

Staffing Levels in Schools: What the Numbers Do (and Don't) Tell Us

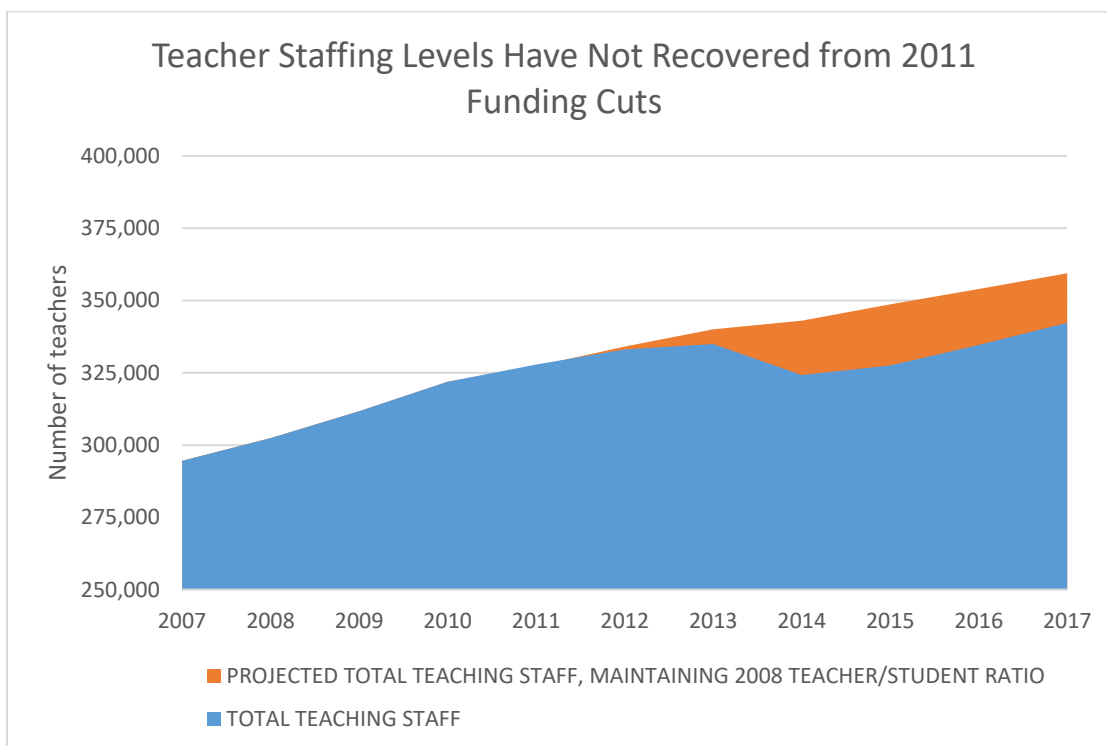
Anna Crockett, Economic Opportunity Intern, crockett@cphp.org
 Chandra Villanueva, Economic Opportunity Program Director, villanueva@cphp.org

Teachers have the greatest impact on student outcomes. However, many students come to school with barriers to learning beyond what even the greatest teacher can overcome alone. To promote success among all students, schools hire an array of support staff, professional personnel, and administrators.

The majority of a school's budget is dedicated to personnel costs, so when the Legislature cuts education funding, they are also cutting staff. However, changes in staffing have not been consistent over time or within staffing categories—that is, whether cuts apply to teachers, administrators, or other school personnel. In 2011 the Legislature cut \$5.3 billion from the two-year public education budget. This brief examines the impact the 2011 budget cut had on the type and number of personnel working within our schools and other recent policy changes that impact staffing levels.

More Students, Fewer Teachers

Statewide our schools lost 10,700 teachers between the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years due to the \$5.3 billion cut lawmakers made to public education. In the midst of the budget cuts and teacher shortage, student enrollment increased by 44,500 between 2011 and 2012. Unsurprisingly, the statewide student-teacher ratio also went up in 2012. While teaching staff has grown by nine percent since its low point in 2012, **schools would need to hire 11,000 more teachers today to meet the same student-teacher ratios seen during the 2010-11 school year** due to the growing student population.



Source: CPHP analysis of Texas Education Agency data

Texas classrooms for kindergarten through 4th grade are required to maintain a 22:1 student-teacher ratio, though campuses that are unable to meet the requirement may apply to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for a waiver to increase class sizes. TEA approved 1,329 classroom waivers across the state in 2008, before the economic recession that led to education cuts. In 2012-13, when investments in education were lowest, TEA approved 3,295 classroom waivers – an increase of 148 percent. The most commonly cited reason for requesting a waiver was financial hardship, demonstrating that funding cuts led to more crowded classrooms.

