


TOGETHER
WE THRIVE



2021-2023
BIENNIAL REPORT
TEXAS AFT CONVENTION

Zeph Capo

PRESIDENT

Ray McMurrey

SECRETARY-TREASURER

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A Union of Professionals

Texas AFT

AFL-CIO

Texas AFT is a statewide union with 66,000 members, including educators, school employees, and retirees. We believe that education is the path to a just and democratic society and that the only way to give students a quality education is through the dedicated work of empowered public educators. Our union represents all non-administrative public school employees, as well as faculty and staff in higher education.



**"I'm part of a group
that has my best
interests at heart. We
really do what we say
we're going to do. We
really mean it."**

U'LYNA TRICE | SOUTHWEST DALLAS AFT

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President's Message

ZEPH CAPO, TEXAS AFT PRESIDENT

These last two years in my tenure as president, in contrast with the first two, have been about fighting back against threats and fighting forward for a better future, rather than just fighting to stay afloat.

I'm proud of the work our union has done to drive the plight of our profession into the public sphere. We have surfaced the real issues in public education around salary, staffing, and the public good in a way that has never been done before.

The willingness of our members to complete our yearly comprehensive surveys, sit in focus groups, and provide meaningful feedback has allowed Texas AFT to chart a new path forward — one that uses hard data and the real evidence of our members' experiences to back up our demands.

No longer will lawmakers and decision-makers simply be able to dismiss our concerns outright because they are "emotional" or "exaggerated," rather than the all-too-real pain our members feel from depressed wages, unsafe working conditions, and lack of necessary support.

The Lost Decade (page 14) began as a straightforward research project, our union's attempt to identify — in black and white — the real economic loss our



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ZEPH CAPO | PRESIDENT

members have suffered while serving others. That single report, however, became the go-to document in shaping our messaging, our #RespectUsExpectUs campaign, and our overall organizing plan for most of this biennium.

Texas AFT local unions and organizing committees used *Lost Decade* data to fuel wage campaigns in their districts in 2021, winning significant pay raises and improved working conditions in multiple districts statewide. Fifteen out of 19 local unions waging a campaign won, including our two higher education locals. All three of our organizing committees won too, plus Associate Membership Program members in Manor and Judson ISDs.

Even during the final hours of this legislative session, more than a year after the report's initial release, our digital team found new ways to use that data in the fight for pay raises and against vouchers.

While that report helped to launch our campaign, it was far from the only tool in our toolbox. We held focus groups with Texas educators that led to the *Texas Needs Teachers!* report (page 14), a document that seems to have served as some real inspiration for the Texas Education Agency's Teacher Vacancy Task Force report.

We engaged members continuously, and in new ways, through peer-to-peer texting mixers, postcard-writing parties, legislative advocacy trainings, and a Win Respect Fellowship program. The result is that by the end of the 88th Legislature, we activated more than 25,000 members, potential members, and allies. Many of those people have never taken a stand before.

We also surveyed members on several occasions in the past two years, using their thoughts as our guide. Notably, our survey after the tragic shooting at Uvalde's Robb Elementary (page 24), showed school employees' sentiments on gun violence so forcefully that one Spectrum News reporter dubbed us "the most aggressive of Texas' four teacher groups."

That's a badge of honor we wear with pride and one I hope we retain in the next biennium.



Zeph Capo is the current president of the Texas American Federation of Teachers. Previously, he was the president of the Houston Federation of Teachers.

Capo believes that a quality public education and old-fashioned hard work are requirements for a robust economy, and public schools are the key to a robust civil society. Before becoming a union leader, Capo was a science teacher.

Capo is known for his honest and direct approach to solving issues and building lasting relationships in the communities he serves. In 2011, he spearheaded community meetings to develop a paradigm in how neighborhoods can effect change in a community. Capo believes in strengthening the school-to-work pipeline and dismantling the cradle-to-prison pipeline. To do so, he believes we must improve the learning conditions for our students which also happen to be the teaching conditions of our members.

Capo has served on several community boards that have added perspective and developed cross-sector relationships that will benefit Texas AFT as we forge a new direction. Texas AFT must invest the time to listen to our leaders and members on the ground and be committed to building a shared vision for our future.

Financial Report

RAY MCMURREY, TEXAS AFT SECRETARY-TREASURER

The Texas AFT 2021-2023 biennium is best summed up in one word: transformation. In a post-pandemic world, Texas AFT has transformed how we operate, do business, and engage our members.

That transformation is organization-wide: from starting our new banking relationship with the Bank of Labor, to how we maximize the impact of our legislative program and advocacy days, to how we broaden our reach and organize with existing and potential members through digital ads and social media, all the way down to how we best use our office space.

COVID-19 disrupted everything in our world, but we came out of the pandemic stronger. While our traditional means of contacting and accessing members were disrupted — and difficult to regain — we did not miss beat in our organizing efforts. We shifted resources and prepared financially for new methods of holding meetings, conducting surveys, and assessing members. This required the acquisition of new digital tools and platforms, which we invested in and launched to conduct both our internal and external operations.

Despite these tumultuous days, Texas AFT saw a growing, continuous migration to electronic dues collection



TEXAS AFT BALANCE SHEET

ACCOUNT	BALANCE
General Fund Account Revenues (Including Certificates of Deposit)	\$296,917.36
Texas AFT Legal Defense	\$455,065.87
Texas AFT Legal Defense Reserve	\$200,000
Texas AFT Solidarity Fund	\$175,120.52
Texas AFT Partners in Education Fund	\$26,858.70
Texas AFT Bridges Institute	\$159,770.89
Texas AFT Disaster Relief Fund	\$29,218.15
Texas AFT COPE	\$44,390.94
Texas AFT COPE II	\$82,781.39
Texas AFT Building Fund	\$251,124.93
Payroll Transfer Account	\$3,000
Total Assets	\$1,724,248.75
Liabilities and Equity	\$1,724,248.75

As of May 30, 2023, for FY2022-23 ending June 30, 2023

(eDues). More locals are exclusively collecting membership dues via eDues and the gross receipts from eDues have continued to rise. While payroll deduction remains a legal and viable option, Texas AFT is better prepared than ever to execute electronic dues collection and mitigate any potential issues.

This biennial period also marked a transformational day in how Texas AFT manages and operates its Associate Membership Program. Restructuring AMP's banking, budgeting, and payroll operations directly under Texas AFT has helped collapse walls between AMP and the state federation. The result: greater efficiency, fewer logistical challenges, and more effective resource allocation.

Internally, in the past two years, Texas AFT brought payroll and employee benefits under the umbrella of a Professional Employer Organization (PEO) as a way to centralize and enhance human resource operations and opportunities. As a result, an array of new options and benefits became available to Texas AFT employees.

