

Texas Teacher

A Union of Professionals

SUMMER 2014



 Reclaiming the
P**romise**

 Texas AFT
A Union of Professionals

We are at a critical moment when we must reclaim the promise of public education—not as it is today or as it was in the past, but as it can be—to fulfill our collective obligation to help *all* children succeed. (See page 6.)

The carefully orchestrated effort to silence school employees



Linda Bridges
Texas AFT President

This may seem like a heavy topic to write about as we kick off a new school year. But it has been much on my mind since we ended the 2013-2014 school year, and it has occupied most

of our working time during the summer. The fact is our members throughout the state have been fighting back attempts to silence them and diminish their voice on behalf of their students, schools and profession. I will provide you with a few examples of what I am talking about.

Lone Star College

Our members in the Houston-area Lone Star College System have tried hard

“This is no time to sit on the sidelines. We need to elect strong supporters of public education... and show folks that we will not be silenced but rather will speak in a strong voice for our students, our members and public education.”

to address issues of concern to college faculty and staff in dialogue with the administration. AFT Lone Star College leaders have been joined by members in attending meetings of the LSC board to demonstrate support for AFT-LSC efforts to address the issues. Remarkably, our members attending one board meeting in the spring were verbally attacked by the college chancellor. Chancellor (first name) Carpenter handed our local president an accusatory letter stating: “We understand that AFT’s purpose in attending the meeting en masse is to seek redress for

perceived deficiencies on behalf of its members....”—as if there were something wrong with that! But the chancellor went further, threatening a lawsuit against AFT-LSC if the local continued the campaign.

The most remarkable part of the letter was the chancellor’s attempt to equate mere attendance by college employees at a board meeting with an act of collective bargaining. If merely having our local presidents appear at board meetings alongside members amounted to collective bargaining, we would have turned Texas into a collective-bargaining state long ago! It is clear that the chancellor does not want to hear from employees and wishes to silence their voice. (See page 11 for the full story.)

El Paso ISD

Our local leaders in El Paso recently spoke out against a proposal to contract out the work of school custodians. To understand the situation in El Paso, you need to know that the school district currently is ruled by a non-elected board of managers, appointed by the state commissioner of education, instead of an elected school board. The head of the appointed board of managers took issue with the union’s objection to contracting out custodians and said in a disturbing letter to our local president: “...if the ideas we ‘brainstorm’ before vetting are providing you consternation, you or your representatives can simply not attend” board discussions. In other words, let us do what we wish and don’t object to our ideas.

It is of course the role of the union to raise issues and ask questions of the board. Apparently the board of managers in El Paso does not like to be questioned. This is the same board of managers that recently eliminated the school district’s policy enabling school employees to elect an employee organization to represent them in consultation with the district over salaries, benefits, and working conditions. While AFT was not the elected employee

organization, we supported the policy as a way to ensure employee voice.

Dallas ISD

The attack here is from within and from the outside. The attack from the inside has been led by the administration and resulted in the elimination of elected consultation. The administration changed the regulation without board action and in one fell swoop eliminated this important channel for employee voice.

The attack from the outside is funded by billionaire and former Enron trader John Arnold. Arnold and his confederates hope to achieve the creation of a “home rule” charter district in Dallas. This change would in fact turn the entire school district into a charter school district. If the folks pushing this are successful, teacher salaries could be reduced, class-size guarantees could be ignored in most schools, teacher contracts could be eliminated and DISD could find it harder to recruit and retain quality teachers. The school board has accepted as sufficient the petition signatures presented by the backers of home rule, and the school board must name a charter commission to draft a charter that would have to be voted on by the registered voters of DISD. The election could be as early as November. (See page 6 for the full story.)

San Antonio ISD

The San Antonio Alliance has been the elected representative of school employees in San Antonio ISD for more than 20 years. They have done an excellent job of addressing issues of concern to employees. The move to silence the employees’ elected voice in this case has come not from the school board or school administration but from the local chapter of the Association for Texas Professional Educators (ATPE), an anti-union group that includes administrators, not just teachers and other non-supervisory school employees. Instead of challenging the San Antonio Alliance to an election in accordance with school

board policy, this group filed a grievance to end elected representation and employee voice through elected consultation. The school board trustees to their credit overwhelmingly backed the current policy for elected consultation. ATPE says it will appeal the board decision to the Texas Education Agency. It is hard to understand why an organization purporting to represent district employees would work so hard to silence an effective voice for school employees.

These are just a few examples of what appears to be a concerted effort to silence school employees across Texas. I use these examples to illustrate my point, not to say that we are powerless to fight back. In fact, we can counter these attacks, and we can prevail.

Our locals engaged in these battles are mobilizing members and community partners to fight back. Our folks at Lone Star College continue to take issues to the board and meet with trustees to address matters of concern. They also let the chancellor know that, if he brought a lawsuit against the union for appearing at

board meetings, our union would sue the college for filing a frivolous legal claim. Our leaders in El Paso are meeting with community partners about the efforts to contract out and are finding allies for the fight. In Dallas, our folks have formed with community partners a group called Our Community, Our Schools to fight the “home rule” effort. They have been holding successful town hall meetings to inform the public of this veiled attempt to privatize the schools in Dallas. In San Antonio, our folks are defending the process of elected consultation and also fighting a simultaneous attempt by outside charter operators and foundations to enroll 80,000 students in corporate-chain charter schools.

Our leaders are doing a remarkable job leading the fight to reclaim our schools. However, this is just one part of what needs to be done. If you are not a member of AFT, we need for you to join and stand with us as we fight for public education. If you are a member, we need you to get active and help us mobilize.

It would also be good to have some friends in Austin to help us restore funding

for public schools and help us fight the privatization of our public school systems. I can certainly think of two friends who could help our efforts. If Wendy Davis were governor and Leticia Van de Putte were lieutenant governor, we would have two elected officials who understand the value of public schools and respect the work you do.

