment, it may also result in salary compression as teachers accumulate years of service, undermining efforts to retain experienced teachers. Salary compression occurs when the difference between the salaries of new and experienced teachers narrows, which may lead experienced educators to perceive that their experience and tenure are undervalued.

Interviewed district leaders said they addressed salary compression concerns through retention strategies targeting more experienced teachers. For example, several interviewed districts provide stipends to teachers who serve as department heads, instructional coaches, mentors for newer teachers, or in other roles commonly held by experienced teachers. Additionally, interviewed districts analyzed step increases periodically to maintain appropriate salaries for teachers at different stages in their careers. For example, Plains ISD, a small district located near the Texas-New Mexico border, analyzed disparities between its salary schedule and the state's minimum salary schedule. The district found that newer teachers were earning disproportionately higher salaries above the minimum compared to their more experienced colleagues. To address this inequity, the district introduced larger step increases at 5, 10, and 15 years of service to mitigate the loss of experienced teachers to New Mexico schools and to better align its salaries with its staffing needs.

Districts can also tailor salary increases to address staffing challenges. Several interviewed districts implemented compensation strategies to address turnover among uncertified teachers, a group with consistently lower retention

rates than certified teachers statewide. These districts incorporated certification incentives into their pay structures to strengthen teachers' long-term commitment and preparedness. This approach enhances a district's overall skill base and promotes a more stable workforce.

For example, Freer ISD staff reported that it offers certified teachers an 11.1 percent higher starting salary and 7.1 percent greater step increases than uncertified teachers. Alternatively, Ector County ISD staff reported that certified and uncertified teachers receive the same starting teacher salary, but uncertified teachers are ineligible for annual pay increases until they become certified. Similarly, Plains ISD staff reported that all teachers receive a starting salary based on their years of experience at the time of hire, but uncertified teachers do not receive annual step increases until they obtain certification. These policies incentivize certification while fostering a more experienced and committed teaching staff.

Similarly, districts reported that targeted salary increases are an effective tool for addressing staffing shortages. For example, many districts compete to recruit and retain teachers in high-demand fields such as science, mathematics, special education, or bilingual education by offering stipends to candidates for these positions. Additionally, several districts provide stipends for teachers working in high-need or underperforming schools.

Compensation strategies can incentivize professional growth through stipends or step increases for obtaining additional certifications, specialized training, or graduate degrees. For example, Ector County ISD reported it offers an accelerated pay scale for teachers with residency certifications, which enables them to earn up to \$80,000 within 10 years.

### **TEACHER INCENTIVE ALLOTMENT**

District leaders also identified the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) program as an effective compensation strategy for recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers, particularly in high-need and rural schools and for difficult-to-staff positions. TIA is a statewide program that provides districts with funding to compensate outstanding teachers based on their evaluation outcomes and their campus characteristics.

This allotment was established by House Bill 3, Eighty-sixth Legislature, 2019, as a Tier 1 allotment through the Foundation School Program, which finances districts' basic education programs. A district's annual TIA varies based on the number of designated teachers it employs, each teacher's

**FIGURE 7**  
**TEACHER INCENTIVE ALLOTMENT STUDENT GROWTH MEASURE OPTIONS**  
**SCHOOL YEAR 2024–25**

MEASURE	DESCRIPTION
Student learning objectives	Teachers identify a growth target for each student and assess progress using at least five work samples.
Portfolios	Students' skill growth is measured by evaluating a collection of artifacts, such as performances or work products, against a growth target using a standards-aligned rubric.
Pre-tests and post-tests	Standards-aligned pretests (beginning-of-year) and posttests (end-of-year) are used to measure growth based on individual student goals set by the district or test providers. Districts may use standardized tests or develop custom assessments.
Value-added models	Historical testing data is analyzed to predict student growth, and teacher effectiveness is assessed by comparing actual student performance to predicted outcomes. The data sources must be valid, reliable, and aligned with state standards.

NOTE: Teacher performance ratings are based on the percentage of students who meet growth targets, as measured in each option.  
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, 2024.

designation level, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students at the designated teacher’s school, and whether the district is classified as rural. Through approved local designation systems, districts can identify and designate outstanding teachers annually based on student growth and classroom observation. Designation systems are locally developed and must be based on measurable standards for teacher effectiveness at three levels: Recognized, Exemplary, and Master.

The review team interviewed leadership from six districts participating in the TIA program. Administrators from all six districts reported that, despite initial teacher hesitation, successful implementation led to positive teacher feedback, improved recruitment, and stronger retention. For example, Calhoun County ISD reported notable improvements in recruiting and retaining teachers for historically hard-to-fill positions, with remaining vacancies primarily limited to roles not eligible for TIA designations. Similarly, two small rural districts, Memphis ISD and Rice ISD, reported that implementing TIA has enabled them to recruit teachers from neighboring districts that offer more competitive salary schedules.