The state of Texas AFT's finances remains strong and solvent. Our state federation continues to operate a balanced budget each fiscal year. The first Texas AFT per-capita increase in more than 10 years was realized this biennium, boosting our income. Our assets remain secure, and the state federation is financially stable.

The goal moving forward is to achieve an economic position strong enough for Texas AFT to purchase its own office space. This would be an investment ending the perpetual renter status in an unfriendly Austin market and strengthen the long-term solvency of Texas AFT. This is my primary goal before my tenure as secretary-treasurer is finished.

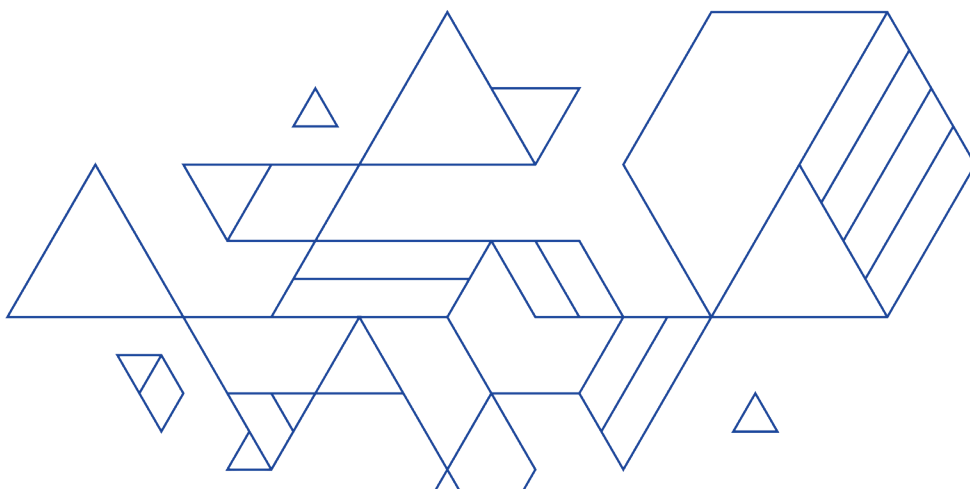
Our union has experienced profound transformation in this biennium, but today we are healthier and stronger than ever. I appreciate the patience and determination of our leaders and members to embrace the change and bravely move our union forward.

Ray McMurrey is the current secretary-treasurer of the Texas AFT, elected in 2015. He is a former president of the Coastal Bend Labor Council and the Corpus Christi American Federation of Teachers, also the home of two former Texas AFT presidents: John Cole and Linda Bridges. Ray built a fierce reputation as an advocate for public schools and employees. He championed employee voice through the consultation process and developed and a strong union led professional development program.

McMurrey graduated from St. Edward's University and played on its men's tennis team, winning the NCAA Division II, Heart of Texas Conference championship in 1990. He graduated Magna Cum Laude and was nominated for the Presidential Award, the university's highest honor for academic success and leadership. In 1995, McMurrey was selected one of 25 teachers in the United States to receive a full scholarship from the NEH to attend UCLA and completed his master's degree that year.

McMurrey taught secondary AP/ Dual Credit social studies for 18 years while also teaching at the college level. He also coached the highly ranked Mary Carroll High School varsity tennis team which played for three state championships.

Ray has been married to Veronica McMurrey, a retired public-school teacher, for 27 years. They have two daughters. Ray enjoys traveling, fitness, history, his two German Shepherds, and all things Texas. He is a certified fitness trainer and a member of the Texas State Guard. He serves as a 4th Degree member of the Knights of Columbus. Ray is also professionally certified by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).



COVID-19 Pandemic

The start of this biennium came at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccines had only just become available to educators and were not yet available to all students. Yet many Texas schools were preparing to welcome back more students for in-person learning exclusively.

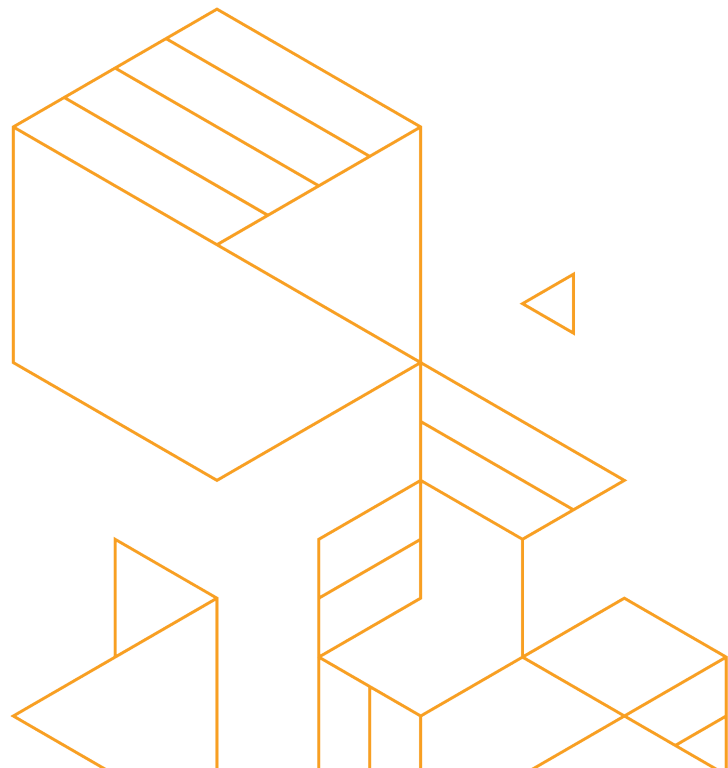
Our union, with the support of national AFT, was determined to make this a safer return, launching our Back to School for All campaign before the start of the 2021-2022 school year.