The contrast between Wendy Davis and Greg Abbot in the governor’s race and between Leticia Van de Putte and Dan Patrick for lieutenant governor could not be greater. Our support for Davis and Van de Putte is not based on party ideology but on their positions in support of a strong public education system—and their opponents’ track record of undermining public schools.

As we take on all these battles, remember that you need to be involved. This is no time to sit on the sidelines. We need to elect strong supporters of public education. We need to fend off these attacks and show folks that we will not be silenced but rather will speak in a strong voice for our students, our members and public education. 



Higher Education unions fight for fair pay and health-care benefits, p. 10

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Texas Teacher

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Texas AFT represents more than 65,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, support personnel, and higher-education employees across the state. Texas AFT is affiliated with the 1.5-million-member American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.

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The ‘Houston 7’ and their union stand up to misuse of testing with federal lawsuit against faulty evaluations

A new rallying cry against the misuse of testing—“Support the Houston 7!”—went viral across the Web in April after seven teachers, along with the Houston Federation of Teachers, filed a federal lawsuit against Houston ISD for its faulty use of “value added measures” (VAM) for teacher evaluations.

The lawsuit details numerous problems with Houston ISD’s Education Value-Added Assessment System, or EVAAS. Its statistical methodology uses a student’s performance on prior standardized tests to predict academic growth in the current year, though what is considered a sufficient level of growth is not defined ahead of time.

A teacher’s EVAAS score is supposed to measure the effect, or added value, of a teacher on a student’s academic growth over the school year. The school district uses this deeply flawed methodology for decisions about teacher evaluation, bonuses and termination, yet it is a “black box” system in which the key elements of the methodology are considered proprietary and confidential.

The lawsuit demonstrates how the Houston 7—all teachers recognized with awards, honors and other evaluation techniques as outstanding teachers—have suffered harm due to swings in EVAAS scores, without “due process” to challenge the ratings.

One of the Houston 7—Daniel



Tweet from the Badass Teachers Association supporting the Houston 7.



Teachers and union leaders announce a federal lawsuit against Houston ISD. Pictured (from top left) are: Randi Weingarten, AFT president; Myla Van Duyn, teacher/plaintiff; Louis Malfaro, Texas AFT secretary-treasurer; Phil Durst, Texas AFT attorney; (from bottom left) Daniel Santos, teacher/plaintiff; Gayle Fallon, Houston Federation of Teachers president; Andrew Dewey, teacher/plaintiff; and Ivan Castillo, teacher/plaintiff.

Santos, an award-winning sixth grade social studies teacher at Jackson Middle School—said the evaluation system is failing him, his students and his profession. “It’s dispiriting and insulting to be told I’m ineffective, a judgment that doesn’t mesh with my classroom performance or the time and effort I devote to my students,” he said. “Texas is using a broken evaluation system that isn’t properly identifying who really needs help to improve.”

Within days after the lawsuit was filed on April 29, teachers around the country responded to the news with emails and social media posts lauding the Houston teachers. The popular Facebook group Badass Teachers Association (BAT) urged members to post and tweet their approval with the hashtag “#supportthehouston7.”

The lawsuit also garnered attention as

it preceded the Texas Education Agency’s release on May 2 of its teacher evaluation model—based in significant part on using student test scores—as part of a waiver of NCLB requirements from the U.S. Department of Education. (See article on page 3.)

“Lawsuits are always the last step in trying to address unfair practices,” said Linda Bridges, Texas AFT president. “But we’ve been systematically reporting the problems with EVAAS in Houston ISD for some four years now, and our objections and the concerns of thousands of Houston teachers have been dismissed by a district administration that has tunnel vision on the notion that student test scores and proprietary statistical formulas can somehow fairly assess teaching effectiveness.”

Bridges noted that the lawsuit also outlines how the district has pressured

administrators to align other components of Houston ISD's evaluation process—such as classroom observations and instructional practice assessments—with the results of EVAAS. “Changing an observation on how a teacher is performing to match the teacher’s EVAAS rating is yet another deplorable result of the VAM system,” she said.

In addition to the Houston Federation of Teachers and Santos, plaintiffs in the lawsuit include: Myla Van Duyn, a ninth grade biology teacher at Davis High School; Andy Dewey, a history teacher at Carnegie Vanguard High School; Ivan Castillo, a fourth-grade bilingual teacher at Briscoe Elementary; Paloma Garner, a ninth-grade biology teacher at David High School; Araceli Ramos, a ninth-grade English teacher at Austin High School; and Joyce Helfman, an eighth-grade English teacher at Johnston Middle School.

To read the lawsuit in full, visit www.texasaft.org > News. 

How does this formula tell if a teacher is effective?

$$y_{ijkl} = \mu_{jkl} + \left(\sum_{k^* \leq k} \sum_{t=1}^{T_{ijk^*l^*}} w_{ijk^*l^*t} \times \tau_{ijk^*l^*t} \right) + \epsilon_{ijkl}$$

y_{ijkl} is the test score for the i^{th} student in the j^{th} subject in the k^{th} grade in the l^{th} year. $\tau_{ijk^*l^*t}$ is the teacher effect of the i^{th} teacher on the i^{th} student in the j^{th} subject in grade k^* in year l^* . The complexity of the parenthesized term containing the teacher effects is due to two factors. First, in any given subject/grade/year a student may have more than one teacher. The inner (rightmost) summation is over all the teachers of the i^{th} student in a particular subject/grade/year. $\tau_{ijk^*l^*t}$ is the number of those teachers. $w_{ijk^*l^*t}$ is the fraction of the i^{th} student's instructional time claimed by the t^{th} teacher. Second, the EVAAS teacher MRM allows teacher effects to accumulate over time. That is, how well a student does in the current subject/grade/year depends not only on the current teacher but also on the accumulated knowledge and skills acquired under previous teachers. The outer (leftmost) summation accumulates teacher effects not only for the current subject/grade/year (subscripts k and l) but also over previous grades and years (subscripts k^* and l^*) in the same subject. Because of this accumulation of teacher effects, the EVAAS teacher MRM is often called the “layered” model.

