

RESPONDING TO THE DATA: HOW TEXAS IS RE-THINKING TEACHER CERTIFICATION



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Facing persistent teacher shortages across the state in Career and Technical Education (CTE), Texas authorized school districts to waive state teacher certification requirements. As a result, the number of uncertified teachers increased by 226% – climbing from 12,900 in 2019 to 42,100 in 2025. What began as a targeted intervention for a narrow group of teachers to address a shortage in a limited set of fields became a statewide loophole affecting teachers across all foundational subject areas.

Students taught by uncertified new teachers lost the equivalent of 4 months of reading instruction and 3 months of math instruction compared with peers taught by certified teachers. Younger students in these classrooms experienced higher absenteeism. Additionally, the rural districts that hired uncertified teachers at substantially higher rates faced compounded inequities in access to trained professionals.

A 2024 study at Texas Tech University led by Jacob Kirksey measured the effects of these waivers and revealed a critical distinction. The issue was not simply an influx of uncertified teachers in the classroom, but, importantly, the presence of teachers with no experience. They found that when uncertified teachers had prior school-based experience as paraprofessionals or substitutes, student learning loss was markedly reduced.

This is not just a Texas story. Many states are using similar waivers and emergency pathways. These findings offer a roadmap for building experience-centered preparation models before shortages translate into lasting learning loss.

THESE FINDINGS OFFER A ROADMAP FOR BUILDING EXPERIENCE-CENTERED PREPARATION MODELS BEFORE SHORTAGES TRANSLATE INTO LASTING STUDENT LEARNING LOSS.

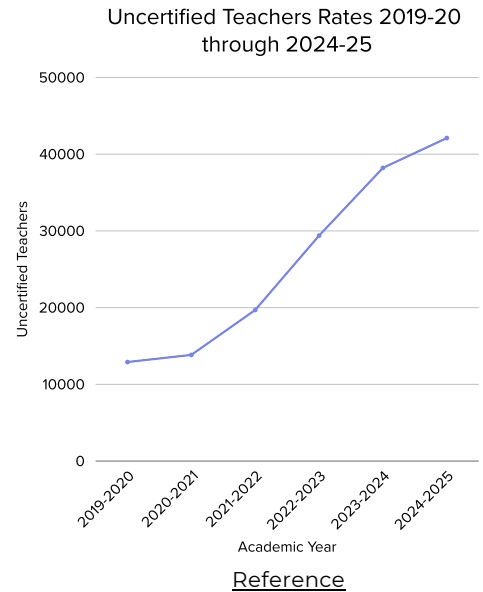
A STOPGAP MEASURE TURNED STATEWIDE LOOPHOLE

In 2015, the Texas Legislature enacted the District of Innovation program, which allows districts to address long-standing teacher shortages by promoting greater flexibility in district staffing. By allowing districts to waive state certification requirements strictly for CTE teachers, the program created opportunities to draw talent from unconventional sources and sectors. The intention here was clear: bring more educators into the classroom who had valuable work-based learning experience. The outcome, however, was very different.

In the years since the pandemic, these waivers have expanded far beyond CTE to include foundational subjects such as math and literacy, reflecting mounting teacher shortages across districts. As a result, participation in the program expanded to nearly 1,000 districts across the state, and the prevalence of uncertified teachers grew sharply.

BETWEEN THE 2019-2020 AND 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEARS, THE NUMBER OF UNCERTIFIED TEACHERS CLIMBED FROM 12,900 TO 42,100.

On paper, this policy appeared to alleviate staffing shortages by placing more teachers in classrooms. In practice, however, it introduced significant negative consequences for student outcomes and absenteeism.



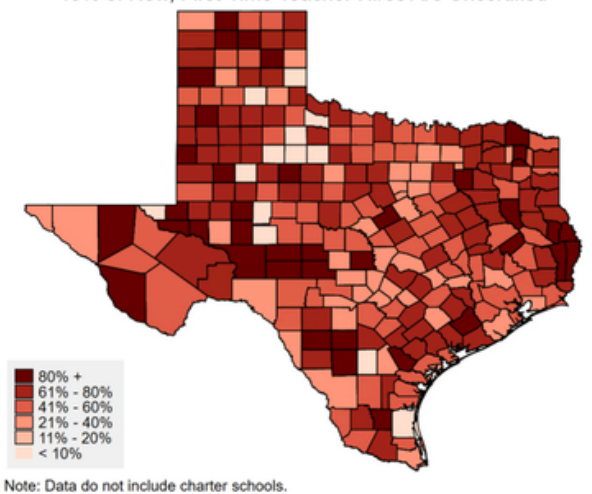
WHAT THE DATA REVEALS

A [2024 study](#) at Texas Tech University examined the consequences of this policy shift by comparing student outcomes in classrooms taught by certified and uncertified teachers.

The research found that the expansion of uncertified teachers was associated with measurable setbacks in academic achievement, student engagement, and support, as well as widening disparities between rural and non-rural districts.

