

T-TESS at Ten:

Reflecting on a Decade of Teacher Appraisal in Texas

In 2014, the Texas Education Agency introduced the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) to strengthen how teachers are supported and recognized across the state. Built on a cycle of pre-conference, classroom observation, and post-conference, T-TESS was designed not just as an appraisal tool, but as a framework for professional growth.

Ten years later, nearly nine out of ten Texas school systems use T-TESS, and almost half participate in the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA), which aligns closely with T-TESS to reward highly effective educators. The system has become a cornerstone of educator development in Texas, impacting both classroom practice and career pathways.

What We Learned

To mark this milestone, TEA partnered with TNTP to gather insights from more than 28,000 teachers and appraisers, district leaders, regional appraisal leads, and national experts. Their feedback paints a complex but constructive picture:

- Teachers and appraisers view T-TESS differently. About two-thirds of appraisers report positive perceptions, while fewer than half of teachers feel the same. Teachers often cite subjectivity and workload as challenges, while appraisers highlight its value for guiding professional development.
- School systems see appraisal as essential to growth. Many district leaders affirmed that appraisal helps teachers continuously improve, but they also raised concerns about consistency and alignment across campuses.
- Regional leaders recognize progress. Education Service Centers report that TIA has encouraged stronger implementation of T-TESS, though districts still seek more streamlined tools and processes.

Opportunities Ahead

The feedback points to important areas for improvement:

- Streamlining the T-TESS rubric so teachers clearly see how expectations connect to their practice.
- Enhancing flexibility in the process to better serve districts of different sizes and contexts, while maintaining fairness and rigor.
- Reducing subjectivity in observations to create more consistency and trust in the system.
- Strengthening alignment across TEA initiatives so appraisal, coaching, and instructional materials work together.

Looking ahead, TEA will continue working with educators, districts, and partners to refine T-TESS so that it remains a tool that not only evaluates teaching, but also sets the bar for excellence in Texas classrooms.