



SUPPORT for Senate Bill 1290

Senate Bill (SB) 1290 by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte would extend the state's mentoring statute to clarify that a school district may choose to assign a mentor to a teacher who is not necessarily new to the profession but who is teaching in a new subject area or grade level.

The bill will be heard by the **Senate Education Committee Thursday, March 26**. The Association of Texas Professional Educators requests your help in passing this bill.

SUPPORT SB 1290 TO HELP TEACHERS ADJUST TO NEW ASSIGNMENTS AND IMPROVE TEACHER RETENTION RATES THROUGH MENTORING.

Mentoring is critical for new teachers but should also be made an option for experienced teachers who change their subject area or grade level. As Texas continues to raise its standards for public education, school districts need teachers who are properly trained and well-equipped to meet the challenges ahead. This need is most critical at the high school level, where recent changes in graduation requirements, such as the 4x4 curriculum, have exacerbated shortages of qualified math and science teachers. Districts often struggle to find appropriately certified teachers in every subject and at every grade level, and sometimes they are forced to assign teachers outside their field of certification. Teachers assigned out of field need additional support to be successful, and mentoring is an effective way to give them the support they need. Likewise, teachers who obtain new certifications for different subject areas or grade levels also benefit from the support of a mentor during that adjustment period.

Changing the mentoring statute is necessary. Even though school districts already have the legal authority to assign mentors to teachers who are new to a subject or grade level, the Commissioner's rules that were adopted to implement the mentoring statute limit its application to mentoring programs for new teachers with less than two years of classroom experience. Similarly, state grants for mentoring are designed only to help districts provide mentors for new teachers. SB 1290 would amend the statute, thereby giving school districts more flexibility to use their available mentoring resources to target assistance to the teachers in the district who need the most help, regardless of their circumstances.

Expanding mentoring to include teachers new to a subject or grade level will improve teacher morale and retention rates. Research has long supported mentoring as one of the most successful methods of improving teacher retention rates. Educators who have been mentored by an experienced colleague report that the experience boosted their confidence in the classroom and helped them become better teachers for their students.

SB 1290 does not create any new mandates for districts. The current statute does not require districts to assign mentors to any teachers but says districts "may" assign mentors to certain teachers. Under SB 1290, the statute would remain permissive, and districts would not be forced to assign mentors to teachers new to a subject or grade.

On behalf of our 112,000 members, ATPE urges you to enable school districts to expand their mentoring programs in order to help those teachers who take on the challenges of teaching in new subject areas or grade levels. We respectfully ask you to vote FOR SB 1290.

For more information, contact ATPE at (800) 777-2873 and ask for Governmental Relations.



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WHY DO EDUCATORS SUPPORT SENATE BILL 1290 TO EXPAND MENTORING TO TEACHERS WHO ARE NEW TO A SUBJECT OR GRADE LEVEL?

Personal experience has proven that the mentoring process for teachers is most valuable. In re-entering the classroom teaching profession, I was both a newly certified teacher and later newly assigned in a teaching field. The experience and techniques of the mentor teachers allowed me to cultivate my own personality for my classes. The mentors also developed a support network to provide resources to avoid the pitfalls of everyday classroom challenges. The networking of information is invaluable.

In addition to my experience, I have witnessed the same positive results with other teachers who have entered our profession. Those who have experience sharing resources and support is what ultimately gives the student the best of their teaching team.

D. Lovett,
Olney ISD

I have been a mentor several times in the last 10 years, and I've come to realize what I missed by not having a mentor as a new teacher to a district and being reassigned to a different subject area after a couple of years without a mentor. There are so many parts to teaching that revolve around the campus you are on, the district you are in, the subject you are teaching, and the student population makeup that older, more seasoned teachers do without thinking about that take years to learn. Having someone to ask questions, observe teaching, talk to about frustrations, and in general give you the support and understanding you need that first year and beyond is priceless to having a successful first school year. Mentoring helps retain teachers and develops career-lasting support systems. The support given by mentors helps students and parents also by providing guidance in parent-teacher meetings, differentiation of instruction, and knowledge of teaching strategies.

Being a mentor was great and knowing you have made the first year of teaching a little easier for someone else is very rewarding. We still meet for lunch or dinner every so often to discuss concerns, share accomplishments, and have continued to build a friendship that is truly a support system for all involved. These meetings include all four of the teachers I have mentored over the years.

H. Secrist
Katy ISD

Many teachers need the support of a colleague when adjusting. It is critical that all new teachers have a mentor. It is important that teachers experiencing a change have a mentor. Teaching is extremely stressful and a mentor helps provide answers and support to alleviate some of the stress.

As a new teacher, I had lots of support because I went through the alternative certification program. My mentor was just one of the many support people in place. He was a tremendous help to me. Everything



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was new and I was so lost. I would not be teaching today if I had not received a lot of support during my first year.

Does mentoring have an impact on students? YES. Teachers need help to be successful and to be a terrific teacher. They need ideas and strategies to try in their classroom. They need to share their successes and failures with others. The more support they have, the better students perform. This is so critical at the beginning of a teaching career and during any changes in a teaching career. "Buddy" teachers do not work as well as mentors. I do not believe districts will increase their use of mentor teachers unless there is funding or legislation.