A board from the news conference on the Houston lawsuit displays the value added measure formula used by Houston ISD for its EVAAS system of evaluations based on student test scores.

TEA launches teacher evaluations based on test scores

Commissioner of Education Michael Williams and the Texas Education Agency on May 5 released teacher evaluation guidelines submitted to the U.S. Department of Education as part of the state's waiver from the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The model, the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS), uses “rubric-based elements that focus on planning, instruction, the learning environment, and professional responsibilities, which include a teacher self-assessment,” for 80 percent of the evaluation.

The remaining 20 percent would be value added measures (VAM) based on student growth on standardized test scores. Districts would have flexibility to determine how to measure student growth for subjects not tested by STAAR.

“The commissioner is relying on a defective VAM model to measure teacher performance based on standardized test scores, and the state will face the same

problems that we've seen in Houston ISD, which now is the target of a lawsuit against its faulty evaluation system,” said Texas AFT President Linda Bridges.

TEA also is depending on SAS Institute—the same company that developed the dubious evaluation system targeted by the lawsuit in Houston—to develop the state's VAM formulas. (See page 2 for information on the lawsuit.)

TEA identified up to 73 school districts to “pilot” the model next year, with full adoption for use in districts statewide in 2015-2016. It's uncertain at *Texas Teacher* deadline how many districts have accepted the invitation, but one notable district—Cypress Fairbanks ISD—opted not to pilot the model.

Texas AFT also has questioned TEA's authority to require districts to use VAM, because the Education Code does not authorize the commissioner to dictate to school districts that scores of an individual teacher's students on state assessments will be a significant factor in evaluations.

Williams has said that he will not force districts to adopt the model, but he also has indicated that the NCLB waiver requirements for using VAM should prompt the Legislature in its 2015 session to require VAM by law, or else Texas would face renewed mandates from the U.S. Department of Education on how districts can use federal funds.

The USDE in May indicated that it is willing to provide states with added flexibility in the timeline to implement VAM, but Williams wants his model implemented regardless of federal requirements.

After T-TESS was released, a wave of new studies appeared showing VAM is unreliable and unfair. Texas AFT highlighted the research in its testimony on teacher evaluations before a May Texas House Public Education Committee meeting.

You can read more about our testimony and the research debunking VAM at www.texasaft.org/evaluations. 

Welcome back to school: Now it's time to get to work!



Louis Malfaro
Secretary-Treasurer

"It ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things."—Niccolò Machiavelli

*"May you live in interesting times."
—The (apocryphal) Chinese Curse*

"That's right, you're not from Texas, but Texas wants you anyway!"—Lyle Lovett

These are interesting times here in Texas. The place is booming. People are moving to the state in record numbers. Cities and suburbs are expanding from El Paso to Houston, from the Rio Grande Valley to Dallas and all points in between. Oil and gas production is filling state tax coffers and helping lead an economic recovery. Unemployment is lower than in most of the rest of the nation as Texas leads the country in new (though too often low-wage) job creation.

The 2010 census informed us that America grew by 2 million new K-12 students in the prior decade, and half of them entered school in the state of Texas! Many school districts are struggling to build schools fast enough for the 80,000-plus new kids who arrive in our public schools every year—a rate not expected to abate in the next decade. As our state grows, our population changes. Houston has the largest and most diverse immigrant population of any American city. Texas is now a "majority-minority" state and our schools, the leading edge of demographic change, reflect that growing diversity.

For the past 10 years the former Texas state demographer, Steve Murdock, has been calling upon Texas leaders to understand and attend to the demographic shifts in our state by focusing on the education and socioeconomic conditions of the fastest growing segments of our state's population. Failure to make changes for the better in both reducing poverty and increasing educational attainment will have negative consequences for all Texans and could lead to a long-term, downward trend in incomes, standards of living and quality of life.

As we prepare to start back to school, the promise of Texas public education is right before our eyes, on the buses we drive, in the cafeterias where we prepare and serve food, and in the classrooms where we instruct children. The potential represented by our students, and the dearest hopes of their families, of our school communities and of our state call us to a renewed commitment to opportunity for all Texas children—not just those who have the means to acquire what they need because they have been born into

privilege. Texas has been given a gift more valuable than all the oil and gas reserves that lie beneath our soil: the more than 5 million K-12 students we are educating in our state.

The challenges we face are many. Texas leads the nation in the number of children and percentage of adults without access to healthcare. We have suffered from austerity budgets in recent years as both K-12 and higher education funding have been cut by a shortsighted legislative majority. Good souls have grown weary as the same old misguided political establishment has pursued policies that favor the wealthy and powerful to the detriment of school children and families in poverty. False prophets of "civil rights" call for an abandonment of the public school and a compromise on the promise of a quality education for all students by advocating privatization schemes that pick winners and losers and reject the notion of universal access to quality neighborhood schools. Fear has crept in as layoffs and harebrained efforts to measure everything with a test have created uncertainty for educators, students and parents. And some educators continue to believe that the child overwhelmed by need, the underfunded school, the privatization scheme or the bad evaluation system will somehow never visit their classrooms. Ah, it's good to be living in interesting times! Perhaps summer vacation (if you got any) has recharged your battery. Maybe you've had the good fortune to hear a speech by Leticia Van de Putte, our candidate for Lt. Governor, or Wendy Davis, who will be the next Texas governor if teachers and school employees decide to make it happen. Perhaps, like me, you are feeling optimistic because you have been spending time this summer with fellow educators who don't give up; ever; no matter what; can't means won't; failure is not a part of my vocabulary.