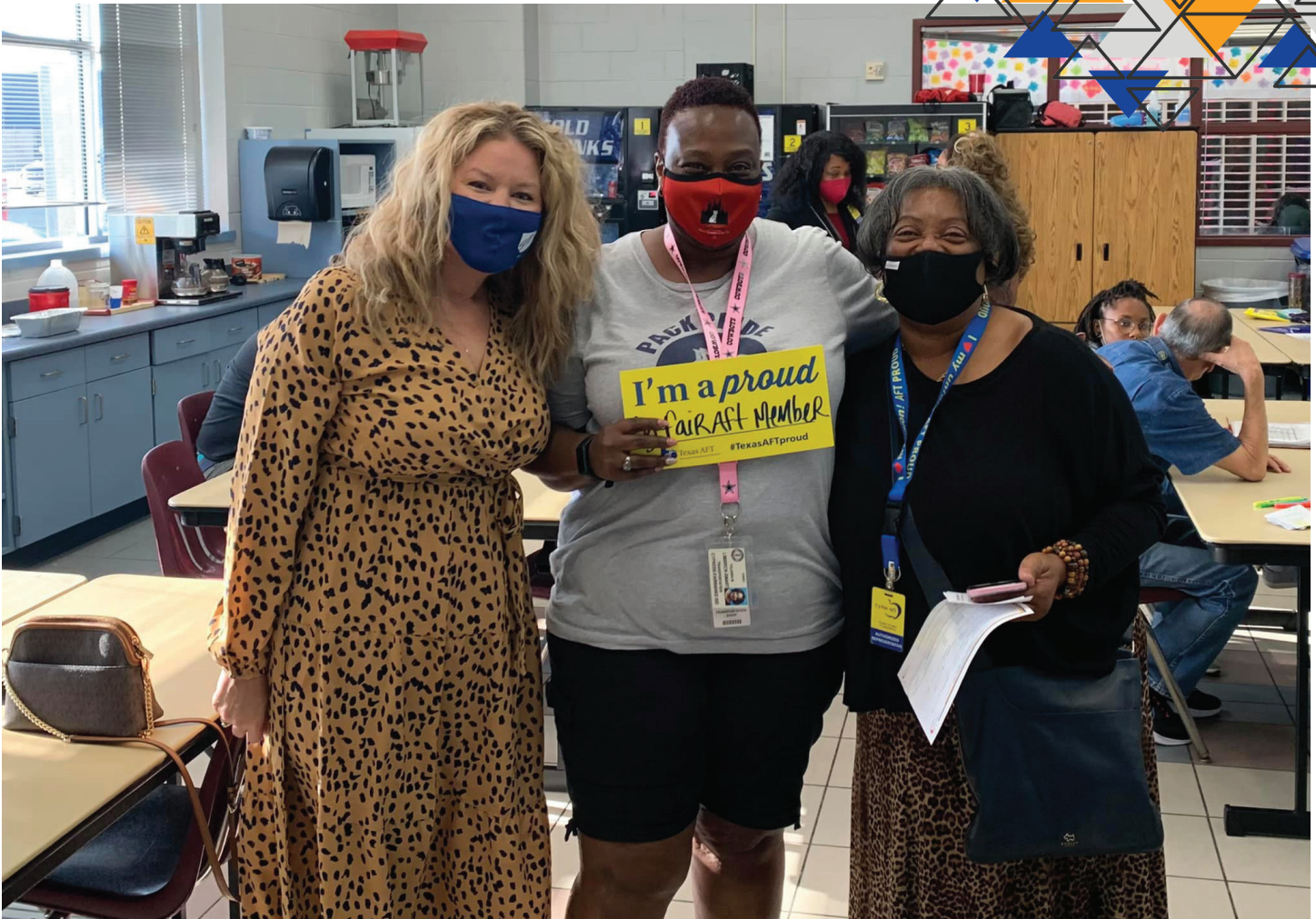


Two participants show off their COVID-19 shots in the arm at a series of vaccine clinics hosted by Texas AFT local unions in the Rio Grande Valley in the fall of 2021. In three months of clinics, BEST AFT, Edinburg AFT, La Joya AFT, McAllen AFT, and PSJA AFT engaged more than 2,000 members of their communities and administered more than 1,500 COVID-19 vaccines.

Our Goals:

- Engage families “lost” in the swirl of virtual instruction and pandemic chaos
- Support a safe return to school by hosting community events, conducting phone banks, and canvassing the community
- Assess and listen to the needs of our communities in terms of public education
- Build power for members by identifying local advocates to engage in future political and advocacy work





In Cy-Fair AFT's Back to School for All campaign, the local union joined with fellow Gulf Coast AFL-CIO members to knock on doors and talk to parents about COVID-19 vaccines, masking, and making our school campuses safer. They also used those 6,425 doors knocked as an opportunity to remind them about important school board races in November.



For back-to-school 2021, Alliance/AFT members knocked on nearly 5,000 doors in their community, connecting parents with resources to support a safe return to in-person learning. They also reached out to parents via phone and text to support mandatory masking on campuses — advocacy that ensured Dallas ISD was one of the first ISDs to mandate masks for the Fall 2021 semester.



In the summer and fall of 2021, Aldine AFT hosted a series of community events that featured not only COVID-19 vaccine clinics but also free book giveaways for families. The local union parlayed this community engagement work directly into the Aldine ISD school board races, in which members were able to protect a friendly incumbent and nearly put an endorsed challenger on the board.

Together We Rise Citizenship Clinics

May 1, 2021, International Workers' Day, was a big day for immigrant workers in Houston seeking to become U.S. citizens: Many were able to make significant strides toward that goal at the Together We Rise Citizenship Clinic and Community Fair in Houston, sponsored by the AFT, Texas AFL-CIO, Texas AFT and Houston-area AFT locals. Attorneys from the Equal Justice Center provided pro bono help as well.

For most people, and especially working people, the citizenship process takes months and sometimes years of tracking paperwork, consulting with attorneys and paying hefty fees—steps made even more challenging for people with limited incomes, limited access to transportation, limited English and tight schedules involving multiple jobs, family responsibilities and school. Add the \$725 citizenship application fee and the citizenship test to that, and the entire prospect can seem impossible.

“We know the naturalization process is horrendous and daunting,” said AFT Executive Vice President Evelyn DeJesus, who spoke at a press conference during the event. “But we are here—presente—to help,” she



Houston area citizenship clinic: from left, Wretha Thomas, Evelyn DeJesus, Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee and Houston Federation of Teachers President Jackie Anderson.

continued, briefly switching to Spanish. With free legal help and support, the Together We Rise citizenship clinic program “is one of the most groundbreaking civic engagement programs in the entire labor movement,” she said.

Launched in April, the program began with a series of informational naturalization forums open to more than 297,000 eligible area residents, including many AFT members. The events, which drew 155 people seeking citizenship, helped participants determine whether they would be eligible to fill out the maze of paperwork required to apply.

Then at the May 1 clinic, qualified applicants gathered for free legal

advice and were paired with volunteers from the unions and other advocacy organizations who helped them fill out the forms necessary to apply for citizenship. They left the event with their paperwork ready to be mailed. Their families and other community members attended the event too, picking up free books from an AFT/First Book giveaway and backpacks full of school supplies.

“I can think of nothing that is a greater honor than helping one of our colleagues become fully vested in our country, fully vested in our democracy, and able to fully lift their voice,” said Texas AFT President Zeph Capo. “The struggle to be free is part of our heritage in this country, and it

is our duty to reach all of our residents in this society and lift up all that we can,” said Texas AFL-CIO President Rick Levy.

“I want my two daughters to grow up knowing that I am participating in the electoral process of this country to ensure that they have a more just America tomorrow,” said Cesia Osorio, a third-grade teacher and a member of Northeast Houston AFT. She will doubtless vote for lawmakers who will support public schools, safe workplaces and good-paying jobs.