However, district leaders noted that developing and implementing a local designation system that meets TIA’s statutory requirements and achieves recruitment and retention goals requires a significant investment. Careful planning and stakeholder involvement are important to the program’s success. District leaders identified the components and development of their local designation systems, which include the following elements:

- student growth metrics;
- teacher observation metrics;

- optional metrics;
- eligible teaching assignments;
- spending plans; and
- stakeholder engagement.

**STUDENT GROWTH METRICS**

The TIA designation process must be based on valid and reliable teacher performance data, including student growth measures that track the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expected growth targets within a single school year. Districts may choose from one or more of the four TIA-recognized student growth measures for each eligible teaching assignment.

**Figure 7** shows the TIA-recognized growth measures and their definitions.

Districts select growth measures based on their priorities and specific teaching assignments. For example, Rice ISD uses student learning objectives as its growth measure to appraise teacher effectiveness. This approach enables the district to expand TIA eligibility to teachers in all grades and subjects, supporting equitable and inclusive program implementation. In contrast, growth measures based on state assessment outcomes limit eligibility to teachers in tested subjects and grade levels, excluding many educators from participation. To support expanded TIA eligibility, Memphis ISD uses portfolios to assess student skill growth in subjects that identify skill standards for creation and production, such as career and technical education (CTE) and theater arts.

Calhoun County ISD measures teacher effectiveness using pre-tests and post-tests in grades and courses subject to the

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Teachers administer STAAR and NWEA MAP Growth standardized assessments, and the district evaluates teacher performance based on the assessment that demonstrates greater student growth. As a result, teachers have multiple opportunities to demonstrate success.

#### **TEACHER OBSERVATION METRICS**

TIA designation criteria also must include valid and reliable teacher performance data collected through annual classroom observation. To meet this requirement, campus leaders must observe all eligible teachers instructing students for at least 45 minutes. Districts must use a TIA-approved appraisal rubric and apply observation protocols fairly and consistently to maintain validity and reliability. All interviewed districts reported using the observable domains of the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) to meet these requirements. The observable domains focus on instruction and the learning environment, while the remaining domains address planning and professional practices.

#### **OPTIONAL METRICS**

Districts also may incorporate optional designation criteria in addition to student growth and teacher observation. For example, districts may establish minimum eligibility criteria. Clint ISD sets a minimum attendance requirement for teachers. Cameron ISD and Memphis ISD require teacher certification for eligibility. Districts may also expand evaluation criteria, such as Clint ISD and La Vega ISD, whose scoring systems consider all T-TESS domains.

Calhoun County ISD and Rice ISD consider teacher contributions outside of direct instruction, including evidence of ongoing development, leadership, and service. Calhoun County ISD considers teacher portfolios that showcase contributions and accomplishments, such as participating in committees, engaging in professional development, and earning advanced degrees. The district's portfolio rubric was developed with stakeholder input. At Rice ISD, teachers earn points toward TIA designation by maintaining high rates of attendance and participating in leadership activities such as mentoring.

#### **ELIGIBLE TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS**

Districts must identify eligible teaching assignments to participate in TIA. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) does not limit designations to certain teachers, but districts may restrict eligibility to selected teaching assignments. Initially, most districts identify a subset of teaching assignments and

later expand it. For example, La Vega ISD initially limited eligibility to teachers of STAAR-tested subjects, but the district has expanded its designations annually based on teachers' interest and feedback. The district plans eventually to include all certified educators.

Each eligible assignment must be evaluated using valid and reliable student growth and observation data. The interviewed districts reported that this requirement influenced the teaching assignments they chose to include. For example, district leaders reported challenges in developing consistent student growth measures for teaching assignments in the enrichment curriculum, such as CTE and physical education. Some districts reported that they successfully expanded TIA eligibility to include most of their teachers and subject areas. For example, more than 95.0 percent of teachers in Clint ISD are eligible for TIA, including assignments as diverse as prekindergarten, cosmetology, and band. However, district leaders report that some roles remain excluded due to difficulties in identifying reliable student growth measures.

TEA may withhold allotment funds if it determines that a district's designation system's performance criteria are invalid. As a result, districts reported taking a measured approach when identifying assignment eligibility. However, multiple interviewed districts reported that this approach led to frustration among teachers whose assignments were excluded or deferred for future consideration. To address this challenge, Memphis ISD and Rice ISD delayed their TIA applications until they had established robust student growth measures for all teaching assignments districtwide. La Vega ISD approached this issue collaboratively by establishing a process through which teachers may request their assignments be considered for TIA eligibility. District leadership collaborates with these teachers to develop appropriate performance measures for their assignments. La Vega ISD leadership reported that this process has helped teachers better understand performance measures, TIA requirements, and the data validation process.

#### **SPENDING PLANS**

Districts also must establish TIA spending plans to participate in the program. These plans outline the timing, amount, and method of compensation for eligible staff. Compensation may be issued as a lump sum, in staggered payments, through stipends, or salary adjustments.

