

Texas AFT

Legislative Agenda 2015



Reclaim the Promise: Call to Action!

This is no time to sit silently on the sidelines. To reclaim the promise of public education, we need to stand up, stand together, and speak out for our students, for all education employees, and for public education. Legislators listen best to messages from folks in their home district. Inform yourself about the issues and ask your state senator and state representative for their support.

To ID Your State Senator and Representative:
Go to www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us.

Visit us at www.texasaft.org to stay up to date with the Legislative Hotline and Action Alerts, and to write to legislators directly by fax or e-mail.

Texas AFT “Direct Call” to Legislators:
Dial 1-888-836-8368, give your state senator’s or representative’s name, and ask to be connected.

Prefer Writing a Letter?

Senators: P.O. Box 12068, Austin 78711
Representatives: P.O. Box 2910, Austin 78768
Governor: P.O. Box 12428, Austin 78711
(or call the governor toll-free: 1-800-843-5789)



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- Let education employees/retirees elect a majority on the TRS board.
- Expand and improve health benefits for adjunct higher-education faculty.
- Secure the repeal of unfair federal Social Security benefit cuts that victimize school employees.

Provide a Living Wage

- Raise educators’ pay to match comparable private-sector jobs in Texas.
- Pay a living wage to all education employees, pre-K/16.



Defend Due Process and Employee Rights

- Clearly define the work day, work year, and work assignment; ensure extra pay for extra work.
- Stop out-of-field assignments of educators and support staff.
- Reverse 2011 erosion of employee contract, pay, and due-process rights.
- Ensure basic due process and other employee rights in state law for all education employees, pre-K/16.
- Train administrators to respect employee rights; define and penalize retaliation for employees’ exercise of rights under state law.

Guarantee Employee Voice in Local Policy-Making

- Maintain the ability of school boards to develop policy in consultation with employees’ democratically elected representative organization.
- Let school boards bargain with an elected organization on local contracts—as police, firefighters, and other public employees in Texas already can.



(Community-Developed Solutions *continued*)

- Build wraparound services for students and their families into all neighborhood schools.

Improve School Discipline, Safety, and Health

- Uphold teachers’ and bus drivers’ authority to remove disruptive students without retaliation; enforce requirements for training in proper application of the Safe Schools Act for administrators.
- Notify parents if their child’s school lacks full-time nurse staffing.

Reclaim the Promise: Respect and Reward Educators and Support Staff

Provide Affordable Health Care and Retirement Security

- Boost state health-care funding for all education employees and retirees, aiming toward fully paid coverage for every employee and 50 percent for their families—health coverage as good as the governor’s!
- Protect defined-benefit TRS pensions—benefits you cannot outlive.
- Make it the goal of state policy to enable all school employees to retire under the Rule of 80 at 70 percent of their active salary with an annual cost-of-living adjustment.
- Provide a catch-up cost-of-living increase for all TRS retirees.

Reclaim the Promise: Fund Our Schools

Restore Funding Fully for 2016-2017

- Use the state's rising revenue (an estimated \$15 billion plus available for 2016-2017) to restore spending fully to pre-recession levels—an increase of more than \$600 per pupil.

Assure Full Funding for the Long Term

- To meet the growing needs of Texas students for the long term, build a new revenue structure.
 - Close property-tax loopholes that shift the burden from commercial to residential rate-payers.
 - Close loopholes in the business franchise tax.
 - Increase cigarette/tobacco taxes.
 - Sunset unjustified sales-tax exemptions for business and professional services (but keep “lifeline” exemptions for health care, child care).



Meet Constitutional Standards of Funding Adequacy and Equity

- Change outmoded funding formulas to reflect the full cost of educating more than five million students—60 percent economically disadvantaged, 9 percent with disabilities, 17 percent with low English proficiency.
- Enforce funding equity, so that students have access to the educational resources they need regardless of where they happen to live.
- Guarantee state aid will keep up with enrollment, inflation, and rising state and federal requirements.
- Restore the authority of elected school boards



to raise funds locally without triggering a tax-rate election.

- Provide full state formula aid for community colleges, including employee benefits.
- Block private-school vouchers and equivalent drains on public education funding via other privatization schemes like corporate-chain charter takeovers, virtual schools like K12, Inc., “achievement districts,” “home rule” charters, and deceptively labeled “parent triggers” for charterization.

Reclaim the Promise: Help Our Students Succeed

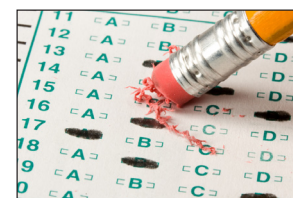
Provide the Building Blocks of Quality Education for All

- Provide full-day, voluntary pre-K and kindergarten for all.
- Guarantee extra help early for struggling students.
- Ensure staffing to serve high-need students in regular classrooms.
- Ensure properly certified teachers in every class.
- Raise standards for entry into the teaching profession. Provide mentoring and research-based, teacher-directed professional development.
- Restore scholarships for instructional aides to become teachers.

- Assure teachers and paraprofessionals of time to prepare and collaborate.
- Enforce K-4 class-size caps, cap class size in pre-K and higher grades, and bar overuse of online courses in lieu of in-person college instruction.
- Strengthen quality standards for state-authorized charter schools and virtual (distance-learning) schools; limit charter expansion.

End Misuse of Standardized Tests

- End misuse of state assessments as the main measure of success.
- Tighten limits on local benchmark testing tied to state assessments.
- Use multiple measures to gauge growth and guide instruction; include measures of social/emotional learning.
- Ban use of “value added” models for individual educator evaluation.
- Use suitable tests for pupils with disabilities, English Language Learners.



Use Community-Developed Solutions to Improve Schools

- End top-down, punitive sanctions, use community-developed solutions to improve schools, and use community-based accountability measures.
- Engage parents as full partners in developing school-improvement plans.
- Hold school districts accountable for providing a supportive environment for learning that reflects real employee, parent, and community input.

(Continued on reverse)

Reclaim the Promise of Public Education



Public education in Texas is at a crossroads. Our schools and institutions of higher education are under relentless attack from corporate interests that seek to profit from the hostile takeover of public education.

Down their chosen road lies more of the same—a future of continued underfunding that deprives students of the resources they need; more misuse of state test scores to label our schools, students and teachers as failures; wholesale transfers of students and funding from neighborhood public schools to private operators; and the deprofessionalization of teaching and disrespect for those who serve in our public schools and institutions of higher education. Pensions, health care, pay, benefits, and basic employee rights are all targeted for demolition down this pathway of destruction.

Down the other road—our road—parents and education employees work together with community allies to reclaim the promise of quality public education. Together we fix the broken testing system. We restore school funding and make sure educational opportunity does not depend on a child's ZIP Code. We say no to vouchers and other privatization schemes. We redefine accountability so that we measure what matters—preparation of our students for success in life, not just for snapshot state tests. We reclaim the respect we deserve for our work and the support we need to meet the needs of every individual child.

We can only take public education on a road to a better future if we stick together. Join us as we reclaim the promise of public education in our state. Sitting on the sidelines is not an option!

Linda Bridges

Linda Bridges, Texas AFT President