We can do this my friends. We need to quit being so quiet. Time to not be afraid. Heads out of the sand before we get buried by the impending school year! We have to remember that working together we have made big changes before. Happy 30th Birthday House Bill 72 (1984) which has provided three generations of Texas school kids the benefits from a 22:1 class size cap in grades K-4. We did that. Happy 50th Birthday Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Title I) that has provided half a century of extra resources to poor kids in schools across the country. We did that. Happy 20th Anniversary Texas Safe Schools Act that has provided for two decades of appropriate interventions and support for teachers with discipline. We did that.

There is no doubt in my mind that there is a change in the wind here in Texas. Let us make ready, as November elections approach and a new legislature convenes in January, to put our collective shoulder to the wheel and push for a better deal for our kids, our schools, our communities and our profession. The future of Texas is depending on us and failure is not an option! 

Why we all need to pay attention to the fight over the Dallas home rule charter school district

Could corporate interests be looking at your district next?

A takeover of Dallas ISD schools under the guise of a “home rule charter school district” appears to be moving forward at *Texas Teacher* deadline. Supporters of the home rule charter district proposal—an organization with the misleading name of Support Our Public Schools (SOPS)—turned in petition signatures to initiate a process for the school board to create a 15-member commission, which would be charged with writing a charter that could radically change the district’s governance and operations. Once the commission develops a charter, residents in the Dallas ISD boundaries would vote on whether to



Coalition members from Our Community, Our Schools pack a meeting to discuss a vision for Dallas ISD schools.

approve it with a possible ballot measure in the November general election. Although a 1995 law authorized the creation of home rule charter school districts, no one in Texas has ever attempted the move until SOPS launched its petition drive this spring.

“The proponents of this horrible idea are trying to say it will provide flexibility, which in reality means that corporate interests will seek to turn our neighborhood schools into privately operated charter schools with no accountability to the public,” said Rena Honea, president of Alliance/AFT, Texas AFT’s local affiliate for Dallas ISD.

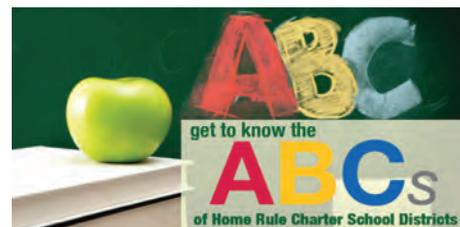
Districts under home rule can kill off class-size limits for most K-4 classrooms, eliminate teachers’ contracts, wipe out

parents’ and students’ and teachers’ rights to due process in student discipline, and much more. The entire parental-rights chapter of the Education Code would no longer apply, including parents’ rights to see what their kids are being taught. Accountability to the community through an elected board also could be eliminated.

SOPS only has five publicly avowed members and is funded by John Arnold, a billionaire and former Enron trader and hedge fund manager from Houston who also has led attempts to turn defined benefit pensions for teachers and other public employees into pooled individual retirement accounts.

Alliance/AFT spearheaded the formation of a coalition named “Our Community, Our Schools,” (OCOS) made up of more than two dozen area organizations to oppose the home rule charter drive and seek community-driven solutions to some of the challenges facing Dallas ISD. OCOS has held community forums throughout the spring to develop a vision for Dallas schools.

The real danger with the SOPS drive goes well beyond Dallas. Attempts were made in the 2013 Legislature to expand the idea of “home rule charters” and make it even easier to accomplish. The current Republican candidate for lieutenant governor, State Sen. Dan Patrick, authored legislation last session under the rhetoric of “home rule” that would allow a bare majority on a local school board on their own motion to nullify state safeguards of educational quality and employee rights, without voter authorization.



For an in-depth look at issues surrounding home rule charter school districts, see:

www.alliance-aft.org
www.ourcommunityourschools.org
www.facebook.com/OCOSDallas

SOPS has claimed that its intent is limited to flexibility around school hours and start dates, but those changes could be made without use of a home rule charter.

Linda Bridges, Texas AFT president, said that if the real goal is sensible flexibility to achieve campus improvement, there’s a better way to do it. In contrast to the false “home rule” facade of parental and community empowerment, there are authentic versions readily available. For instance, under the Education Code Section 12.052, a majority of parents and a majority of teachers at a campus acting together are empowered to petition their school board for an in-district charter campus, without having to forgo any of the educational quality standards under state law.

“There’s no doubt that the Dallas home rule charter push is an attempt for privatizers to get their foot in the door, with the intent to look to other districts in the future,” Bridges said. “It’s up to us as educators to take a stand for public education that’s truly public and stop the Dallas takeover.”

Take a stand for public education by sending an online letter from www.texasaft.org to state officials objecting to the use of home rule charter school districts.





Reclaim the Promise of Public Education

OUR **SCHOOLS**, OUR **SOLUTIONS**

Reclaiming the promise...

Join Texas AFT as we reclaim the promise of public education.

For current members, that means taking a stand to let elected officials know that we are professionals who will work to ensure a quality education for all our students, and a respectful working environment that inspires us to spark the love of learning in the children we educate.

Not a Texas AFT member? Not all school employee organizations are the same, and we hope you explore some of the ways Texas AFT stands apart from the crowd.

An emphasis on local!

Texas AFT is the only Texas school employee organization with a significant number of local unions and Associate Member Program offices organized to provide direct representation for educators and school employees.

Our local union affiliates are on the front lines to advocate fair pay and quality work environments and provide statewide coverage for professional development,



mentoring and training. By organizing a collective voice locally, we have the power to protect school employees from unfair employment practices, and together we can elect true friends of public education in state legislative and congressional districts throughout Texas.

The union family

Being a member of a union means you are part of a family of educators and other workers with a shared vision for public education. Think of your union as both a support system and a family, with strong bonds throughout your school, the state and the nation.

We're a team

Texas AFT represents all non-administrative certified and classified

public school employees in traditional public schools and some charter schools. Texas AFT represents the interests of teachers, counselors, librarians, diagnosticians, custodians, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, nurses, teaching assistants, clerical employees, and the other men and women who work so hard to make our schools succeed.

Texas AFT also represents faculty and staff in universities, colleges and community and junior colleges.