Spending plans must also account for designated teacher movement, as districts receive allotment funds for these teachers based on their employment as of the last Friday in

February. Some districts address this by withholding all or some TIA funds until the teacher returns for the next school year. For example, La Vega ISD withholds 20.0 percent of a designated teacher's compensation if the teacher leaves the district without providing notice of resignation by March 15. Rice ISD withholds the entire amount, distributing it only if the teacher returns in August.

The Texas Education Code, Section 48.112, authorizes TIA funds to support program implementation but requires 90.0 percent of the allotment to be used for teacher compensation at the campus of the designated teacher. Most interviewed districts allocate the entire teacher compensation portion directly to the designated teacher. However, some districts use a portion to support staff who directly support the designated teacher's students, such as paraprofessionals or inclusion support teachers. For example, La Vega ISD allocates 10.0 percent of the teacher compensation portion to staff who support designated teachers.

#### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

District leaders emphasized that stakeholder engagement is critical to the successful implementation of TIA programs. Incorporating teacher feedback and involving teachers in key program decisions builds trust and helps align the TIA program with district values. At Memphis ISD, for example, a stakeholder committee developed growth measures collaboratively, and teachers have rated the system's fairness highly in annual surveys. Similarly, Cameron ISD reported that teacher input was an important factor in the district's decision to use assessments that already are administered, such as STAAR, to measure growth rather than expanding testing requirements. In contrast, Clint ISD and Memphis ISD incorporated teacher feedback to identify student growth measures that did not rely on STAAR data, as teachers raised concerns that STAAR focused more on achievement than growth.

To facilitate stakeholder engagement, most districts established committees to gather feedback on key local designation systems decisions, and some districts maintain these committees. For example, Clint ISD's stakeholder committee, which includes three teachers for every administrator, meets quarterly and conducts emergency sessions or distributes surveys as needed. To maintain transparency, the district posts all stakeholder meeting materials and outcomes on its website.

Districts that did not maintain their stakeholder committees after establishing local designation systems often support

engagement through alternative feedback methods. For example, Calhoun County ISD seeks input regarding TIA decisions from its district advisory committee, which includes teachers and administrators from every campus. Similarly, La Vega ISD gathers ongoing teacher feedback through online forms, virtual meetings, a Q&A system posted on the district website, and district events.

In addition to facilitating feedback, effective stakeholder-engagement strategies provide information and support, helping educators understand local designation system components and navigate its performance standards. Districts reported hosting events to introduce the TIA program, explain their local designation systems, and identify opportunities for ongoing training and dialogue. For example, both Clint ISD and Memphis ISD offer regular, optional drop-in meetings, and Clint ISD also holds weekly office hours specifically for TIA-related support. Districts also reported fostering transparency with stakeholders through end-of-year reports that outline progress on key TIA components. These tools give teachers insight into district designation decisions and offer them opportunities to share concerns and provide feedback for improvement.

#### AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Another effective compensation strategy for supporting teacher retention identified by surveyed districts was offering affordable housing. School districts that are isolated geographically or experience high real estate costs often struggle to attract and retain teachers due to their lack of affordable and available housing. To address these challenges, some districts offer support through housing stipends, partnerships with property developers, and rental units on district-owned properties. Survey data indicate that most districts providing housing support acquired real estate to offer staff rental units at below-market rates.

By reducing housing costs, districts can increase the real value of a teacher's compensation package. For example, Kress ISD's salary schedule aligns with the state's minimum, but the district enhances its overall compensation by providing housing support. The district owns six housing units, including single-family homes and double-wide mobile homes in the community. Rental prices vary by unit and tenant to allow teachers to access housing that aligns with their salaries.

Providing affordable housing can help districts attract and retain teachers while supporting educators in achieving homeownership within the community. For example,



Calhoun County ISD owns 19 houses that it leases to newly hired staff at discounted rates for up to three years. The district prioritizes teachers with children and those providing instruction in high-need areas, such as special education. Similarly, Ector County ISD owns two apartment buildings as part of a targeted effort to recruit international teachers from countries including Ghana, India, the Philippines, and Spain. The housing provides essential support for teachers transitioning to their new community.

Cotulla ISD owns an apartment complex, a mobile home park, and a recreational vehicle park to help teachers access affordable housing amid competition from workers in the oil and gas industry. These properties provide below-market rent and utility rates, making it more affordable for teachers to live and work in the community. Cotulla ISD reported that the district is interested in developing a starter-home neighborhood to offer housing with yards for staff with young children.

### CHILDCARE PROGRAMS

Districts also identified childcare programs as an effective compensation strategy for attracting and retaining teachers. Like housing costs, high childcare expenses are an important factor teachers consider when evaluating employment options, which affects school districts' abilities to recruit and retain qualified teachers. According to the Economic Policy Institute and the National Education Association, in 2024, the average cost of infant care in Texas is \$777 per month or \$9,324 per year, which accounts for 15.4 percent of the average teacher salary of \$60,716. This expense exceeds the average in-state tuition for a four-year public college. Providing financial relief for childcare can be a valuable strategy for districts to improve teacher recruitment and retention.