“This is a country of opportunity. It is a country of dreams,” said Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas). And, with a nod to the AFT’s bus drivers, food service workers, groundskeepers and custodians—most of whom are Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian American or Pacific Islander—she added, “It is a country where we recognize support staff who we could not survive without if they were not doing their duty as essential workers every single day.” The clinics serve many of those members, said Wretha Thomas, president of the Houston Educational Support Personnel.

The movement toward citizenship not only affects the individual going through it—it changes the lives of their family members and community as well. “Today we do this for the children,” said Glenda Macal, president of Fort Bend AFT. “We know when their parents and their grandparents, their siblings and their friends, become citizens, they no longer have to

fear. They know that they belong to this country that in their hearts they already belong to.”

In September 2021, our Rio Grande Valley local unions held another round of citizenship clinics. More than 160 residents took part in the clinics. Participating locals included AFT chapters for McAllen, Edinburg, PSJA, La Joya, and Brownsville.

AFT Executive Vice President Evelyn DeJesus also was on hand for a tour of area schools in McAllen, La Joya, Edinburg, and Pharr—part of AFT’s Back to School for All campaign and tour promoting safety in the pandemic. DeJesus, Texas AFT President Zeph Capo, and local leaders handed out free books and school supplies to students at the schools.



Across the country, there are close to 9 million lawful permanent residents — a common immigration status — eligible for naturalization. In the Houston area alone, there are nearly 300,000. Education Austin has already helped more than 1,000 citizenship applicants; the Texas AFL-CIO has helped another 1,652 in eight cities across the state. AFT locals, including Northside AFT, San Antonio Alliance, Corpus Christi AFT, Alliance AFT (Dallas) and Socorro AFT, have hosted clinics.



AFT, Rio Grande Valley area locals, and First Book distributed bilingual books during the community event in September 2021 as part of the Together We Rise Citizenship Clinic.

Origins of the RESPECT Campaign

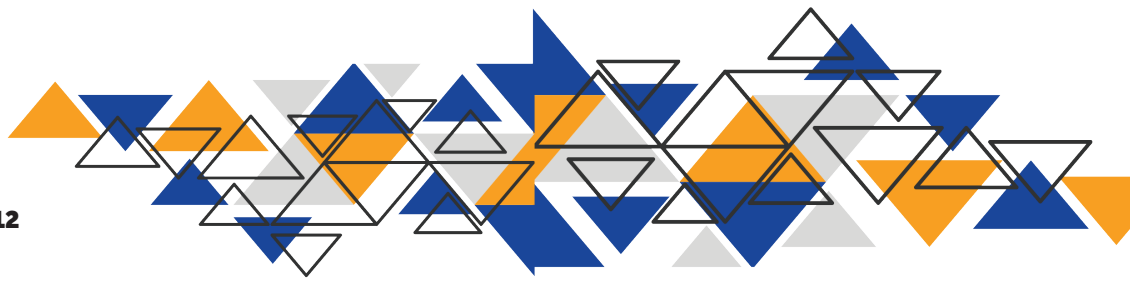
The work of Back to School for All and the continued struggles of the COVID-19 pandemic set the stage for our union's next campaign — a statewide call for Respect. And it all started with the voices of our members and their fellow school employees.

From that initial wave of attention, Texas AFT began constructing a statewide campaign that aimed to tie together our statewide work in elections and at the Legislature with the work of our local unions and organizing committees in their own districts.

As members prepared local campaigns for pay raises in their districts (page 14), Texas AFT created a statewide umbrella with the membership surveys and *Lost Decade* report to amplify and support their work.



Texas AFT President Zeph Capo speaks at a news conference at the Capitol in January 2023. Local presidents joined him, sharing signs with different aspects of our union's Respect Agenda for the Legislature.



Group warns of teacher staffing crisis

Survey finds only 12% felt safe back in class amid omicron surge

By CORBETT SMITH
Staff Writer
corbettsmith@dallasnews.com



The Dallas Morning News
Education Lab

Deepening coverage and conversations
about issues affecting North Texas schools

Only 1 out of every 10 Texas school employees felt safe returning to work during the most recent COVID-19 surge, according to survey results released Monday by an educators union.

The survey, conducted in January by the Texas chapter of the American Federation of Teachers, found 12% of the

2,498 respondents said they felt safe returning to classes after the winter break.

Fueled by the highly infectious omicron variant, weekly cases in the state's public schools peaked a few weeks after students returned from the holiday break. That coincided with a time when some sys-

tems — such as Richardson ISD — were relaxing their mask policies.

In its weekly tally on Jan. 16, the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Department of State Health Services reported a record 115,602 COVID-19 cases among staff and students, almost twice as many

as the previous high.

Over two-thirds of respondents said they were unaware of their district's "return to campus" plan coming back from the break, if such a plan even existed.

When pairing January's responses with an earlier survey from November, which found that 66% of Texas educators had considered leaving their jobs within the past year, Texas AFT President Zeph Capo called the current situation a crisis.

The surveys are a clear sign

See **POLL** Page 7B

In February 2022, amid a COVID-19 surge fueled by the Omicron variant, Texas AFT held a virtual news conference to release the results of two member surveys. The first, as noted in this *Dallas Morning News* article, showed that just 12% of the Texas school employees we surveyed said they felt safe returning to school after winter break.

Teachers' group says two-thirds of Texas public school teachers considered quitting during the pandemic

Many teachers and staff have had to take on more responsibilities as colleagues get sick or quit. Meanwhile, pay hasn't increased to match that extra work.



Teacher's group says two-thirds of Texas public school teachers considered quitting during the pandemic

Feb. 9, 2022



TEXAS STANDARD
THE NATIONAL DAILY NEWS SHOW OF TEXAS

By Jill Ament | February 9, 2022 10:44 am

Education, Texas Standard Original

The other big release in that February news conference were the results from our 2021 Membership Survey. The main takeaway spread like wildfire across Texas news outlets: 66% of our members (not just teachers) said they were seriously thinking of leaving their jobs. The reasons were many — low pay, rising workloads, and unsafe working conditions chief among them — but the root cause was simple: **Texas public school employees did not feel respect.**

Campaign Spotlight

Just-in-Time Wage Campaign Trainings for Local Leaders

Finding the Money: What to Do with Financial Documents & Proposed District Budgets

Putting It All Together: Creating a Compelling Narrative

Moving the Decider: School Board One-on-Ones

Moving the Troops: Mobilizing Members

Declaring Victory: How to Close Out Your Campaign

Data & Research

Our Respect campaign put our members' experiences front and center, but we also did our homework, compiling hard facts and figures on the staffing crisis in our schools — and the reasons behind it.



