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State's top teachers give public education a C

AUSTIN – When a group of Texas' top teachers were asked what grade they would give public education, they said a "C."

"If you want to talk about the potential of what we can and what we should be able to accomplish, I would give it an A. But there's a huge discrepancy in what we can do and what we're actually doing," said a teacher who participated in a focus group at the Texas Regional Teacher of the Year Gathering hosted by the ATPE Foundation over the summer. A report on the event's focus group sessions was released in August.

In keeping with its mission to advance public education through educator recruitment and retention efforts, the ATPE Foundation, established by the Association of Texas Professional Educators, hosted the Texas Regional Teacher of the Year Gathering to honor great teachers and to gather information to help education organizations, state agencies, school districts and legislators improve public education.

Twenty-four of the 40 2012 Texas Regional Teachers of the Year participated in three discussion sessions that covered teacher preparation, mentoring programs, professional development and the future of teaching. The sessions were conducted by Creative Consumer Research of Houston.

According to the report, teachers feel that budget cuts have crippled many aspects of public education, including teacher training and professional development. Some educators also feel that their profession does not receive the respect it deserves.

"If the governor of the state doesn't even have respect for teachers, then how can you expect the other 20 million people that live in the state to give a rip about it? If you put everybody in a school for a week, I'm sure public perception would change," said one teacher during one of the event's sessions.

The report also found that for many teachers, the actuality of teaching has taken a backseat to other tasks such as preparing students for standardized tests.

Many teachers would like to see the standards to become a teacher raised as well as the creation of more mentoring programs that allow experienced teachers to take new teachers under their wing.

The educators invited to the Texas Regional Teacher of the Year Gathering had all been honored through the Texas Education Agency's Texas Teacher of the Year program as either their region education service center's elementary or secondary Teacher of the Year. The ATPE Foundation serves all Texas educators, so the educators' professional association affiliations were unknown.

“The Regional Teacher of the Year Gathering allowed these accomplished educators from around the state to have a candid and in-depth discussion with their peers about why they continue to dedicate themselves to public education despite the challenges they face in the classroom,” said ATPE Foundation Board President Rita Long. “All spoke openly about their concerns about the future of public education and discussed possible solutions to these challenges.”

To view the report, visit atpefoundation.org/RegionalTeacher.aspx.

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The ATPE Foundation was established in 2000 by the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE), the state's leading educators' association and the largest independent association for public school educators in the nation. The foundation is dedicated to the advancement of public education and the success of Texas schoolchildren through literacy initiatives, technology programs and educator recruitment and retention efforts.