In addition, childcare has become increasingly scarce due to program closures. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, licensed childcare operations in the state declined by approximately 8.0 percent. As of March 2022, data showed that 57.0 percent of Texas counties recorded an inadequate number of licensed childcare programs. In these areas, children younger than age five outnumber available licensed childcare placements three to one. This shortage can make it more difficult for teachers who have young children to remain in the workforce. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that 17.0 percent of teachers who left the profession during school years 2020–21 and 2021–22 did so for personal reasons, including pregnancy, childcare, and family caregiving.

Interviewed districts confirmed that the high cost and limited availability of childcare were significant barriers to retaining staff who are parents. In response, many districts established and operated childcare programs for their staff, offering reduced-price or free tuition. District leaders reported that this benefit has been instrumental in retaining educators, particularly those who commute from out of town and previously had difficulty securing childcare. Additionally, they noted that onsite childcare programs serve as effective recruitment tools, helping their districts stand out among competitors and encouraging teachers to develop stable ties to the community. Teacher feedback has emphasized the value of these programs. According to district leaders, some teachers remained with the district specifically because of the childcare benefit, while others who previously had left returned for the same reason.

Some interviewed districts that offer childcare have established onsite facilities by repurposing existing campus spaces. For example, Cotulla ISD converted a former elementary school into an affordable early childhood center within walking distance of other district campuses. Cameron ISD and Kress ISD each repurposed classrooms on their campuses to provide childcare services. District leaders report that using existing infrastructure reduces program costs and provides convenient locations that benefit teachers with young children. The districts' childcare facilities offer lower tuition rates for teachers and facilitate convenient drop-off, pick-up, and access to their children during the school day when needed.

Additionally, onsite childcare may facilitate children's transition to prekindergarten, especially for those receiving special education services, by allowing current and future teachers to collaborate on student goals while children remain in a familiar environment. These programs also enable districts to foster kindergarten-readiness skills in future students. For example, Cotulla ISD supports and measures its daycare students' early literacy and cognitive development in preparation for prekindergarten. District leaders noted that the onsite childcare program strengthens kindergarten readiness and encourages teachers who are parents to remain employed with the district.

Childcare programs require significant investment from school districts. Some small districts support these programs entirely through their general funds. For instance, Kress ISD, a rural district serving approximately 264 students, can offer tuition-free childcare to staff due to the small scale of its operations. The district allocates \$50,000 to \$60,000 annually to employ two caregivers for seven children.



However, as operations expand, districts often require additional funding sources to cover the increasing costs of caregiver salaries, supplies, utilities, and maintenance. Cotulla ISD, with an enrollment of 1,143 students, charges staff below-market tuition rates to offset the operational costs of its childcare program. Additionally, the district has expanded its childcare program to include children of community members, in addition to those of district staff, further diversifying its funding base.

Similarly, Ector County ISD, which serves 33,426 students, established the Ector County ISD Children's Center to care for children ages 0 to 5 and charges below-market tuition rates for district employees. The center is funded through a combination of state allotments, federal grants, and tuition payments.

Ector County ISD receives federal grant funding through the Texas Workforce Commission's Child Care Services (CCS) program, which helps low-income families afford childcare. School districts can apply to become CCS providers and receive funding to care for eligible children. As of January 2025, Texas school districts operated 147 childcare centers using CCS funds. Cameron ISD leverages these funds to provide free childcare for district staff. District leadership reported that access to these funds made childcare a more viable option for the district, enabling it to enhance teacher compensation without relying solely on salary increases.

## TRAINING AND SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Following compensation, districts cited additional teacher training and support as the second most effective category of retention strategies.

Research highlights that teachers' most common challenges include managing classroom behavior, planning lessons, and balancing the demands of students, parents, and district staff. Although experience often helps mitigate these challenges, teachers with less than five years of experience remain susceptible, contributing to higher turnover. Certified teachers entering the profession must transition from studying these skills in educator preparation programs to applying them effectively in full-time teaching roles. In contrast, uncertified teachers entering the profession must confront these issues without formal training, further increasing their risk of turnover.

**Figure 8** shows survey results regarding the training and support strategies leaders most frequently ranked among the most effective for retaining teachers. The percentages represent the share of district leaders who ranked a given strategy among their top three most effective approaches.

Survey results indicate that districts view novice teacher support, teacher mentorship programs, and residency programs as the most effective training and support strategies for improving retention. The review team interviewed

districts that implement these strategies to understand how they put them into practice successfully.