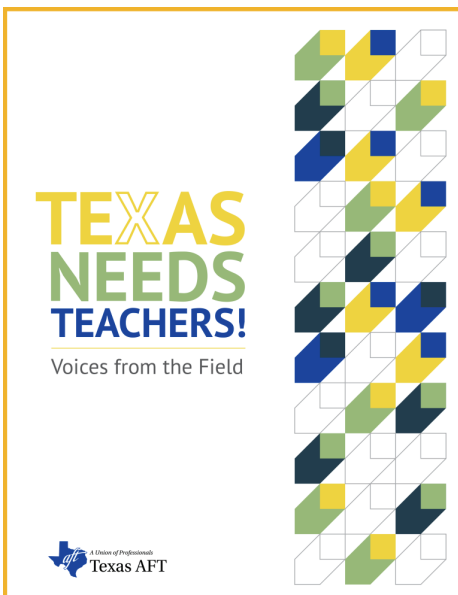
April 2022 "The Lost Decade"

In this joint report, Texas AFT and Every Texan revealed startling trends in Texas' funding of public schools, as well as how that underfunding has depressed teacher and staff salaries. If our state and local leaders fail to address issues like back-sliding pay, the report notes, we will continue to see headlines about massive teacher and staff shortages.



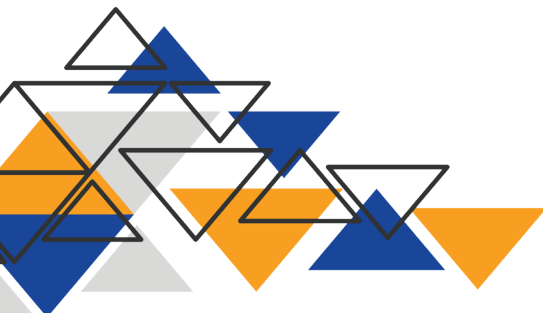
August 2022 Houston Superintendent Roundtable

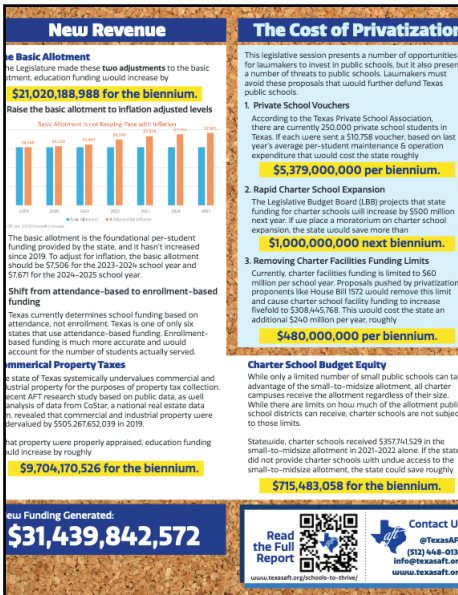
AFT President Randi Weingarten joined with Texas AFT to host a roundtable discussion with area superintendents on solutions to the current staffing crisis. The focus was practical solutions to the shortage of educators in Texas and beyond, outlined in both a national AFT report and focus groups with Texas teachers, including investing in more "grow-your-own" educator certification programs, raising pay for educators, and reducing extra, non-teaching responsibilities.



July 2022 "Texas Needs Teachers!"

Texas AFT reached out to Battelle for Kids (BFK), a national not-for-profit serving K-12 education systems for over 20 years, to facilitate conversations with teachers across the state. The goal was not only to uncover contributing factors for the educator retention crisis, but to surface solutions and give voice to those closest to the work. This paper presents the findings from a series of focus groups conducted in Dallas, El Paso, Houston, San Antonio, and the Rio Grande Valley.



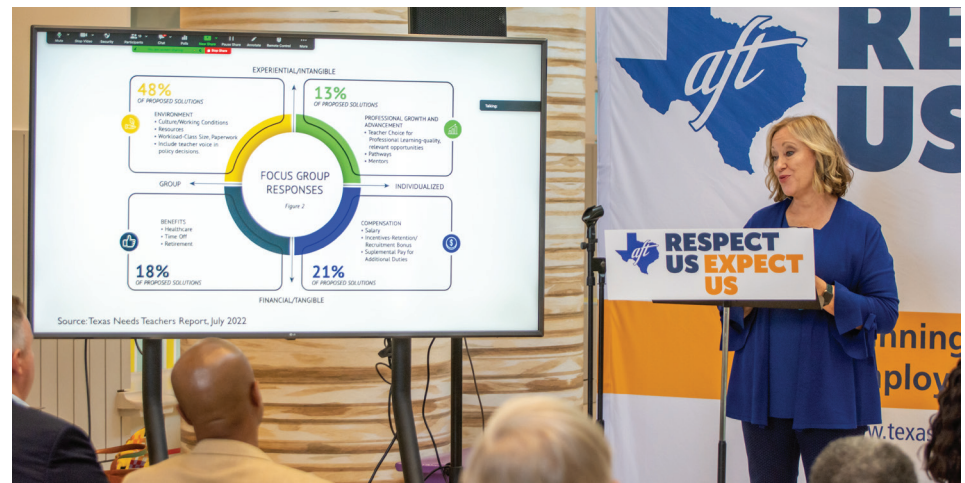


March 2023 "Fully Funded, Fully Respected"

The state of Texas spends roughly \$3,314 less per student than the national average each year. That adds up to about \$18 billion less spent on Texas public schools than elsewhere in the United States. In this report, Texas AFT and Every Texan put a price tag on a different future, one in which lawmakers prioritize respect for public schools and their employees and one in which we work together to build a public education system that helps Texas children thrive.



Socorro AFT members gather before a Socorro ISD school board meeting in May 2022. Local members used *Lost Decade* data for their district to campaign for raises, ultimately winning a 6% raise for teachers and staff, as well as a \$2,500 retention stipend and a \$15 starting minimum wage.



Karen Garza, CEO of Battelle for Kids, outlines the findings in the *Texas Needs Teachers!* report at Texas AFT's Respect campaign launch on July 24, 2022.



Rep. Alma Allen speaks at a roundtable discussion with AFT, Texas AFT, and local superintendents at the University of Houston on Aug. 30, 2022.

Local Organizing

In the past two years — under the umbrella of the Respect Campaign and beyond — we have seen tremendous successes with local unions and organizing committees fighting and winning on behalf of members in their districts.

By the Numbers: 2022 Local Wage Campaign Wins

- Texas AFT members won pay raises in 21 districts statewide.
- 15 local unions registered wins out of 19 total campaigns.
- All 3 organizing committees won their local wage campaigns.
- In Southwest Dallas AFT, 3 of 4 districts won their campaigns.
- Associate Membership Program members in Manor ISD and Judson ISD won raises too.