Although we believe it takes a team to run our schools, we do not represent administrators, since it would be a clear conflict of interest in cases where we assist teachers and other personnel in employment matters.



Statewide and nationwide

With more than 65,000 members, Texas AFT is a statewide organization encompassing 26 local unions in school districts across the state, and the Texas AFT Associate Member Program also serves thousands of teachers through additional local and regional offices.

We are also affiliated with the



1.5-million-member American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO, with 12 million members.

Training and conferences

Texas AFT sponsors ongoing workshops for educators to improve their skills, including:

- Leadership conferences to train leaders for advocacy, organizing and involving members, and conflict resolution.



- National conferences sponsored by the American Federation of Teachers on a variety of topics pertinent to your profession.

- Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel (PSRP) workshops designed especially for support personnel and those providing core services.

- Professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals on various topics including: Foundations For Effective Teaching, Managing Antisocial Behavior, Classroom Management, Preventing and Stopping Bullying, and many more. All professional development is TEA-approved for certificate renewal.

- Training for the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS). Unlike the PDAS training offered by districts, Texas AFT training focuses on your rights within the evaluation system and ways to improve your score on each domain. (Note: As new evaluation

models emerge, we'll be there to ensure you are equipped to navigate the requirements and obtain fair assessments.)

- Safe Schools Act training to ensure teachers know how to use the law to protect themselves and improve the learning environment for all schoolchildren.
- National Board Certification support for teachers and collaboration with districts to offer support locally.

Publications

Texas AFT produces a variety of print and electronic publications that inform and advise educators, parents and students, including:



- *Texas Teacher*, an award-winning magazine for members that offers news on education and resources for professional development.

- *Texas AFT Legislative Hotline*, daily e-mail reports from the Legislature on breaking news and issues that need membership action. Between sessions, the Hotline serves to update members on important changes in education law and policy, particularly issues that affect your pocketbook.

- *PSRP Report* and *We Make Schools Work*—publications in English and Spanish for Texas AFT paraprofessionals and school related personnel.

THE PRINCIPLES THAT UNITE US

- Public schools are *public* institutions.
- Our voices matter.
- Strong public schools create strong communities.
- Assessments should be used to improve instruction.
- Quality teaching must be delivered by committed, respected and supported educators.
- Schools must be welcoming and respectful places for all.
- Our schools must be fully funded for success and equity.

Reclaim the promise of public education.
www.ReclaimPublicEdNow.org

- *American Educator*, AFT's superb professional journal, and *On Campus*, a magazine for higher education employees.

Teaching resources

Texas AFT provides teachers with tips and materials for classroom management, lesson planning and other resources found on the AFT Web site at www.aft.org and www.sharemylesson.com.

Partnerships

Texas AFT has actively worked with state and local governments on policy initiatives, many of which originated with Texas AFT—such as the Safe Schools Act, which established teachers' authority to remove violent and disruptive students. Texas AFT also works with groups like Texas Forward (which seeks a balanced approach to state budget decisions), coalitions to fight private-school vouchers and keep the class-size law, and parent groups like Save Texas Schools.

Texas AFT and AFT national also have partnered with First Book, a nonprofit that provides free books to students in low-income families, and has distributed more than 100,000 books throughout Texas.



A strong voice

A team of AFT representatives in Washington speak out for members on issues including the pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind), education funding and the misuse of testing.

Here in Texas, our legislative staff is well-known and respected in Austin and serves as the leader in fighting for public schools.

The 'you' in union

However, Texas AFT knows that you and your colleagues in your schools are the most effective agents for change, and we work to mobilize members on a variety of issues affecting your profession.

Together we stand strong at the Capitol each legislative session to advocate more funding for schools and thwart destructive proposals that aim to defund and privatize our schools.

Texas AFT members by the thousands participate in our Lobby Day at the Capitol in March of legislative sessions. Members mobilize regularly to meet with legislators in their districts statewide, send thousands of e-mails and make thousands of phone calls to advocate our cause.

Your membership, support and activism strengthen Texas AFT's legislative team at the Capitol, and help ensure that the voice of professional educators is heard in the discussion of the future of our public schools—so that we have a say on decisions that affect us, our schools and our students.

We have your back

Texas AFT staff also cut through red tape and help resolve thorny issues at your workplace. Our attorneys work with representatives in the field to defend your rights under state law. Our advocates have the knowledge and experience to represent your interests on issues like planning time, duty-free lunch, certification and evaluations. If you need an attorney, we



offer the finest, including Texas AFT General Counsel Martha Owen, who has been recognized in Best Lawyers in America. *Texas Monthly* magazine has named her a Super Lawyer every year since 2003. And our Associate Membership Program in-house counsel, Julissa Herrera, helps members access a statewide network of attorneys with years of experience in school-related issues.

Join us!

To join Texas AFT, see the next page to see if you have a local union or organizing committee covering your school district to call directly. If not, you will sign up as member of our statewide Associate Membership Program by calling 800-222-3827 or visiting www.texasaft.org and clicking on "Membership > Join the Union." 

Member Benefits

When you join Texas AFT, your member benefits start immediately. Workplace protections include:

- **\$8 million professional liability insurance.** Texas AFT members enjoy excellent liability coverage, with up to \$8 million per claim, including up to \$3 million in coverage against charges of failure to educate and \$2 million in civil rights cases. AFT's professional educational worker insurance protects members against lawsuits filed by a student or his/her parents, when the member is acting within the scope of his/her duties as a district employee.

- **Teacher defense fund.** Every day, Texas teachers can face false charges, dismissal, loss of certification, and other serious problems.