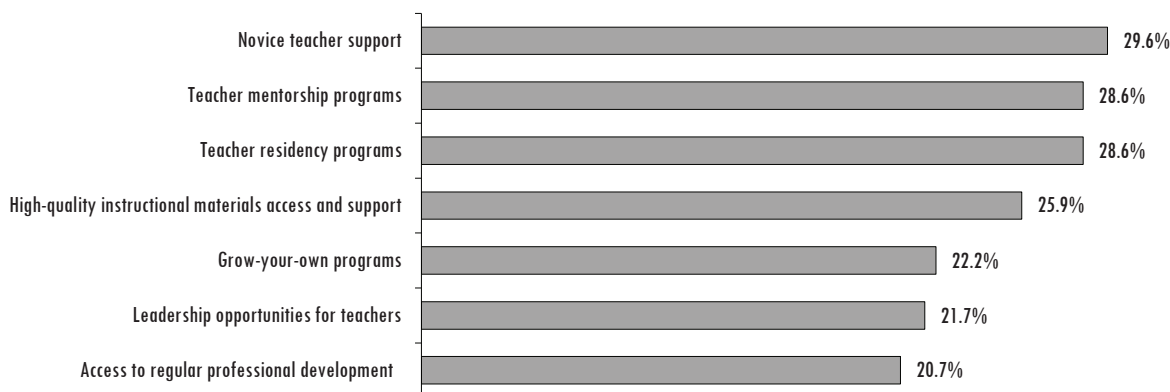
The following sections explore these training and support strategies and highlight key practices and considerations shared during interviews.

### SUPPORT FOR NOVICE TEACHERS

Support for novice teachers ranked the highest among effective teacher training strategies for retention. Novice teachers are those with less than five years of teaching experience. Survey data shows that several districts have implemented targeted training programs to help novice teachers navigate common challenges by accelerating the development of skills typically acquired through years of experience. These programs provide support through coaching, mentorship, professional development, and peer collaboration.

Plains ISD supports novice teachers through a program that integrates instructional coaching and peer observation. Each novice teacher is paired with an instructional coach who provides personalized guidance. Additionally, a retired principal conducts nonevaluative classroom observations and collaborates with new teachers to address specific challenges. Coaching and observation opportunities occur more

**FIGURE 8**  
**HIGHEST-RANKED TRAINING AND SUPPORT STRATEGIES AMONG SURVEYED DISTRICTS**  
**OCTOBER 2024**



**NOTES:**

(1) The percentage represents the share of district administrators who ranked a given strategy among the top three most effective approaches they reported implementing.

(2) Grow-your-own programs promote education within the community to recruit teachers for districts.

SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board School Performance Review Team, District Survey, October 2024.

frequently early in the school year to support teachers with workload and classroom management issues.

Memphis ISD established a New Teacher Academy that emphasizes in-class modeling and coaching for novice teachers. The academy hosts workshops every six to eight weeks, focusing on essential topics such as classroom management and instructional strategies. Instructional coaches visit classrooms regularly to provide feedback, model lessons, and collaborate with teachers regarding effective practices. For example, a novice science teacher in the district observed an experienced colleague's classroom daily to learn how to deliver similar lessons.

Similarly, the New Teacher Academy at Freer ISD provides structured support for teachers during their first three years of employment through monthly meetings each fall. Led by the superintendent and district principals, the academy focuses on essential teaching skills such as planning lessons, implementing classroom procedures, using effective instructional strategies, and maintaining professionalism. Sessions address practical classroom needs that often align with the district's mentorship program topics, which are based on beginning teachers' needs.

Districts that implement novice teacher support practices consistently identified key practices that contribute to program success. Instructional coaching and in-class modeling enable novice teachers to observe experienced teachers applying instructional strategies in the novice teachers' classrooms, which may increase their confidence in the strategies and their abilities to implement them effectively. Opportunities for peer observation and targeted feedback foster professional growth and collaboration among teachers. Additionally, logistical support, such as reducing responsibilities or providing additional planning time, helps novice teachers focus on skill development. Plains ISD, for example, uses substitute teachers to give new teachers dedicated time for coaching and observation, without using their planning periods. Together, these elements help new teachers build the skills they need to succeed while contributing to higher retention rates and instructional quality.

## MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

Districts also identified mentorship programs as an effective teacher training strategy for retention. Mentorship programs pair novice teachers with experienced educators to provide structured guidance and support throughout the year. This approach helps new teachers navigate professional challenges,

develop effective teaching practices, and integrate into the district community. Among the surveyed districts, 80.0 percent reported operating mentorship programs.

The effectiveness of mentorship programs as a retention strategy depends on structured implementation. Interviewed districts reported that strong mentorship programs establish clear goals and provide strategies to achieve them. For example, Freer ISD noted that its previous mentorship program was less effective because it simply paired mentors and beginning teachers without clear guidance. However, the district saw improved staff outcomes after restructuring the program to include mentor-teacher stipends and training, defined program deliverables, and novice teacher goals.