HIGHEST RECORDED NUMBERS

- Houston ISD: 11% average pay raise for teachers and staff on teacher pay scale and up to 16% pay raise for support staff.
- DeSoto ISD: \$6,500 pay raise at every step level for teachers.
- El Paso ISD: 7% of scale for teachers, librarians, and nurses, and 7% of midpoint for counselors.

- Austin Community College: \$20 minimum wage
- Edinburg ISD: Additional \$10/month paid by district toward employee health insurance premiums
- Manor ISD: Reading Academy stipend
- Dallas ISD: Double-digit pay increases for transportation, custodial, and food service employees.



Two Schools Saved from Closure: Faced with budget troubles, La Joya ISD proposed closing two elementary school campuses and eliminating nearly 140 jobs in February 2023. In response, La Joya AFT members sprang to action, calling a quick-response press conference and flooding the school board meeting with concerned employees and parents. On March 23, 2023, the school board voted to keep both schools open.



\$1.5 Million in COVID-19 Back Pay: Socorro AFT members lived by the #RespectUsExpectUs motto all year in their district. The local union's effort to right a wrong over COVID-19 leave paid off big in June 2022 when the Socorro ISD school board voted to return leave days and \$1.5 million in docked pay to employees. President Veronica Hernandez, pictured at Texas AFT's Public Education Advocacy Day in March, and her local union filed an associational grievance on behalf of members, but the school board ultimately chose to resolve the issue without members having to escalate the grievance.



Right to Recess for Elementary Students: Thanks to Brownsville Educators Stand Together (BEST AFT) members, every elementary school student in Brownsville ISD is now guaranteed a minimum 15-minute recess each day. "We posed the question, 'If we can waste countless hours of instructional time on excessive practice testing, then why can't we use 15 minutes a day for the well-being of our children and community?'" said Esmer Garcia Barajas, co-chair of BEST AFT and an elementary teacher. In February 2023, the district responded to BEST AFT's request, instructing principals that recess is a requirement.



Historic 2023 Wage Campaign Wins: In April 2023, San Antonio ISD passed its largest employee compensation package in over 25 years, guaranteeing raises from 4-9% for district employees. The vote was unanimous, and the product of months of advocacy by San Antonio Alliance members, who made significant across-the-board pay raises their top organizing priority at the start of the school year.



Historic 2023 Wage Campaign Wins: After a monthslong campaign, Education Austin reached an historic agreement on compensation through elected consultation with Austin ISD in May 2023. Included in the agreement — approved unanimously by the school board — are pay raises for all district employees and an increase to the district's minimum wage, bringing it up to \$20 per hour.



Reject School Vouchers & Fund Our Public Schools: Texas AFT members across the state pushed hard on their school board members to stand with us in fighting for fully funded, fully respected public schools – and against attempts to privatize and defund our schools. Cy-Fair AFT, Aldine AFT, PSJA AFT, and Socorro AFT all successfully pushed their boards to pass resolutions calling on the Legislature to increase funding for public schools and reject voucher bills.

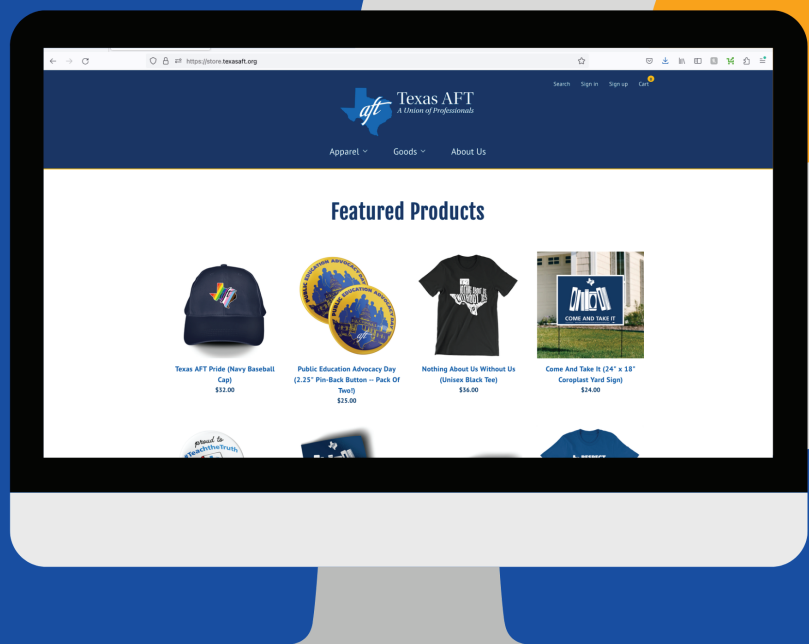
\$221,000 Promise Kept for Educators: In Spring 2023, Spring AFT Chair Yolanda Merritt spoke against Spring ISD administrators' actions denying a performance bonus previously promised to teachers with students taking the STAAR ALT 2 assessment. On Valentine's Day, Spring AFT members rallied at the school board meeting in favor of a proposed amendment to restore that pay incentive. The amendment passed, and 54 additional educators received a total of \$221,000 for their efforts.

TEXAS AFT ONLINE STORE

Help fund our fight for the next two years.
All purchases made through our online
store act as a donation to Texas AFT COPE.



Use code **CONVENTION** for 25% off
all purchases until July 1.



store.texasaft.org

Member Engagement



During the 88th Legislature alone, Texas AFT grew its list of activists and action-takers by 20,000. That work was made possible by a determined investment in engaging members, both by returning to tried-and-true organizing tactics made unavailable by COVID-19 and by maximizing new digital organizing abilities.

Win Respect Fellowship

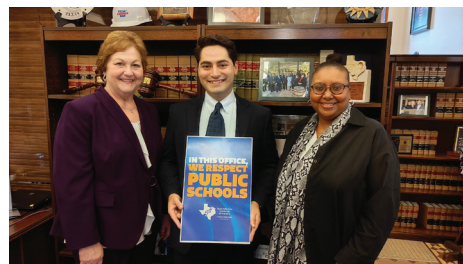
Over the summer of 2022, 335 members applied to be part of Texas AFT's Win Respect Fellowship, a five-week virtual boot camp for potential activists. Of that group, 46 members graduated as fellows, after sending 20,600 texts sent by fellows to members about the Respect campaign and requesting or scheduling 14 meetings with legislators.

