

The Texas Teacher Workforce Landscape

What district leaders need to know in 2026–27.

More than half of the teachers who started in Texas classrooms last year did so without a certificate.⁶ HB 2 says that ends, on a timeline that has already begun. This brief is about what happens to those teachers, and to the districts that depend on them, between now and the deadline: where the workforce stands, what the law requires, what PREP supports, and why treating certification as workforce strategy rather than a compliance date is what keeps a district from being back here in three years.

A brief for Texas district leaders on the certification deadline, the PREP partnership paths, and what separates meeting HB 2 from building a workforce that holds.

KEY FINDINGS

Texas is at a turning point.

New certification requirements are ensuring the highest-quality teachers are entering Texas classrooms.¹ The time is now to build a strong, qualified educator workforce to support your students.

52.3%

of first-year Texas teachers in 2024–25 entered without certification.⁶

42,103

uncertified teachers statewide, 12% of the workforce, up from 3.8% in 2019–20.⁴

2×

Every year since 2022–23, Texas has hired more than twice as many uncertified new teachers as teachers with standard certificates.⁴

4 months

of reading learning and three of math lost by students with a new uncertified teacher. But uncertified teachers with prior classroom experience performed on par with newly certified ones.⁷

2026–27

The first HB 2 certification deadline. It is in effect now.¹

THE BOTTOM LINE

Certification is the middle of the sequence, not the end of it. The workforce Texas will have in 2029 is being built by the teachers already in its classrooms today.

One state. Very different workforce realities.

Statewide averages hide the decision a district actually faces. Candidate availability, certification exposure, and competition for talent vary sharply by region — in recent analysis of first-time Texas teachers, uncertified hires ranged from roughly a quarter of new teachers in some regions to about seven in ten in others.⁷ The path that fits one district fits almost no one else.

PIPELINE PROBLEM

Certified candidates don't arrive.

Certified candidates simply aren't available locally in sufficient numbers. Rural districts hire uncertified teachers at roughly four times the rate of non-rural ones.⁷ When the outside pipeline doesn't reach you, the only durable answer is building one from inside the community.

CERTIFICATION PROBLEM

The teachers are already here.

Systems that relied on certification flexibility now have teachers of record who must earn the credential while doing the job, on HB 2's timeline. The task isn't replacing them. It's getting them certified and keeping them once they are.

RETENTION PROBLEM

Certified is not the same as staying.

Strong competition for high-quality talent leaves systems of all sizes with gaps to fill. Teachers who enter with little preparation leave at two to three times the rate of those who enter well prepared.⁵

WHERE TO START

The first step isn't selecting a program. It's identifying which workforce problem you're actually trying to solve.

The first deadline is not coming. It is here.

HB 2 phases out the exemptions districts have used to staff classrooms with uncertified teachers, and through the PREP allotment it supports the path to certification.^{1,2} Read the dates together rather than one at a time and the shape changes: this isn't three deadlines. It's one requirement that keeps widening.

2026–27

First deadline

Districts can no longer exempt K–5 reading and mathematics teachers from certification through a District of Innovation plan.

2027–28

Expanded requirement

The same applies to all foundation curriculum teachers — reading/ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies — at every grade level.

2029–30

Full implementation

Districts with an approved extension have until 2029–30. That application window closed in March 2026. The requirement is the same; only the clock is longer.

WHAT THE TIMELINE DOESN'T SAY

The deadline settles when your teachers are certified. It doesn't settle whether they're still here in 2029, or whether you're doing this again for the next cohort.

HB 2 establishes the destination. PREP partnerships support the path.

PREP is a state-supported partnership program spanning the points where districts recruit, prepare, certify, support, and retain educators. It isn't one program. It's five, and they solve different problems.² The first decision isn't whether to participate; it's which path matches the workforce challenge you actually have.

01 MENTORSHIP

Keep the teachers you have.

Supports structured mentoring for beginning teachers, with stipends, training, and release time. Best fit where early-career teachers are leaving faster than a district can replace them.