Rice ISD organizes its mentoring program around goals that build progressively throughout the school year. Initial meetings focus on classroom management, while later sessions emphasize lesson planning and instructional strategies. The program includes learning walks, an activity through which novice teachers observe their mentors' lessons, then mentors observe and provide feedback on the novice teachers' lessons. Initially, mentorship meetings are scheduled weekly and gradually occur less often. Mentor teachers in Rice ISD maintain logs of their interactions, which the district's curriculum director reviews to support accountability and program quality.

Freer ISD's mentorship program supports teachers during their first two years of employment. Mentors and novice teachers meet for a minimum of 5.0 hours per semester, and novice teachers observe their mentors' lessons throughout the year. While meeting topics are primarily guided by the needs of novice teachers, they often align organically with topics covered in the district's New Teacher Academy, such as lesson planning, classroom procedures, and the lesson cycle.

Freer ISD and Rice ISD have established structured processes for selecting mentor teachers. In both districts, principals nominate teachers based on measurable student outcomes, adaptability, and interpersonal skills. Their processes prioritize teachers who will support novice teachers effectively and uphold the district's standards. District leaders from both districts emphasized the risk of selecting ineffective mentor teachers, who may unintentionally model poor practices. To mitigate this possibility, Freer ISD leadership encourages principals to nominate teachers who exhibit the district's standards of behavior.

In addition, both districts establish clear priorities for pairing mentor teachers with novice teachers. Freer ISD

focuses on content area alignment for all pairings, while Rice ISD emphasizes content alignment for high school teachers and grade level alignment for elementary and middle school teachers.

The mentorship programs in both districts provide training to help mentors support new teachers effectively. Freer ISD partners with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) to offer mentors structured summer training, and principals provide ongoing support throughout the school year. In Rice ISD, the curriculum director leads summer training sessions for mentors and offers ongoing support. District staff reported that mentor training benefits novices and mentors by improving support for new educators and providing mentors with professional growth opportunities.

Implementing a structured, research-based mentorship program that provides mentor compensation, training, and dedicated time for mentorship activities requires significant district resources. To fund these efforts, interviewed districts reported relying on the Mentor Program Allotment (MPA). Established pursuant to House Bill 3, Eighty-sixth Legislature, 2019, the MPA provides funding to districts implementing high-quality mentorship programs for teachers with less than two years of experience. To qualify for funding, mentor teachers must have at least three years of teaching experience and a superior record of assisting students. Mentors must complete TEA-approved mentorship training programs. To facilitate mentorship activities, districts receiving MPA funds must provide release time or reduce teaching loads for mentor teachers to conduct classroom observations and coaching sessions.

Regardless of MPA participation, districts offering mentorship programs implemented strategies to reduce costs and optimize resources. Freer ISD, which receives MPA funds, collaborates with nearby San Diego ISD to share the cost of mentor training. Although Rice ISD does not participate in the MPA, the district minimized its mentorship training expenses by investing in training materials to deliver mentor development onsite. Rice ISD also reduces program costs by incorporating mentorship into an additional component of its TIA designation system, rather than offering stipends to all mentor teachers.

Districts also face challenges in allocating time for mentorship activities, with several reporting difficulties balancing teachers' need to observe experienced educators with students' need for uninterrupted instruction. To minimize

disruptions, Rice ISD recommends that participating teachers schedule observations during planning periods. Freer ISD relies on substitute teachers and educational aides to cover classes during these observations.

Additionally, some mentoring activities are scheduled after school. Freer ISD reported that participating teachers have expressed concerns about the added time commitment. Rice ISD received similar teacher feedback and addressed these concerns effectively by implementing a four-day workweek. This schedule includes a monthly professional development day that dedicates time during the workday for mentors and novice teachers to meet.

## RESIDENCY PROGRAMS

Surveyed districts also reported that teacher residency programs positively affected teacher retention. This teacher-training strategy offers a structured, yearlong clinical teaching experience to prepare aspiring educators. Some teachers receive stipends during the residency, which research has shown to improve program accessibility and participation significantly. Resident teachers collaborate with experienced mentor teachers and gradually assume classroom responsibilities. An August 2024 report by the Learning Policy Institute, *Teacher Residencies: State and Federal Policy to Support Comprehensive Teacher Preparation*, found that paid residency programs have strong retention outcomes, with 80.0 to 95.0 percent of participants remaining in the same district after three years.

Clint ISD partners with the University of Texas at El Paso to host teacher residents. The program schedules residents to work four days in the district and attend courses one day each week at the university. It also offers three residency pathways to support aspiring teachers based on their backgrounds and goals. Residents receive an annual stipend of \$14,000, which reduces the financial barriers posed by a yearlong unpaid internship.

Clint ISD reports that the residency program has provided several benefits. It requires residents to serve as substitute teachers one day per week, which provides residents with independent classroom experience and the district with a supply of vetted substitutes, eliminating costs associated with hiring substitute teachers for those days. Additionally, the program provides a source of talent to fill the district's open teaching positions. District leaders reported that residents' experience in the classroom and familiarity with district systems make them better prepared for their first year of teaching than other applicants.