Win Respect Fellowship Graduates

Annette Jones, Aldine AFT
Ashton Warren, HFT
Brian Tucker, HFT
Carlos Saucedo, El Paso AFT
Chandra Watson, Aldine AFT
Charity Okafor, Aldine AFT
Chele Bowser, Texas AFT AMP
Chikita Washington, Cy-Fair AFT
Cynthia Diedrich, Cy-Fair AFT
Denise Davis, Texas AFT AMP
Gena Coston, Aldine AFT
Julie Jackson, Texas AFT AMP
Katrina Rasmussen, Alliance-AFT
Ketra Lincoln, Cy-Fair AFT
Kevin Hopper, Education Austin
Kimberly Gale, Texas AFT AMP
Kimberly Van Putten, Texas AFT AMP
Lauren Arnice, NEHOU AFT
Laurie Duke, At Large
Leisa Jenkins, Texas AFT AMP
Leissa Kimball, San Antonio Alliance
Lisa Chamberlain, Aldine AFT
Lisseth Rodriguez, Texas AFT AMP
Lydia Echavarria, Texas AFT AMP
Mark Antley, HFT
Michael Troncale, Cy-Fair AFT
Monique Mason-Kelly, HFT
Pamela Gantt-Lee, Alliance-AFT
Patrice Brown, Manor AFT
Patrick Franklin, Texas AFT AMP
Rebecca Nealy, Texas AFT AMP
Rodrigo Joseph Rodriguez, Ed. Austin
Ruben Avalos, Socorro AFT
Sandra Herrera, McAllen AFT
Sara Fox, Texas AFT AMP
Sara Hall, HFT
Sarah Howery, Texas AFT United
Shana Long, El Paso AFT
Tammy Conrad, Ed. Round Rock
Tania Hernandez, Alliance-AFT
Teresa Razo, San Antonio Alliance
Tracy Smith, Alliance-AFT
Valerie Jeannin, San Antonio Alliance
Wendi Potts, Texas AFT AMP
Yolanda Merritt, Spring AFT
Yvonne Salazar, Socorro AFT

Regional Leadership Conferences

In 2022, Texas AFT hosted four regional leadership development conferences (in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, and McAllen) with more than 400 participating members. The conferences included modules for both campus leaders and elected leaders. Elected leaders took a deep dive into making the case for better pay and working conditions in the media and interviews. They also conducted a power analysis of their districts ahead of elections and the legislative session. Campus leaders, meanwhile, learned how to have one-on-one conversations with current and potential members and how to increase membership on their campus through mapping and charting.



Members at the Capitol

After a legislative session in 2021 with normal activities interrupted by COVID-19, Texas AFT approached the 88th Legislature differently. We returned to in-person engagement at the Capitol, including a Public Education Advocacy Day that drew 489 members to Austin on March 13. But we also leveraged digital tools to maintain advocacy from members statewide, even if they couldn't make it to Austin. The result: our largest, most sustained member mobilization effort to date.

26,000+

Unique Texas AFT action-takers through the legislative session, with at least one call, email or visit made to every Texas House and Texas Senate office

4,331

Tracked phone calls made to representatives and senators this session (with many more reported anecdotally)

500+

In-person attendees of advocacy day events throughout the session

40+

Texas AFT, AAUP, and Retiree Plus members — and parent allies — who signed up to testify on various bills being heard in committee

"If you want to see something changed, you've got to be the change you want to see. You've got to be the person who makes the world a better place for our kids."

**PEARL WEST
CHILD NUTRITION MANAGER
NORTHSIDE AFT**



Political Organizing

Texas AFT members were heavily engaged in political races over the course of the last two years, in their districts, for the Legislature, and for statewide office. Tens of thousands of Texas AFT members vote in every election, and they made their voices heard canvassing, phone-banking, sending texts, and writing postcards for candidates across Texas.

November 2021 school board races saw Houston and Cy-Fair members fight for diversity, equity, and inclusion at their school boards against well-funded far-right political action committees.

In a welcome twist to our union's campaign message, several Texas AFT



members said “Respect Us and Elect Us” in 2022 primary elections, where teachers like Chris Leal in Dallas and Coretta Mallet-Fontenot in Houston left their classrooms to run for the state House and the State Board of Education, respectively. Aldine AFT President Candis Houston came within 219 votes of unseating long-time Rep. Harold Dutton.



Texas AFT members fought hard for public schools in November 2022 elections, making more than 17,000 phone calls and sending 221,000 texts to fellow school employees and Texas voters.

While our statewide Respect Slate came up short, the 2022 election cycle saw several new allies join the Texas House and Senate and several more keep their seats.

Members built on the momentum from their electoral work during the 2023 legislative session to apply pressure to lawmakers they had been integral in electing, including Sen. Morgan LaMantia in the Rio Grande Valley.

Members also kept up the engagement and momentum in their districts.

In May 2023, their hard work paid off, with a series of sweeping wins for educator-endorsed candidates, including in Socorro ISD and Northside ISD.



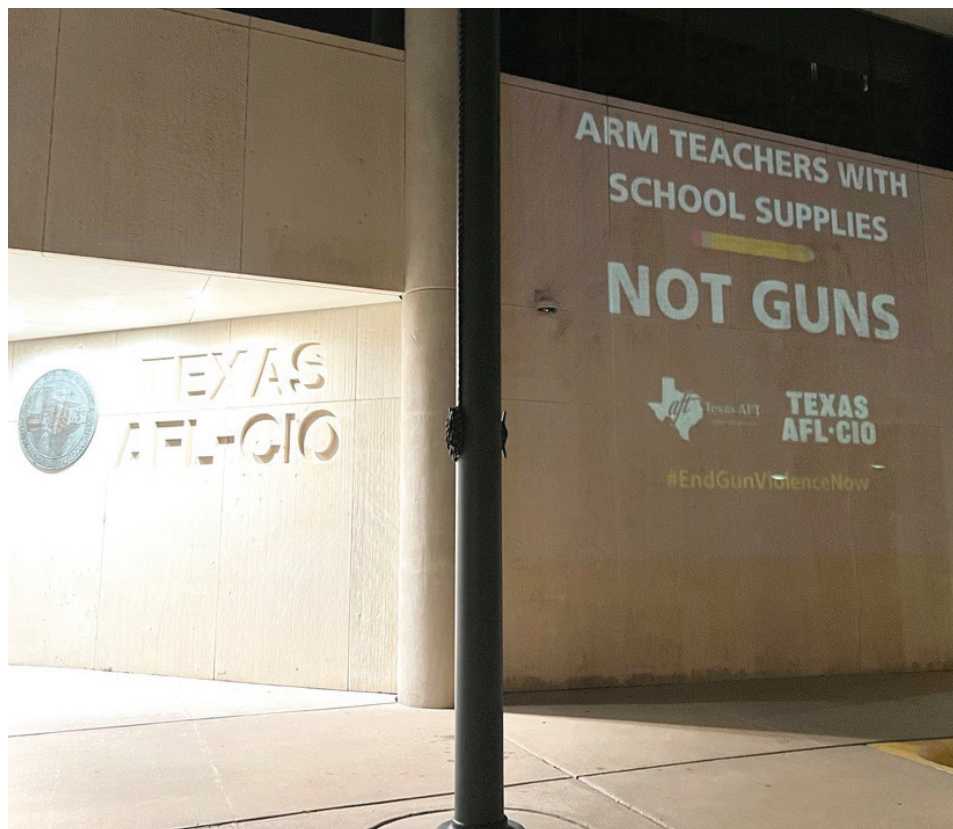
Response to Uvalde

On May 24, 2022, a gunman shot and killed 19 students and two teachers at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas. It was an unthinkable tragedy, but unfortunately, not an unexpected one.