Texas AFT's legal defense fund employs 25 experienced attorneys in a statewide legal network for members who need help, and the team is backed by labor law experts in Austin and Washington. *(Continued next page)*

The screenshot shows the Union Plus website interface. At the top, there are navigation links for Home, About Union Plus, FAQs, Contact, Customer Service, Leaders, and Site Map. A search bar is present with the text "Don't miss out on valuable offers! Personalize your experience by telling us more about you." Below this, there are several benefit categories: Money & Insurance, Home & Technology, Health, Travel & Entertainment, Auto, Legal & Education, Assistance, Reminder Service, and Collective Bargains. The "Legal & Education" section is highlighted, featuring a woman working on a laptop and text that reads: "Need help planning for college? Looking for legal advice? Union Plus provides assistance to help you prepare for even the most stressful times. Scholarships, legal tips, and free college planning tools are only a click away." Other sections include "DON'T HAVE A WILL?" and "IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION!". At the bottom, there are "BENEFITS LINKS" for Legal Aid Services, College Education Resources, and Consumer Education.

Visit www.aft.org/benefits and www.unionplus.org to find dozens of discounts and other benefits.

• **Accidental Death and Dismemberment.** All Texas AFT members in local unions receive \$25,000 coverage through a policy held by AFT. Each member should be sure to fill out an AD&D beneficiary card for the local office files, and to keep a copy for his/her personal records.

AFT+ also offers dozens of discount programs and services to save money for members, including family health and vision care discounts, plus savings on cell phone costs, veterinary care, hotels and rental cars, theme parks, movies and sports events, as well as on-line purchases. Many members have found that their savings

from using the benefits can cover their union dues! In times of financial need, our programs support members. For example, our union credit card provides disaster relief and other funds to cardholders experiencing unexpected troubles.

AFT's popular mortgage discount program includes a six-month suspended payment plan for laid-off or disabled members, and the Save My Home foreclosure prevention plan has helped members keep their homes.

Your member benefits resource

Meet Barbara Lighthouse, the Member Benefits Representative for Texas AFT.

Barbara responds to telephone and e-mail questions about program offerings and handles customer service needs. She also travels around the state to educate new and long-time members, along with staff and union leaders, about the many programs and how to access detailed information.

If you have questions about any benefits please contact Barbara Lighthouse, Texas AFT Member Benefits Representative, at 1-800-222-3827 or belighthouse@texasaft.org. 



Member Benefits Representative
Barbara Lighthouse

Not all school employee organizations are the same.

(Hint: We're union proud!)

Other organizations may provide professional training, some legal protection and other perks, but Texas AFT adds an emphasis on empowering you and your co-workers to improve the quality of your profession by building local unions.

Texas AFT believes that strong local unions are the best means of ensuring the compensation, respect and resources that our professions deserve—which in turn lead to better schools for our children. We are different than some other "teacher groups" because we actively seek to form local unions and secure the right to collective bargaining. Here's how it works:

- 1) **Public school employees organize as part of our Associate Member Program** for statewide membership. In areas without local affiliates, Texas AFT staff help recruit enough members (usually several hundred) to form an "organizing committee" dedicated to growing into an autonomous local union.
- 2) **The organizing committee prepares to "charter,"** which means to affiliate as a full local union in Texas AFT and AFT nationally. The organizing committee, with assistance from Texas AFT, develops a governing structure, identifies and trains leadership, and continues to recruit new members.
- 3) **The organization votes to "charter."** Members vote on whether to form a full affiliate. AFT at the national level then grants the local a charter.
- 4) **Local unions seek consultation agreements.** Many local affiliates then work toward achieving elected consultation, a designation (usually by election among all affected school employees) as the organization that formally negotiates with a district on employee wages, benefits and working conditions.
- 5) **The unions achieve collective bargaining.** Texas AFT works to change state law to allow collective bargaining contracts for school employees.

New local unions forming

Texas AFT members in the following districts have formed "organizing committees," a transition step before chartering as local unions:

- Waco AFT (Waco ISD)
- Northeast Houston AFT (Galena Park, Channelview and Sheldon ISDs)
- Edinburg AFT (Edinburg ISD)
- Northside AFT (Northside ISD)

See page 13 for a full list of local unions.

Community college locals advocate fair pay, benefits

Texas AFT represents members in three community college systems in Texas—Lone Star College (Houston area), Austin Community College and El Paso Community College.

Members in these affiliates are on the front lines fighting for adequate pay and health-care benefits at a time when state funding for community colleges has failed to keep up with skyrocketing enrollment.

ACC AFT fights for adjunct faculty health care, launches outreach to students

Austin Community College AFT is standing up for ACC's adjunct faculty—who comprise the majority of instructors at its 10 campuses—after an initial threat by the college administration to limit adjunct working hours to avoid provisions of the Affordable Care Act.

The college sent adjunct faculty a letter in November informing them that they would be limited to 28 hours of work to avoid the 30-hour mark that would mandate employer-provided benefits under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Marshall Bennett, ACC AFT president, called it a continuation of a trend of “part-time-ification” of higher education faculty nationwide in an attempt to avoid adequate compensation and benefits for instructors.

“The attitude is that we don't owe you for the time you've spent working out of the classroom,” Bennett said. “We don't owe you health-care benefits. We don't even owe you office space.”

The ACC administration has since backpedaled, saying the letter was a mistake, and that the college only had to provide access to coverage under ACA at the 30-hour mark. But the college has stuck to another policy that ACC AFT dubs unfair—the measurement of how many hours adjuncts work for their classes. That policy says



ACC AFT Vice President David Albert (left) and President Marshall Bennett plan for outreach to students to support employees issues.

the workload amounts to five hours for a three-and-a-half hour class. Employees are eligible for Texas Teacher Retirement System membership at 20 hours a week, so with a load of three classes, many adjunct faculty are left out of retirement coverage as well.

“I have not met the adjunct who can teach three classes with fewer than 20 hours a week of work,” said David Albert, ACC AFT vice president for adjunct faculty. “That would be a superhuman.” He noted that in contrast, full-time professors are credited for eight hours of work for a three-hour course.

ACC AFT mobilized its members to attend college trustee meetings and advocate fair pay and a better measurement of their actual workload. The college has responded and is working with the union on a compromise, hopefully to be settled by the

summer. Bennett said a good working relationship with the administration and

trustees will be crucial if the college wants the union's support in a \$500 million bond election slated for November.