02 PRESERVICE RESIDENCY

Build certified candidates before the vacancy opens.

Paid, year-long clinical residencies tied to district need. Best fit for the pipeline challenge, on a two-to-three-year horizon.

03 GROW YOUR OWN

Build the pipeline from within.

Develops current employees without a teaching certificate, and high school students in CTE pathways, toward the classroom. Best fit where certified candidates don't arrive from outside. *Note: recent LASO cycles tied GYO participation to residency approval.*²

04 PRESERVICE TRADITIONAL

Strengthen the pathways you already use.

Connects university-based preparation more intentionally to district hiring. Best fit for districts with reliable local candidates who want that pathway better aligned. Opens in LASO Cycle 5, fall 2026.

05 PRESERVICE ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION

The certification path.

The one PREP path aimed squarely at the certification challenge, supporting the alternative route to the credential. Best fit where the uncertified count — not hiring, not turnover — is the number that keeps a district up. Opens in LASO Cycle 5, fall 2026.²

KEY INSIGHT

Four of five PREP paths build future candidates or support new hires. One is built around certification itself. For districts facing the 2026–27 deadline, that's where the clock is running.

Meeting the deadline and building a workforce are not the same project.

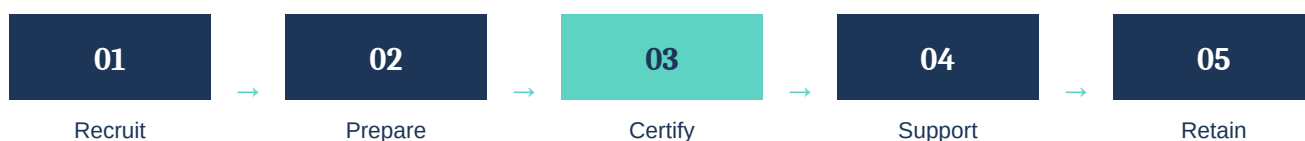
HB 2 will get Texas classrooms to certified teachers one way or another. The question the deadline doesn't answer is what kind of workforce a district has once it gets there.

The credential alone isn't what changes outcomes. Texas Tech's analysis of recent first-time Texas teachers found students with new uncertified teachers lost roughly four months of learning in reading and three in math. But uncertified teachers who came in with prior classroom experience produced results on par with newly certified ones.⁷ What moved student learning wasn't the paperwork. It was preparation and practice.

The same pattern shows up in who stays. Teachers who enter with little preparation leave at two to three times the rate of those who enter well prepared,⁵ and uncertified teachers in Texas are both less likely to remain and less effective early on.⁴ A district that certifies its teachers by 2027 without also developing and supporting them has met the deadline and rebuilt the vacancy.

That's the case for treating the five functions as one system rather than a checklist worked left to right. They compound: preparation makes certification meaningful, support makes certification stick, and retention turns three years of investment into a stable workforce instead of a recurring emergency. Texas has hired more than twice as many uncertified new teachers as standard-certified ones every year since 2022–23.⁴ The districts that come out ahead will be the ones that treated the deadline as the moment to build the whole sequence.

MOST DISTRICTS STOP AT 03.



COMPLIANCE MODE ASKS:

“Are our teachers certified by the deadline?”

STRATEGY MODE ASKS:

“Will we be back in this position three years from now?”

THE IMPLICATION

The deadline is a compliance event. The workforce is a three-year strategy. Districts that plan for the second will meet the first along the way.

Lever 2 puts certification under recruitment. The data says it belongs under retention too.

TEA's Effective District Framework organizes talent into three essential actions: 2.1 Intentional Roles and Staffing, 2.2 Recruitment and Selection, and 2.3 Growth and Retention. Certification lives in 2.2, under Educator Pipelines and Partnerships: the district tracks and counsels candidates toward standard certification and partners with preparation programs to get them there.³

That placement made sense when certification happened before hiring. For most Texas districts it no longer does. In 2024–25, more than half of first-year teachers entered without certification.⁶ They aren't candidates in a pipeline; they're teachers of record, and they'll earn the credential while doing the job. For them, certification isn't the last step of recruitment. It's the first step of growth and retention.

