



# TEXAS AFT LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2021

**During difficult budget times, Texas AFT will fight to maintain existing resources, strengthen our public schools, and ensure that organizations looking to profit off of children don't hijack our public schools. While private school vouchers have been rejected by lawmakers, it's time to halt privatization through the expansion of charter schools throughout the state. A budget crisis makes it clear that the state simply cannot afford two competing school systems.**

## **MAINTAINING FUNDING**

Our union's top priority must be ensuring the economic challenges of today do not become the economic catastrophes of tomorrow. Texas must take the lessons from 2011 seriously: We cannot cut our way to prosperity. Instead, we must use the Economic Stabilization Fund and consider alternative sources of revenue to maintain the historic gains in HB 3 to public education, funding for our colleges and universities, and the Teacher Retirement System.

## **PRIORITIZING HEALTH & SAFETY**

COVID-19 has highlighted how few laws protect the safety of public school and community college students, teachers, school nurses, and support staff.

- Texas AFT will fight for laws mandating health and safety standards and see that they are enforced for our public schools, as well as ensure the state is able to prepare properly for future pandemics.
- Educating children during a crisis requires additional funding. Our educational workers should not bear the cost of these additional resources.
- During a public health crisis, our school nurses are more critical than ever. It's time for Texas to mandate nurses on every campus and publicly disclose when schools lack these critical professionals.
- All public school employees must be able to use their earned leave time without fear of reprisal or negative evaluations.
- Teachers and professors should not be penalized on evaluations because of a pandemic. Texas AFT calls for a pause on punitive evaluations as we navigate this crisis.

## **FIGHTING PRIVATIZATION**

With our public schools doing so much more than they usually do and with the budget under serious strain, Texas AFT will fight all efforts to privatize our public schools, whether through voucher schemes or through unaccountable charter schools.

- Texas must prevent charter schools, which cost taxpayers an estimated \$3.1 billion per year, from siphoning funds intended for public schools by halting their expansion. Texas AFT will fight for a moratorium on additional charter campuses until the state is able to determine how to mitigate impacts on traditional public schools and find a sustainable method for funding that does not harm Texas public school students and local taxpayers.
- Texas AFT will fight to ensure charter schools meet the same academic standards, health and safety rules, and civil rights requirements as traditional public schools.
- The state must strongly oppose programs that seek to support private schools at the expense of public education, including private school vouchers and tuition tax credits.
- While virtual learning is critical during an emergency such as COVID-19, research shows there is no substitute for in-person instruction. Texas AFT will fight for policies that balance these competing interests.

## **STOPPING OVER-RELIANCE ON STANDARDIZED TESTING**

It's time to eliminate the stranglehold high-stakes testing has on our public schools, public school students, teachers, and school districts.

- Children should never be penalized academically for their performance on a single standardized test, particularly during an unprecedented pandemic.
- A student's score on a standardized test should not determine a teacher's pay, or even a portion of a teacher's pay.
- Schools and school districts should not be graded — much less taken over — based on standardized test scores.

## **STOPPING TEA OVERREACH**

It's time to re-prioritize the rights of democratically elected school boards against the TEA.

- A single public school's performance on standardized tests should not cause a statewide takeover while the Commissioner of Education allows the expansion of charter schools with D and F ratings.
- The State Board of Education should be the final word on educational issues that significantly burden the state budget and future legislatures, not the unelected Commissioner of Education.
- Texas AFT will continue to fight for democratically elected school boards that are central to an effective system of public education that serves all children.



# CONTINUING OUR PRIORITIES

## EXPANDED ACCESS AND FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Wraparound services will lead to lower dropout rates, less chronic absenteeism, and better student participation in after-school programs.

## LIVING WAGES FOR ALL PUBLIC EDUCATION WORKERS

No Texan working in our public schools or community colleges should live in poverty.

## INCREASED SALARIES FOR TEACHERS FROM PRE-K TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Despite the passage of HB 3 in 2019, Texas teachers are still struggling to make ends meet, and community college professors have had no relief. Texas must do better, while ensuring salaries are not based on problematic metrics like standardized tests or student surveys.

## OUR RIGHTS AS WORKERS

Now more than ever, all public school employees must have the right to join a union without repercussions, voluntarily pay dues through payroll deduction, collectively bargain, and strike.

## A SECURE RETIREMENT

The Legislature must guarantee all Texas teachers are financially secure in their retirement by increasing state contributions to TRS, opposing all efforts to weaken pension systems, and advocating for a Cost of Living Adjustment that is tied to inflation.

## LOWER HEALTHCARE COSTS FOR BOTH ACTIVE AND RETIRED TEACHERS

Healthcare costs for our retirees continue to skyrocket, while current teachers and support staff are left picking up an ever-increasing share of their insurance costs — all at a time when these workers are on the frontlines of a global pandemic. The state must take immediate action to reverse these trends.

## **TRULY UNIVERSAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN FOR ALL TEXANS**

Mandating pre-K isn't enough. Texas must fully fund pre-K through the existing funding formulas, instead of the current 1/2 funding.

## **A DEFINED WORKDAY FOR ALL EDUCATORS**

Texas law requires a minimum of 7 hours and 45 minutes for public school days, but the law does not address the maximum length of the school day for employees. Many districts allow campus administrators to keep staff throughout the evening with little or no notice. Teachers should not be subjected to such a grueling and unpredictable schedule.

## **SIMPLE DECENCY**

All public school and community college workers deserve due process protections before being disciplined or terminated at work.

## **INCREASED ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

Texas AFT supports increased state funding for community colleges, increased regulation of for-profit colleges, affordable textbooks, and more programs to reduce student loan debt.

## **HELP FOR HIGHER EDUCATION WORKERS**

Texas AFT supports our adjunct professors and will work to ensure access to healthcare for these critical workers.

## **STUDENT SAFETY**

We must expand gun safety laws, provide every school with a mental healthcare professional, and establish federal guidelines for children's health and safety in schools. While a teacher must be able to control the classroom, Texas AFT supports restorative justice practices as a critical tool.

## **FAIR CURRICULUM STANDARDS**

Curriculum standards should be established by professional educators, and textbooks should be written by professionals, not politicians.