ACC AFT also was instrumental in expanding and protecting access to health-care coverage with testimony supporting the passage of a new law in 2013.

Previously, many adjunct faculty and other college employees were eligible to buy into their college's employee health-care plan—ERS HealthSelect—and pay the full premium. To be eligible, faculty members must have taught at least one course in each of the six previous regular semesters and must have been assigned a teaching load of at least 12 hours in the year of enrollment. Since it was common for an adjunct to miss teaching one semester because not enough students registered for their class, that adjunct was knocked back to zero semesters of continuous teaching and had to restart the three-year clock for eligibility.

HB 2127 by Rep. Donna Howard (D-Austin) eliminated the requirement for previous employment at the college and made adjuncts eligible for health coverage when hired, as are regular faculty members. It also lowered the required number of assigned teaching hours required in the year to nine.

Bennett said ACC AFT will go through a strategic planning process this summer to plan for expanding its reach to more employees. Engaging students will be another priority for the union, he said, since students can be an important ally for employees, and employees can fight for lower tuition and fees for students. “We need to set an example and show students how to wield political power,” he said. 



ACC students support adjunct faculty at a board of trustees meeting.

AFT Lone Star College stands up for free speech, employee rights

AFT Lone Star College has faced many of the issues confronting community colleges throughout the country—the cutting of adjunct faculty workloads, salary caps, and changes to salary schedules that severely deflate the possible increases in pay for mid-career and senior-level employees.

The union faces an additional challenge, however, in that relations with the college administration over these issues have become increasingly strained, despite the best efforts of union leadership to work collaboratively.

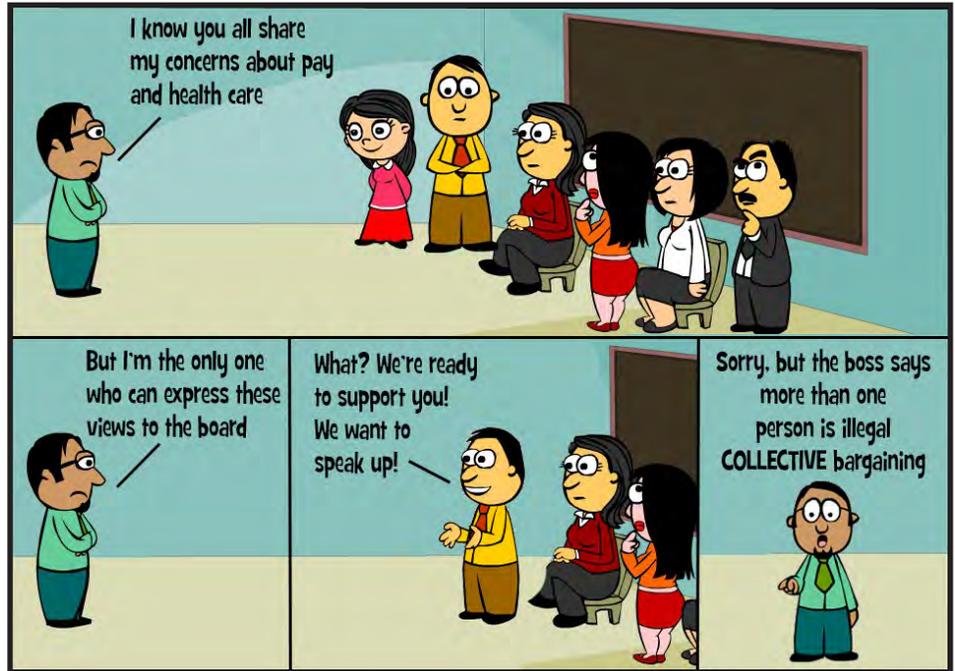
“Working relations with the administration would be fine, as long as we sat back and didn’t question anything,” said Alan Hall, Lone Star College AFT president. “The mere act of showing up to speak at trustee meetings or questioning any kind of policy change has been seen by the administration as a hostile attack. Quite the contrary, we view it as a democratic exercise in expressing our views to the governing body for the college.”

Things came to a head at a December Board of Trustees meeting when union member John Burghduff spoke at the meeting to raise objections to a policy change that limited adjunct employees to



Lone Star AFT members show up in “Reclaim the Promise” blue for an April board of trustees meeting.

no more than 9 credit hours per semester, not to exceed 15 hours in any given academic year. The board chair, David Holsey, cut off Burghduff and told him that he was complaining, and that per college policy complaints must be filed through a defined chain of command and not offered



in the public comments section of Board meetings. When a subsequent speaker noted that the action was violating the employees’ free speech, Holsey cut him off and had a police officer escort him from the room.

“The fact that college employees can’t weigh in with their opinion on a major policy change that affects the work and pay of thousands of employees is ludicrous,” Hall said. “But that was just the start of the absurdity.”

When the union rallied members to “Reclaim Our College” and advocate better pay at spring board meetings, Holsey and the college’s chancellor—Richard Carpenter—sent a letter claiming the union was attempting illegal “collective bargaining”

and threatened a lawsuit.

The letter stated: “We understand that AFT’s purpose in attending the meeting en masse is to seek redress for perceived wage deficiencies on behalf of its members. It is hard to conceive how such action is not an attempt at unlawful collective

bargaining between our organizations.... While individual grievances are permitted, en masse petitioning exposes the System to legal liability....efforts to permanently change the future rule of employment for everyone is collective bargaining.”

The union members planned to show up “en masse” at the June board meeting to assert their rights as an employee organization showing support for shared positions on issues of concern to all employees.

Hall said that with the impending departure of Chancellor Carpenter, the union is hopeful for more fruitful communications with the college administration.

“We launched a campaign called ‘Build-a-Chancellor’ that surveyed employees to see what kind of leadership they wanted for the next head of the college system,” he said. “We’re hopeful that the qualities employees expressed interest in will be taken into consideration. The most cited desired characteristics were ‘proven record of cordial relations with faculty and staff’ and ‘supporting employees’ rights to representation on matters of wages, benefits and working conditions.” 