That's where the sequence breaks. A district can execute 2.2 well, tracking every uncertified teacher to the HB 2 deadline, and still lose them, because the support that keeps early-career teachers in the classroom (appraisal, mentoring, pathways, advancement) sits in 2.3 and often doesn't start until the credential is done.³ The teacher who most needs 2.3 is the one still working through 2.2.

LEVER 2: TALENT



THE IMPLICATION

Recruitment alone is not enough. Preparation, certification, support, and retention are one continuous process, not a handoff between two essential actions. Districts that close that gap don't just clear the deadline; they get the workforce stability the rest of the framework depends on.

Lever 2 is the unlock for the other five.

LEVER 1

Planning and Performance Management

A stable talent base is what lets a district execute its strategic roadmap instead of losing momentum to constant restaffing and re-planning.

LEVER 3

Integrated Student Supports

Retained counselors, interventionists, and support staff mean students experience consistent relationships and follow-through instead of gaps left by vacancies.

LEVER 4

Academic Experience

High-quality instructional materials are only as good as their implementation. Teachers who stay implement them with fidelity; a revolving door re-teaches them every year.

LEVER 5

Instructional Leadership and Capacity Building

Coaching relationships and internalization cycles depend on people staying long enough to grow. Turnover resets the clock on capacity.

LEVER 6

Finance and Operations

Every teacher retained is a rehiring and onboarding cost avoided, and money that goes to students instead of churn.

A stronger teacher workforce starts by understanding the workforce you actually have.

Start with the problem, not the program.

Every Texas district has a different starting point, and the right move depends on which workforce problem is actually yours. These five questions will tell you which one.

01 Which problem is ours?

Pipeline, certification, or retention. Most districts have one that dominates. Naming it decides everything downstream.

02 How many of our teachers of record are uncertified, and on which HB 2 timeline?

2026–27 for K–5 reading and mathematics; 2027–28 as foundation curriculum requirements expand; 2029–30 under approved extensions.¹ The count by deadline is the plan.

03 What happens to them the year after they earn the credential?

If the answer is “the same thing that happened before they had it,” the district has met the deadline and rebuilt the vacancy.

04 Where does certification sit in our EDF work?

Under 2.2 Recruitment, as the framework files it, or under 2.3 Growth and Retention, where the teachers actually are. The handoff between the two is where most workforce strategies break.

05 Which PREP path matches the problem, and are we ready for LASO Cycle 5?

Four paths build future candidates or support new hires. One is built around certification itself. The window opens fall 2026.²

TURN INSIGHT INTO A PLAN.

Answer these in under five minutes. Take the District Readiness Tool at go.relay.edu/district-professional-learning-readiness-tool-relay-teaching-lab

Talk it through. Bring your workforce priorities, timeline, and questions. We'll start there.

SOURCES AND NOTES

Every statistic in this brief is keyed to the numbered source below.

- 1 Texas Education Agency, *HB 2 Implementation: New Certification Requirements and Incentives for Uncertified Teachers*, August 2025.
- 2 Texas Education Agency, *Preparing and Retaining Educators through Partnerships (PREP) Program Allotment*.
- 3 Texas Education Agency, *Effective District Framework, Lever 2: Talent* (texasedf.org).
- 4 Learning Policy Institute, *Teacher Certification in Texas: District Strategies to Recruit and Retain a Credentialed Workforce*.
- 5 Learning Policy Institute, *Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It*. National data.
- 6 University of Houston College of Education, *Texas Teacher Workforce Report*, 2026.
- 7 Jacob Kirksey, Texas Tech University, research on outcomes from the influx of uncertified Texas teachers, 2024.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

Published by Relay Graduate School of Education and Teaching Lab. The web edition is available at go.relay.edu/texas/teacher-workforce-landscape and is the source of truth for this content.