

*Texas AFT's 2023 Respect Agenda:*

# **SOLVING THE SCHOOL STAFFING CRISIS & MAKING SCHOOLS SAFE FOR OUR KIDS**

Our union's top priority is to fight for the additional resources our schools need to keep our students and school employees safe, healthy, and thriving. It's time for our state government to pay its fair share by increasing the basic allotment that funds our public schools, and we have the ability to do it with a \$27 billion budget surplus. Only a substantial increase in the basic allotment will allow schools to attract and retain the well-trained, experienced teachers and school staff that all students deserve and provide safe schools for Texas children.

Texas school employees, parents, and Texans must raise our voices together to support an increase in public education funding and a statewide raise for Texas school employees.

**Will you help us show that Texans are united behind our public schools by adding your name to our Respect Pledge?**

## **The Facts**

- Texas has **averaged 5 school shootings per year** for the last two decades, and with teachers and staff leaving in droves because of low pay and untenable workloads, our overcrowded classrooms and under-resourced mental health support are presenting their own safety concerns.
- Texas is **44th in the country for per-student spending and 39th for funding**, an embarrassment for a state that has the world's ninth-largest economy.
- Texas teachers have felt a **10% decrease in real pay** on average over the last decade, with some districts experiencing declines as much as 13% and 14%. Real teacher salaries are lower now than they were before the "historic" school funding bill passed in 2019.
- From 2019–2021, TEA approved **100% of waivers for class size limits**. Oversized classes interfere with student learning, exacerbate disciplinary issues, & are unsafe in emergencies.
- Despite posturing about mental health after tragedies like Uvalde, the Abbott administration's underfunding of education has **deprived 98% of Texas students of sufficient access to counselors**.
- **90% of Texas educators** surveyed by Texas AFT say they fear there will be a shooting similar to the one in Uvalde in their own classroom.
- **66% of districts fail** to meet the recommended ratio of 1 nurse per 750 students, per the National Association of School Nurses.
- Our neighbors have taken strong action to address teacher shortages & seen results. New Mexico teacher vacancies decreased by over a third after the legislature passed pay raises up to 21% for school employees.
- Texas has a **\$27 billion surplus** and the **second-largest economy in the country**. Passing a 15% raise for all school employees in Texas would cost less than 18% of our state's budget surplus. The solution is clear, but only if state officials choose to prioritize Texas kids.

# Our members have made clear that they have been disrespected for too long, and now it's time for elected officials to **Respect Us or Expect Us.**

## Safe schools for our children

We must keep our children, teachers, school nurses, & support staff safe through immediate and long-term measures.

- **Manageable class sizes** allow students to learn and teachers to teach. Elementary schools have class-size limits of 22:1. We need to institute class-size limits for middle and high school grades and enforce the laws we have. It is time to stop the flood of class-size waivers every year.
- **Every school must have a mental health care professional and nurse** and should meet recommended guidelines of at least 1 counselor per 250 students and 1 nurse per 750 students.
- **Hiring sufficient support staff** means classroom teachers are not saddled with extra duties unrelated to teaching and kids are safe in their classrooms.
- **We need gun reforms** to reduce minors' easy access to dangerous firearms in our state, which has led to an average of 5 mass shootings on Texas school campuses per year for the past 20 years.

## Solve the school worker shortage

It is past time that policymakers listened to the experts on our schools: the teachers and staff who work in them every day. If they don't, they'll continue to see the staffing crisis that threatens the schools our kids deserve.

- **Texas teachers need a \$10,000 raise and support staff need a 15% across-the-board raise** to make up for the 'lost decade' of wages and ensure educators can afford to live where they work.
- **Lower health care costs for both active and retired teachers** by increasing the state's share of health care contributions so teachers' raises aren't immediately eaten up by rising health care costs.
- **Guarantee financial security in retirement** by passing an annual cost-of-living-adjustment tied to inflation and increasing state contributions to TRS.
- **Investing in "Grow Your Own"** tuition-free programs will help paraprofessionals and support staff who already know and care about our public schools to get their teaching certifications quickly.
- **Protect the rights of school employees to join a union** without repercussions and be allowed to voluntarily make contributions through payroll deduction. School employees should also be granted the right to bargain collectively and strike when necessary, as any other worker.
- **Put an end to "District of Innovation" exemptions** on basic standards like class-size limits, certified teachers, and a defined work year so teachers aren't sacrificing every weekend with their family to stay afloat at work.
- **Bring Texas' per-student spending up to the national average.** Texas is currently 44th in the country for per-student spending, and it shows in our inability to provide the support and wraparound services they need to thrive.
- **Stop the siphoning of \$3 billion in school funds** by halting charter school expansion. Texas can afford world-class public education for our students, but not if it continues to prop up a less accountable, less successful secondary education system – or gives wealthy families tax breaks to send their children to private schools.



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