ELECTION 2014



Wendy Davis (left) with Leticia Van de Putte

High stakes election: November will be your chance once again to support friends of public education

Candidates for the top two statewide elected offices provide a stark contrast in their proposals for how best to educate Texans. Texas AFT's endorsees—Democratic state senators Wendy Davis (for governor) and Leticia Van de Putte (for lieutenant governor)—have long championed public education by fighting cuts in funding, advocating the restoration of funding, promoting universal pre-K and reining in the misuse of standardized testing.

On the other side, the Republican candidate for governor—Greg Abbott—has defended cuts in public education in his role as attorney general, and has emphasized the use of virtual schools like K12, Inc., and privately-operated charter schools as part of his platform. The Republican candidate for lieutenant governor, state Sen. Dan Patrick, has proven to be no friend of public education. He pushed aggressively to funnel taxpayer funds to private schools via various voucher schemes while he backed severe cuts in education funding and opposed efforts to reduce or reverse the cuts.

There will be other clear choices between those who would uplift and those who would undermine public education for Texas schoolchildren. From now to November 4, Texas AFT will be reporting which way the candidates would take Texas if elected.

The best way to explore the issues and stay tuned in to election news is by subscribing to the Texas AFT Legislative Hotline at www.texasaftblog.com/hotline.



Important Dates for November 4 General Election

Last day to register to vote: October 6

Early Voting: October 20 to October 31

Last day to apply for ballot by mail (received, not postmarked): October 24

Note: Federal Post Card Application deadline for service members and citizens outside the United States is October 28.

General Election: Tuesday, November 4

Web sites for election information

State of Texas: www.votetexas.gov

Election dates, voter registration information, candidate lists

BallotPedia: www.ballotpedia.org

What's at Stake?

Thanks to the political mobilization efforts of Texas AFT members, we helped restore \$3.4 billion of the \$4 billion cut from state per-pupil aid in 2011. However, this restoration of funds does not meet the standards of adequately funding our schools. When lawmakers return to Austin in January of 2015, we must ensure that we have elected candidates who truly support public education on issues such as:

Funding schools: Lawmakers will decide how to invest in our schoolchildren, as a state Supreme Court ruling may be issued in time to force legislative action.

Test-driven evaluation: Our state's current evaluation tool, PDAS, could be replaced with a new evaluation model being piloted right now in some school districts. Lawmakers will be debating whether or not to make student test scores a significant part of the overall evaluation

Health insurance: Health-care costs are rising as benefits are decreasing. Lawmakers will have to make critical decisions on how to provide affordable health-care options for both active and retired school employees.

Privatization: We must continue to work to protect our public schools from privatization schemes in the form of vouchers, tuition tax credits, and other proposals.



How to Join...

1. Check the list of local unions and organizing committees and their school districts below. If you work in one of those districts, contact the local union or organizing committee directly.
2. If not, you will be joining the Associate Member Program. Contact us directly at 800-222-3827, or go to texasaft.org and click on "Membership."

Aldine ISD: Aldine AFT (281) 847-3050	El Paso ISD: El Paso Federation of Teachers & Support Personnel (915) 562-3738	Northside ISD: Northside AFT (210) 733-9777
Alief ISD: Alief AFTSE (281) 589-6644	Flour Bluff ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482	Pflugerville ISD: Pflugerville AFT (512) 448-0130
Amarillo ISD: Amarillo AFT (806) 359-4487	Fort Bend ISD: Fort Bend Employee Federation (281) 240-1865	Round Rock ISD: Education Round Rock (512) 448-0130
Austin Community College: ACC AFT (512) 448-0130	Galena Park ISD: Northeast Houston AFT (713) 453-7500	San Antonio ISD: San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel (210) 225-7174
Austin ISD: Education Austin (512) 472-1124	Goose Creek ISD: Goose Creek Education Federation (281) 427-2091	Sheldon ISD: Northeast Houston AFT (713) 453-7500
Bastrop ISD: Bastrop AFT (512) 448-0130	Gregory-Portland ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482	Socorro ISD: Socorro AFT (915) 593-2801
Brazosport ISD: Brazosport Federation of Teachers (979) 265-9701	Houston ISD: Houston Federation of Teachers (713) 623-8891	South San Antonio ISD: South San Antonio AFT (210) 227-8083
Calallen ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482	Houston ISD: Houston Educational Support Personnel (713) 660-8435	Spring Branch ISD: Spring Branch AFT (713) 468-4700
Channelview ISD: Northeast Houston AFT (713) 453-7500	Killeen ISD: Killeen Federation of Teachers & Support Personnel (254) 690-2538	Tuloso-Midway ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482
Corpus Christi ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482	La Joya ISD: La Joya AFT (956) 682-1143	Victoria ISD: Victoria AFT (512) 448-0130
Cy-Fair ISD: Cy-Fair AFT (713) 466-1125	Lone Star College: AFT Lone Star (281) 889-1009	Waco ISD: Waco AFT (254) 755-0276
Dallas ISD: Alliance AFT (214) 942-4663	McAllen ISD: McAllen AFT (956) 682-1143	West Oso ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482
Del Rio ISD: Del Rio AFT (512) 448-0130	North East ISD: Northeast AFT (210) 227-8083	
Edinburg ISD: Edinburg AFT (956) 502-5340		



Subscribe to Texas AFT text messaging!

Be sure to stay up to date on all our events and action campaigns by subscribing to our Texas AFT text message system! **Just compose a text message as you would to your friends, and text "TEXAS" to 69238.**

You'll get a confirmation text that lets you know you've signed up successfully and prompts you to personalize your location for local information texts.

(You may unsubscribe at any time, and there is no charge for this service, but normal data and message rates on your phone plan may apply.)

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RESOURCES by the numbers