J. Fife

I fully support mentoring for teachers in public education. Business and other professional models have mentors. It makes sense that to be most effective and efficient, someone experienced in the profession should advise and guide the new teacher or the teacher new to a subject or grade level.

I did not have a mentor when new to teaching. I was shocked at how many things my college degree in education and student teaching did not prepare me for when I stepped into the classroom. How my students could have been better served if I had been advised and directed!

When I moved to a new setting, I told my new teammates I did not want to flounder around making mistakes and learning the hard way, wasting some years of my students' learning time and my own to figure out things for myself. I was fortunate to have wonderful, helpful team members who were like mentors, though not official ones. They saved me and my students many a heartache.

We must provide our citizens of tomorrow with people properly trained and mentored once on the job. Our students get the short end of the stick when we do not adequately prepare those who deal with them to nurture skillfully. Ultimately, society reaps lessened benefits and sometimes pays a high price for students not given adequately educated teachers.

D. Massey

I support mentoring for teachers, both new and ones who are teaching a new subject or grade level. As a new teacher, I did not have a mentor and was often at a loss for how to best handle a situation with a student or teach a new concept. I have also been required to teach out of my area of expertise and would have benefitted from the experience of a mentor. Having been a mentor for a new teacher, I have found that it does require quite a bit of time. With all of the other duties required of teachers, compensation for that position is something that should be offered to encourage experienced teachers to give of themselves. As a dedicated teacher, I jealously guard against any time I have to devote to duties other than my students, as my students are my first priority. Compensation for that time would be a great motivator.

M. Alexander



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I had a mentor when I started teaching in the fall of 1988. I graduated from Texas Tech with my master's in special education and teaching credentials. The Tech program allowed me to teach for a year on an emergency permit and still earn a full teacher's salary. Without a mentor, I most likely would not have survived the first year. I had a good substitute teaching background which helped but the mentor was far more important in helping me to incorporate myself into a new community and school system. Five years later, I served as a mentor for a new special education teacher who was getting his certification through one of the regional service centers. The region service center had a two-day training that the mentors had to attend, and there was a stipend for the mentor. As always, any little extra income for a teacher makes a difference. Any new teacher hired by the Texas Youth Commission facility in Brownwood was always assigned a mentor. The mentor helped the new teacher adjust from "public school thinking" to "TYC education" and all the other curriculum, staffing and student relations differences. Because the Brownwood facility does assign mentors, there are fewer turnovers in the teaching staff which helps keep the education of students at risk more stable.

There is no one more important to beginning teachers or teachers teaching new subjects than a mentor. The wealth of information on curriculum, local school districts, and local community are just a few of the benefits of having a mentor.

B. Powell

When I came to Lee, I was assigned a buddy who helped me "learn the ropes." She was in the same hall and taught or had taught the same subjects. This was a very effective approach.

I have been teaching since 1973. The word mentor was never mentioned. I just found someone to help me whenever I needed help.

Once I had to teach American history; I am a business teacher. Luckily for me there was a history teacher across the hall. Plus, I had some bright students who taught me!

I have mentored several teachers. Every time we get new teachers in our department, we all pitch in and help.

Mentoring has an impact on students when there is a good match between mentor and mentee. If the new teacher needs help and doesn't get it, well, you know!

F. Bragg
Robert E. Lee High School



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Teachers learn best through the sharing of ideas and collaboration. I was assigned a mentor when I was a new teacher and it was absolutely critical to my success in the classroom which in turn helps the STUDENTS. My mentor was fabulous. We planned the curriculum together. We discussed my strengths and areas for growth. Most of all she supported me which benefitted the students. Teaching is a difficult profession and we retain effective teachers by supporting them. When a teacher is confident and knows the curriculum it helps the students. I have found that the best teachers collaborate and share ideas. They do not have to reinvent the wheel.

M. Duffey
Third Grade Teacher
Andrews Elementary

I feel a statewide, supported, organized mentoring program is the single most important factor in fostering change for Texas.

Numerous studies show the most important predictor of student success is a certified/qualified and experienced teacher. Students taught by teachers with more than five years experience consistently score better on TAKS. Since newer teachers are more likely to leave the profession, mentoring and other assistance is critical. (The Cost of Underpaying Texas Teachers, March 2006)

According to a 2002 report by the Charles A. Dana Center, 84% of the first group of teachers who received assistance through TxBESS were still teaching after three years compared to 75% of teachers who received other or no support. The most conservative method outlined in SBEC's November 2000 report, The Cost of Teacher Turnover, the 2004-2005 cost to a Texas district per turnover is \$13,329.

In this time of economic crisis, we cannot financially afford NOT to mentor our new teachers. In this time of academic change, we cannot afford to give our students teachers who have not been mentored. And, in this stressful time of change and crisis, mentoring provides experienced teachers with an avenue to fulfill their feeling of obligation to give back to the educational community.

D. Lee
Paris ISD

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