



FIGURE-1

# DISSECTING TEACHER QUALITY

AT THE CORE OF STUDENT SUCCESS IS A WELL-QUALIFIED, EFFECTIVE TEACHER.  
ATPE PEELS BACK THE LAYERS IN ITS PROVOCATIVE NEW STUDY.

## **FINDING No. 1:**

Even after controlling for prior achievement, student demographics and geographic location, teacher quality at the school level is associated with student achievement—especially at the secondary level.

## **FINDING No. 2:**

Teacher quality appears to be more equitably distributed in elementary schools than in secondary schools, but this is more likely due to a lack of detailed data and a greater supply of elementary teachers than any state or district policies.

## **FINDING No. 3:**

Students in lower-performing schools have substantially less access to teacher quality than students in higher-performing schools.

## **FINDING No. 4:**

At all school levels, but particularly at the middle- and high-school levels, high-poverty and predominantly minority schools are far more likely to have teacher turnover and higher proportions of novice and out-of-field teachers than low-poverty and predominantly white schools.

**A**s an educator, you are likely to have a strong reaction to these findings, which are the results of ATPE's new study on the distribution of teacher quality in Texas. Released Oct. 18, this headline-generating study (covered by more than 40 news outlets and counting) is sparking online comments on news stories and receiving air time on talk radio. The findings might cause you to ask, "Teacher quality? How is *that* defined?" or, "Who needed a study to tell them *that*?" You might be angry, wondering if the study results are an indictment of the teachers who work in hard-to-staff schools. (They are not. Read on.)

Whatever your reaction, know that ATPE's *Study on the Distribution of Teacher Quality in Texas Schools* is achieving its desired effect: generating important conversations about how teachers are trained, recruited and retained, especially in schools serving economically disadvantaged and minority populations. And there simply is no more important conversation to have, especially as we head into the 82nd legislative session.



#### ATPE'S GOAL FOR THE STUDY

In recent years, a growing body of research from across the country has confirmed what many educators have known for decades—that teachers are the most critical school-based component affecting the academic progress of students. Having a highly effective teacher for multiple years can help reduce the effects of poverty and low levels of parental education. Moreover, an increasing number of studies have found that measures of teacher quality—a term that has a specific definition in the context of ATPE's study—are positively associated with teacher effectiveness in secondary education.

Given the many studies that show a correlation between teacher quality and student achievement, ATPE wanted to go a step beyond and take a comprehensive look at the degree to which teacher quality is disproportionately distributed across the state and even within school districts. To conduct our study, ATPE commissioned Dr. Ed Fuller, a special research associate at the University of Texas at Austin.

This isn't the first time ATPE has worked with Fuller, a noted researcher in this area. You might recall our 2008 report on this very topic. The 2010 study takes an even deeper look into the subject.



#### DEFINING TEACHER QUALITY

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the study is the term *teacher quality* itself. In the context of this study, *teacher quality* is not meant to label teachers as "good" or "bad"; rather, the study uses several Teacher Quality Indices (TQIs) to arrive at a measure of quality. Each TQI is based on several objective measures that research has shown to be related to student achievement: whether a teacher is fully certified, whether a teacher holds a certificate that

matches his teaching assignment, a teacher's years of education experience and high certification test scores.

Using the TQIs, ATPE's study revealed a substantial inequitable distribution of teacher quality across the state at the middle- and high-school levels:

- On average, at the high schools with the lowest measures on the TQI scale, one-third of teachers were assigned out of field, as opposed to those schools with the highest TQI scores, which had, on average, less than 10 percent of teachers who were assigned out of field.
- The high schools with the lowest minority enrollments, or schools with minority populations of less than 44.5 percent, had a TQI significantly greater than those with the highest minority enrollments, or minority populations of more than 97.5 percent.

Clearly, students in low-performing schools as well as in high-poverty and predominantly minority schools have far less access to the same levels of teacher quality as students in high-performing, low-poverty and predominantly white schools. Moreover, this finding holds true for schools that are within driving distance of one another—both within the same district and across district lines between contiguous districts.

Once again, it bears repeating: This study is not an indictment of teachers who choose to work in the most hard-to-staff schools. Rather, the study indicates that *aggregate* school-level teacher quality is inequitably distributed throughout Texas. Many schools have a "revolving door" because there is no mechanism in place to attract and retain the most experienced, well-qualified teachers—and that's a problem state and local policymakers have ignored for far too long.



## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

If Texas is going to increase overall achievement, it must address the inequitable distribution of teacher quality. To that end, the study offers several policy recommendations at both the state and district levels.

The recommendations targeted to state policymakers in the governor's office, Legislature, State Board of Education, State Board for Educator Certification, Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board include:

- Gathering input from teachers and administrators on improving teacher quality and more equitably distributing teacher quality.
- Creating an annual statewide report that analyzes the aggregate TQI and individual TQI components. Overall results should be made public, and individual school reports should be provided to district personnel.
- Providing monetary incentives for districts to address TQI inequities and increasing districts' flexibility to address their unique needs.
- Increasing requirements for teacher preparation programs, especially alternative certification programs.
- Funding a statewide working conditions study. "What keeps people [at hard-to-staff schools] is support and the teaching and working environment," Fuller said during ATPE's Oct. 18 press conference. "Money will get teachers there; teaching and learning keep them there."

- Improving the school accountability system, which currently provides a disincentive for well-qualified and effective teachers to move to low-performing schools.
- Developing a statewide campaign designed to increase the prestige of the teaching profession.