The increase in waivers that permit a bigger classroom size is concerning. Multiple studies have shown that reducing class size is an effective strategy for closing achievement gaps and that small class sizes, especially in the early grades, lead to better academic outcomes. Reports from classroom size reduction efforts in Tennessee and California show that such programs have a positive and lasting impact.

Texas finally returned to investing the same amount in 2015 as it had before the 2011 cuts – at least in terms of inflation-adjusted dollars, though per student funding remains below 2008 levels. As funding slowly rebounds, so does teacher hiring. The number of waivers approved has also significantly declined. However, the fact remains that the state has a long way to go if it hopes to return to the pre-2011 student/teacher ratio.

Support Staff Plays an Important Role Inside and Outside the Classroom

Among other personnel, support staff has had the most growth between pre-recession 2008 and 2017. Many of the staff roles that have had the most positions added—psychologists, orientation/mobility specialists, and corrective therapists—help address the unique requirements of some of our neediest students. Staff to student ratios among psychologists and speech therapists have improved since pre-recession levels of 2008, allowing more individualized attention to students in need so they can be successful in the classroom.

Another set of support staff—specifically teacher facilitators—have also increased dramatically in number. As defined by the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), a teacher facilitator serves as an exemplary role model in assisting teachers with improving their classroom performance. The increase may be, in part, a result of renewed emphasis on teacher evaluation. The TEA has initiated several new teacher evaluation programs in recent years, including the T-TESS teacher appraisal program, which began in 2014. These programs are designed to enhance teacher quality while also promoting teacher retention.

Professional vs. Paraprofessional Staff: Where We Fall Short

The number of “other campus professional personnel” has grown significantly since 2008. This classification is used for both instructional and non-instructional staff, so it’s difficult to say whether this growth has directly benefited students in the classroom. With such a catch-all category that could include both instructional officers and campus volunteer coordinators, it would be worthwhile to further disaggregate this group in order to determine how the growth of “other campus professional personnel” affects students.

Staffing levels are low among paraprofessionals, who provide classroom assistance. Educational aides have increased only nine percent since 2008—short of keeping up with student enrollment, which grew by 15 percent. More concerning is the fact that the number of interpreters, another paraprofessional role, have actually decreased by five percent in the same timeframe. Anyone who studies the demographic changes in Texas knows that this trend is headed in the wrong direction. During the 2016-2017 school year, 19 percent of Texas students were English language learners, up from 16 percent in the 2004-2005 school year. Spanish is

the home language for the vast majority of these students, although TEA has identified 130 languages that students speak at home.

Administrators Are Running, Not Taking Over, Schools

Like executives and department heads at large corporations, administrators play a critical role in managing school staff and facilities, stewarding public resources and pushing for positive student outcomes. Administrative staff levels grew at the same rate as student enrollment (15 percent) from pre-recession 2008 until 2017. Much of that growth comes from registrars (who manage students' academic records), human resources personnel, and assistant principals. Administrative roles that have decreased in number since 2008 include teacher supervisors, whose duties may be replaced by the teacher facilitators mentioned above. Growth among high-paying administrative roles like superintendents (three percent) and assistant superintendents (12 percent) has actually slowed compared to student enrollment growth.

Conclusion

Since the 2011 budget cuts, school staffing levels have varied greatly, even within staffing categories. Broadly, Texas still has not recovered the number of teachers and paraprofessionals it lost after the budget cuts. These staff members are the most directly involved with students in the classroom, and neither schools nor students can succeed without them.

While administrative staffing levels have grown slightly more than student enrollment, school support staff has increased the most. Many of the fastest-growing roles include psychologists, corrective therapists, and other staff members that provide unique services for students with particular health needs. While there has been growth among other catch-all positions, we do not know how involved these new staff members are in the classroom. Breaking up these miscellaneous categories into instructional and non-instructional staff would help determine where the majority of this growth has been.

It is therefore important not to paint with a broad brush when analyzing changes in school staffing levels. Total personnel has grown almost exactly as much as student growth, and much of the extra growth among staff are those who serve our most vulnerable students. With more complete data and a comprehensive understanding of the policy environment, we can better understand how our students' needs are (or aren't) being met.

Recommendations

- Increase school funding so schools are able to hire more teachers and paraprofessionals to get back the pre-cut student/teacher ratios
- Disaggregate miscellaneous staffing categories

The **Center for Public Policy Priorities** is an independent public policy organization that uses research, analysis and advocacy to promote solutions that enable Texans of all backgrounds to reach their full potential.

Website: CPPP.org Twitter: [@CPPP_TX](https://twitter.com/CPPP_TX) Facebook: Facebook.com/bettertexas