In addition to resident stipends, districts also provide a stipend and training to mentors, who are selected based on strong teaching performance and evaluations. Clint ISD's residency program expenditures also include salary costs for a district coordinator who supports residents, manages program operations, provides professional development, and serves as a liaison among mentors, residents, and the university.

To implement a residency program, a district must identify sustainable funding for these components. Clint ISD initially supported its residency program with grant funds; but now finances it through state and local resources. This transition required program adjustments, such as limiting the number of residents accepted, decreasing resident stipend amounts, and leveraging residents as substitute teachers.



# SCHOOL CULTURE

Surveyed districts identified efforts to improve school and district culture as the third most effective category of teacher retention strategies.

A positive school culture—characterized by collaboration, appreciation, support, and respect—significantly improves job satisfaction, which supports teacher retention. A critical element of fostering a positive campus culture is building trust and transparency by empowering teachers to take an active role in shaping school policies and initiatives. Research shows that schools with higher levels of faculty decision-making, influence, and autonomy have lower rates of teacher turnover. In addition, school leadership can promote a positive school climate by minimizing nonteaching administrative tasks and increasing scheduled planning time to help alleviate teacher stress.

**Figure 9** shows survey results regarding the school culture strategies leaders most frequently ranked among the most effective for retaining teachers. The percentages represent the share of district leaders who ranked a given strategy among their top three most effective approaches.

Survey results indicate that district leaders view structured feedback channels to involve teachers in key decisions, along with increased teacher planning time, as the most effective strategies for teacher retention. The review team interviewed

districts that implement these strategies to understand how they put them into practice successfully.

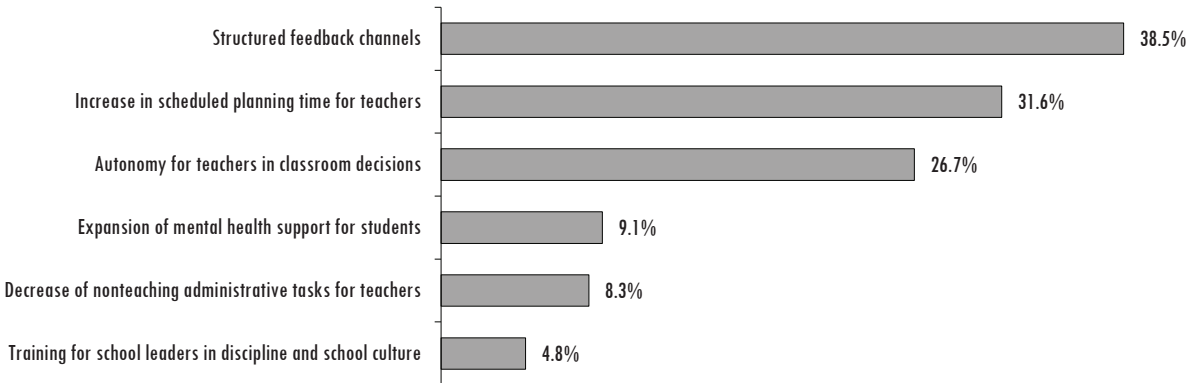
The following sections explore these school culture strategies and highlight key practices and considerations shared during interviews.

## STRUCTURED FEEDBACK CHANNELS

Surveyed districts ranked structured feedback channels as the most effective culture strategy for promoting a school culture that boosts teacher retention. These channels provide consistent opportunities for educators to voice concerns, offer suggestions, and contribute to decision-making processes. Establishing and maintaining effective feedback systems fosters a collaborative and supportive environment, empowering teachers to share their perspectives and contribute to meaningful change. In addition, districts report that well-implemented feedback channels enhance teacher satisfaction, improve retention, and help address critical challenges as they arise. These practices also build trust among teachers and administrators, which establishes a foundation for continuous improvement in instructional practices, school culture, and district policies.

During interviews, district leaders described the systems they implemented to solicit teacher feedback. Small districts reported relying primarily on informal channels. For

**FIGURE 9**  
**HIGHEST-RANKED CULTURE STRATEGIES AMONG SURVEYED DISTRICTS**  
**OCTOBER 2024**



NOTE: The percentage represents the share of district administrators who ranked a given strategy among the top three most effective approaches they reported implementing.  
SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board School Performance Review Team, District Survey, October 2024.

example, because Kress ISD is a small district, its leadership can maintain direct and frequent contact with teachers. The superintendent engages with teachers regularly by hosting teacher lunches every six weeks to encourage open dialogue in a relaxed setting. In addition, the superintendent establishes stakeholder committees to gather teacher feedback regarding new initiatives and hiring decisions. For example, teachers participate in the interview process for principal candidates.