THESE FINDINGS UNDERSCORE THE IMPORTANCE OF BOTH TEACHER PREPARATION AND CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE IN PROMOTING EFFECTIVE LEARNING AND POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR ALL STUDENTS.

Figure 1
Percentage of Uncertified Teachers: 2022-23 School Year
45% of New, First-Time Teacher Hires Are Uncertified



“Amid Rising Number of Uncertified Teachers, Previous Classroom Experience Proves Vital in Texas”

Student Learning and Early Supports

Students assigned to new, uncertified teachers lost the equivalent of approximately 4 months of learning in reading and 3 months in math compared with peers taught by certified instructors. These effects are most pronounced among educators without previous classroom experience, highlighting the importance of familiarity with classroom instruction and school-based practice.

Beyond academic outcomes, younger students taught by uncertified teachers experienced higher rates of absenteeism and were less likely to be screened for dyslexia and other early learning needs. Together, these patterns suggest that limited preparation not only affects achievement but also weakens the early identification and support systems that are critical for long-term student success.

Disparities Across Locales

As shown in Figure 1, the study found that although most districts were affected by these waivers, rural districts had substantially higher rates of hiring uncertified teachers than non-rural districts. Therefore, students in rural districts in Texas were more likely to be taught by educators with limited classroom experience and have less consistent access to trained professionals, compounding existing inequities in learning opportunities and outcomes.

Experience Matters

The study finds that student outcomes are driven less by certification status alone and more by classroom experience and preparation. Students taught by uncertified teachers experienced measurable learning loss, but this loss was significantly reduced when teachers had prior school-based experience, such as working as paraprofessionals or substitute teachers. This underscores that direct, in-classroom experience is a critical factor in supporting student learning.

PREPARATION THAT EMPHASIZES REAL-WORLD TEACHING EXPERIENCE SUCH AS APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS, MAY HAVE A GREATER IMPACT ON STUDENT OUTCOMES THAN CERTIFICATION ALONE.

NEW POLICY BASED ON DATA: A BOLD CHOICE FOR STUDENTS

The evidence is clear: student learning suffers when taught by inexperienced, uncertified teachers. Beyond documenting the problem, this study offers a policy roadmap that prepares educators for the classroom. By underscoring the need for direct, hands-on classroom experience, the data show that experience-centered strategies for teacher preparation can strengthen the educator workforce.

Building on this evidence, a major shift is underway. [House Bill 2](#) (HB2), a new Texas law enacted in June 2025, will phase out all uncertified teachers in foundational subject areas by the 2029-2030 school year. The law emphasizes high-quality, structured preparation pathways, ensuring that all educators entering the classroom have both rigorous training and hands-on experience. HB2 supports alternative routes into teaching, such as apprenticeship programs and mentorship-based models, while moving away from emergency waivers.

WHAT HB2 DOES:

- PHASES OUT UNCERTIFIED TEACHERS IN MATH, ELA, SCIENCE, AND SOCIAL STUDIES BY 2029-2030
- PROVIDES DISTRICT INCENTIVES FOR CERTIFICATION
- FUNDS FOR MENTORING AND STRUCTURED PREPARATION
- KEEPS ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS AND RAISES QUALITY EXPECTATIONS

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY IS NOT OPTIONAL. IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM TO DELIVER ON ITS PROMISE TO EVERY STUDENT.

WHAT WE'RE DOING AT THE PATHWAYS ALLIANCE

The Pathways Alliance, led by InnovateEDU, is an uncommon coalition of leading education organizations dedicated to supporting and implementing quality, sustainable, and diverse educator preparation pipelines, including teacher residency programs and apprenticeships.

With over 80 partners across the country, and through initiatives such as the [National Guideline Standards for Registered Teacher Apprenticeships](#) and our [Data Infrastructure Working Group](#), in partnership with the Ed-Fi Alliance, Pathways supports the adoption of shared data standards that allow states to consistently track preparation pathway type, classroom-based training, mentoring supports, certification progress, and employment outcomes. This enables states to link preparation models to retention and student success, reduce data loss across systems, and strengthen alternative pathways intentionally before staffing shortages translate into long-term learning losses for students.

Preparation data often lives across disconnected systems operated by universities, state agencies, districts, and workforce partners, making it difficult to evaluate pathway quality or follow candidates into the classroom. To support this work, Pathways helps states strengthen the data foundations behind teacher preparation, allowing them to link preparation models to retention and student success, reduce data loss across systems, and intentionally strengthen alternative pathways before staffing shortages translate into long-term learning losses for students.

The Pathways Alliance [resource library](#) provides more information about the current landscape of teacher pathways and the strategies states and districts are using to strengthen and sustain the educator pipeline. Additionally, the [K12 Teacher Apprenticeship Compendium](#) outlines current registered apprenticeship programs broken down by state.

As the field continues to grow, [we invite new partners](#) to join the Pathways Alliance to collaborate, share data-informed practices, and advance high-quality pathways that support teacher recruitment and retention, ultimately improving student outcomes.