A key recommendation at the district level is that districts invest in a high-quality teacher mentoring and induction system, such as the Texas Beginning Educator Support System (TxBESS). ATPE Governmental Relations Manager Jennifer Canaday expanded on this at the Oct. 18 press conference. "Mentoring is the single most effective component in improving teacher retention," she said.

Addressing the issues raised by this study will demand a long-term commitment from policymakers, educators, community members and parents. It will require that we re-examine the allocation of resources at both the state and district levels. The state of Texas has a moral responsibility to ensure that poor and minority students—and students in general—are provided with well-qualified, effective teachers. ATPE is prepared to work with lawmakers and school boards to do all we can to provide a quality education for all schoolchildren. The future of Texas requires no less. 🔄

### 🖱️ Learn more about ATPE's study

Download a PDF of ATPE's *Study on the Distribution of Teacher Quality in Texas Schools* at [www.atpe.org/Advocacy/Issues/teacherqualitystudy.asp](http://www.atpe.org/Advocacy/Issues/teacherqualitystudy.asp). Please send questions and comments about the study to ATPE Public Relations Director Larry Comer at [lcomer@atpe.org](mailto:lcomer@atpe.org).



ATPE Executive Director Doug Rogers (second from left) discusses teacher effectiveness during a Sept. 23 symposium at the University of Texas at Austin.

## ATPE speaks up at teacher effectiveness symposium

Raise Your Hand Texas and the Texas High School Project organized a symposium on teacher effectiveness Sept. 23 on the University of Texas at Austin campus, and on the panel of invited experts was a familiar name: ATPE Executive Director Doug Rogers.

Moderator Evan Smith (editor of *The Texas Tribune* and former editor of *Texas Monthly*) questioned panelists on tough issues, including teacher recruitment and retention, the quality of traditional educator preparation programs compared with alternative certification programs, measures of teacher effectiveness and differentiated pay, and

the prestige of the education profession. Although the panelists brought diverse viewpoints to the table, there was consensus about the need to elevate the profession's status. "We must promote teacher respect," Rogers told the audience of lawmakers and influential businesspeople. Panelist Sandra Licon of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation concurred. "If we want this to be a profession, we need to treat it as a profession," she said.

Along with Rogers and Licon, the panel included Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, and Ann Best, chief human resources officer for Houston ISD.



# Is this documentary rotten to the core?

An open letter to Davis Guggenheim, director of *Waiting for "Superman"*

Dear Mr. Guggenheim:

I found it prudent to give myself a cooling-off period before crafting a response to *Waiting for "Superman."* While some of my fellow theatergoers audibly gasped in horror at the anecdotes and carefully selected data you chose to share, I found myself astonished at the film's generalizations and emotionally charged language (e.g., "dropout factories," "failure factories," "academic sinkholes," etc.). Forty minutes into the film, I wrote "Where are the teachers' voices?" in my notebook, and I left the theater wondering why you chose Bart Simpson's teacher and Jack Black's character in *School of Rock* as your examples of public school teachers—thereby giving millions of dedicated educators no more voice than the teachers in a *Peanuts* cartoon.

But after giving myself some time to reflect, I see that *Waiting for "Superman"*—as one-sided and slick as I personally find it—is producing a positive outcome. It's driving people to have important conversations about our schools and what students deserve. In fact, several of us here at ATPE recently spent some time discussing the movie and the issues it raises. The conversation was fascinating. The group included education lobbyists, former teachers and a former principal as well as communications staff members, and we all had different takes on the message you delivered. Some of us focused on the desperation expressed by the children and parents you featured. Others argued that you ignored the noble truths of the public schools, which offer services to every child, regardless of test scores or family means. And still others wondered how you could glaze over the role of parental involvement in education.

Then we began to discuss the circumstances you depict and whether Texas schools reflect them. One problem with *Waiting for "Superman"* is that it—as a colleague quipped—casts teachers' unions as the Lex Luthor of public education without acknowledging the situation in Texas and other right-to-work states, where teachers' unions lack monopolizing power. As you develop ideas for a sequel to *Waiting for "Superman,"* I urge you to visit some Texas schools. The success of ATPE—the largest educators' association in Texas and the largest independent, non-union educators' association in the United States—is proof that not all public school educators believe in the us-vs.-them values of a union.

I also recommend that you take a look at ATPE's 2010 teacher quality study. The study was released at roughly the same time *Waiting for "Superman"* began playing, and I found myself thinking of the study's results as I watched the documentary. For instance, when Harlem Children's Zone CEO Geoffrey Canada said in the documentary that he wasn't a "good" teacher during his first few years in the classroom, I thought about the importance of teacher retention and mentoring efforts in public schools. Those would be excellent topics for a sequel.

Finally, I suggest you take another look at one of the most indelible images in your film—not the children and parents crying when they didn't "win" the charter school lottery (though I won't soon forget that), but the video of the Houston ISD teacher who inspired the founders of the KIPP charter schools. The video shows the teacher as she puts math concepts into a medium her students connect with: a rap song. This veteran educator had the experience, pedagogical expertise, confidence, administrative support and flexibility required to adapt the curriculum in order to reach her students. And to think: She was a *public school* teacher!

Thanks for getting us talking, Mr. Guggenheim.

Sincerely,

*Kate Johanns*

Kate Johanns,  
Editor of *ATPE News*—and a proud product of Texas public schools

## WHAT DID YOU THINK?

*ATPE News* has presented one reaction to the controversial documentary *Waiting for "Superman."* Now we'd like to hear what you think. Send your reactions to the documentary (and to our open letter) to [comm@atpe.org](mailto:comm@atpe.org).