By contrast, larger districts reported relying on more formal structures for obtaining teacher feedback. For example, Calhoun County ISD established a district advisory council that includes teachers and administrators from every campus. The district reports that teachers on the council contribute to important district decisions. Similarly, in Ector County ISD, teachers serve on a Superintendent's Advisory Council that facilitates direct, open communication with the superintendent. Ector County ISD also assigns human resources staff to act as liaisons to teacher groups, providing another opportunity for teachers to voice concerns to district administration. Teacher leaders also communicate campus-specific feedback and updates through channels such as a Teacher Incentive Allotment focus group.

All interviewed districts reported that they regularly survey teachers for input to inform decision-making. Kress ISD uses surveys to collect feedback regarding proposals, such as transitioning to a four-day workweek and enhancing campus facilities. Ector County ISD conducts twice-yearly surveys to assess professional development needs, workplace satisfaction, and teacher concerns. The district disaggregates and analyzes results by department, campus, and teacher experience level. District leaders report that exit surveys from departing employees provide further insights into areas for improvement. The district applies this information to refine its recruitment and retention strategies.

An effective feedback system promotes a culture that empowers teachers to share honest input. Research underscores the importance of psychological safety in team learning, emphasizing that teachers must trust that sharing ideas, suggestions, and proposals—even if they challenge norms or introduce risks—would not elicit criticism or punishment from colleagues or administrators. Leadership staff from all interviewed districts emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of trust and openness that empowers teachers to provide candid feedback. These leaders reported taking steps to alleviate teachers' fears of retaliation and to provide assurance that teachers' feedback is meaningfully

considered and used to inform district decisions. For example, Kress ISD reported communicating actionable responses to feedback through meetings, newsletters, and emails. To build trust, Ector County ISD contracts with external parties to administer surveys anonymously, and the district shares aggregate findings and subsequent actions with staff. Ector County ISD leaders reported that teachers are more willing to provide feedback when they see the district acting on their input.

## INCREASED PLANNING TIME

District leaders ranked increased planning time as the second most effective culture-related strategy for teacher retention. In addition to classroom instruction, teacher workloads include tasks such as reviewing and selecting instructional and supplementary materials, planning lessons, meeting with parents, completing reports, analyzing data, and attending professional development events. The Texas Education Code, Section 21.404, requires districts to provide teachers with at least 450.0 minutes of planning time every two weeks. However, this allotment may be insufficient for teachers to complete their required tasks. According to the Teacher Vacancy Task Force's February 2023 report, *Developing a Thriving Teacher Workforce in Texas*, extensive responsibilities contribute to teacher workweeks that exceed 40.0 hours, with many citing unsustainable workloads as a primary reason for leaving the profession.

Interviewed districts reported that they increased planning time through several methods. Dalhart ISD provides weekly planning time in addition to a teacher's regular conference periods for professional learning, community meetings, and collaborative planning. Other districts have increased planning time by transitioning to a four-day instructional week. For example, Rice ISD adopted a four-day instructional calendar, in which students and teachers do not have classes on Mondays, except for one Monday each month designated as a teacher workday. The workday is dedicated to professional development, planning, data analysis, and professional learning meetings. This monthly planning day is provided in addition to the 450.0 minutes of planning time the district provides every two weeks through daily conference periods. Rice ISD collected significant stakeholder input in developing this initiative, which it implemented during school year 2021–22.

To accommodate a four-day schedule, Rice ISD's school day incorporates longer class periods that facilitate complex labs, support collaborative learning experiences, and extended

reading and math periods in elementary schools to address critical learning needs. District leaders reported that teachers initially found teaching longer periods challenging. To support them, the district provided coaching and professional development focused on maximizing instructional time. After a short period of adjusting to the longer school day, teachers now report improved intentionality and efficiency in planning and instruction. Teachers appreciated the opportunity for structured professional development time that did not compromise their conference periods. Students also adapted quickly, with additional recess and snack breaks implemented for younger grades.

To address working parents' childcare concerns, the local YMCA and daycares began offering full-day care on Mondays, which in turn strengthened parent support for the schedule. Transparent communication highlighted the initiative's goal of recruiting and retaining quality teachers. This approach has yielded significant results, decreasing teacher turnover from 33.6 percent in school year 2020–21 to 12.0 percent in school year 2024–25. Rice ISD reports that teachers from higher-paying neighboring districts have applied for positions in the district, stating that they are drawn by the work-life balance offered by the four-day week.

Rice ISD monitors student outcomes, including STAAR and unit assessment scores, and has observed continued improvement since implementing this initiative in school year 2021–22. During this time, student enrollment increased, from 1,034 in school year 2022–23 to 1,105 in school year 2024–25. Despite this growth, staff reported that the district has achieved minor cost savings on utilities and transportation, though the district has made no substantial budgetary changes. The superintendent underscored the importance of teacher buy-in, parent involvement, and clear communication, describing the four-day workweek as a strategic move to retain high-quality educators without compromising instructional quality.