Texas trails only California in the number of school shootings since 1970. The events in Uvalde added a new, difficult dimension to our campaign for the respect educators deserve — because respect means making sure they come home at the end of the day.

Almost immediately, state leaders began floating “solutions” to gun violence in our schools. Chief among them: requiring educators to train and be ready to use a firearm themselves. Once again, we made ourselves heard.

In a quick-response survey of Texas public school employees and parents, 5,100 Texans spoke forcefully.



TEXAS AFT GUN VIOLENCE SURVEY

77% of Texas school employees said they did not want to be armed or expected to intercept a shooter

90% of Texas school employees said they were worried their campus could be the next site of a tragedy

More than 90% of Texas school employees said they supported commonsense gun reforms, including comprehensive background checks on all gun purchases (99%), red-flag warning laws (98%), and raising the legal gun ownership age to 21 (96%).





On June 3, 2022, Texas AFT members and labor allies marched to U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz's office in downtown Austin to deliver a message: We need real, significant legislation to make it harder to use weapons of war. If the senator wouldn't support that legislation, he should get out of the way.



Days after the shooting in Uvalde, our national union convened a roundtable discussion in Houston, open to the media, about the need for real reform to end gun violence. Joining Texas AFT local union presidents were AFT President Randi Weingarten, NEA President Becky Pringle, and survivors of previous school shootings, including David Hogg, co-founder of March for Our Lives.

TEXAS AFT DISASTER RELIEF FUND

Following the shooting at Robb Elementary, Texas AFT members rallied in solidarity and support. Altogether, members donated **\$25,000** to support the Uvalde community.

ABOUT OUR FUND

Whether our members face tornadoes, tropical storms, hurricanes, school shootings, or other catastrophic events, Texas AFT is ready to help — through disaster relief checks, safe places to stay, and hands-on clean-up help. Thanks to the generosity of AFT members, we have established our Texas AFT Disaster Relief Fund.

Our fund provides donors a tax-deductible opportunity to help others. 100% of proceeds are distributed to those in need.

**Make a donation today
by visiting:**

www.texasaft.org/relief

Texas AFT in the News

One major goal of our Respect campaign: change the narrative in Texas. Through COVID-19 and in the 87th Legislature, educators were preoccupied fending off attacks on our profession, on our professionalism, on our students, and on our very rights as Texans.

Given who is in charge in Texas, we knew we'd have to keep fighting back. But in the past two years, we have also made a determined effort to fight forward on issues that genuinely matter.

We had to change the narrative in this state. And we did.

Between January 2021 and June 2023, our state federation and state federation president were mentioned in 5,847 news stories. One even dubbed us “the most aggressive of Texas’ four teacher groups.”

It was our message of respect — or the lack of it — that carried every news cycle and dominated conversation. So much so that Gov. Greg Abbott finally convened his own task force on teacher vacancies, which produced a report in early 2023 that mirrored our own recommendations.



Houston Federation of Teachers President Jackie Anderson and Education Round Rock President Tammy Conrad speak to the press about our union's Respect campaign.




e-Edition

Texas teachers demand higher pay, safer conditions as school shooting fears rise and staffing worsens

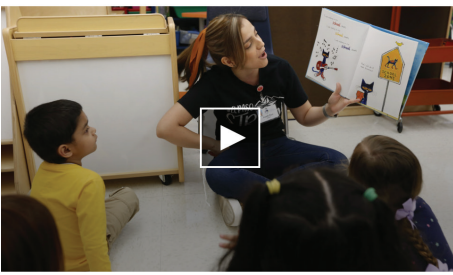
 **Jhair Romero, Staff writer**

Updated: July 25, 2022 4:30 p.m.




69°WATCH

Survey finds most Texas educators consider leaving profession

by Amanda Guillen
Mon, February 7th 2022, 2:24 PM CST



Students in classroom at Mesita Elementary School. (Credit: El Paso ISD)

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81°FOX 44 NEWS.com

Texas AFT speaks about the “crisis” in our schools during pandemic

by: [Nohely Mendoza](#)
Posted: Feb 7, 2022 / 04:17 PM CST
Updated: Feb 7, 2022 / 06:11 PM CST

With no sign of the pandemic coming to an end, the Texas American Federation of Teachers (Texas AFT) says educators in our state are being stretched too thin, and many are ready to leave teaching behind.

The union says its up to our state leadership to fix the problem.

“A lot of teachers, myself included just don’t feel safe,” said Shana Pawlowski, 5th grade math teacher for New Caney ISD.

News Weather

Focus at Four: Texas American Federation of Teachers breaks down proposed raises for Texas teachers

According to the National Education Association, Texas ranks 28th in the nation for teacher pay.

STUDIO

AUSTIN

KBTX First News at Four EXTENDED(Recurring)

By [Heather Falls](#)

Published: Feb. 15, 2023 at 5:30 PM CST

San Antonio Report

[Donate](#)

Private school vouchers are modern-day segregation

by [Dwight Harris](#)
May 16, 2023

UVALDE SHOOTING

Teachers: We need more counseling and fewer guns

BY KIMBERLY REEVES | AUSTIN
PUBLISHED 6:25 PM CT JUN. 08, 2022

AUSTIN, Texas — The most aggressive of Texas' four teacher groups is pushing hard, with new survey results, to force Texas lawmakers to do something significant to make Texas schools safe.

≡
The Dallas Morning News
My Account

NEWS > EDUCATION

'Lackluster so far': Texas teachers want action on better pay, work conditions

Teachers are watching the Legislature closely amid an educator recruitment and retention crisis

Dallas ISD teacher Katrina Rasmussen pictured outside her home on Tuesday, April 18, 2023 in Dallas. Rasmussen wants legislators to do more when it comes to pay increases and school safety. (Elías Valverde II / Staff Photographer)

78°

KXAN

IN-DEPTH. INVESTIGATIVE.

TEXAS POLITICS

'Left out': School support staff push for better pay amid teacher raises

by: [Ryan Chandler](#)
Posted: Apr 29, 2023 / 06:30 AM CDT
Updated: Apr 29, 2023 / 08:59 AM CDT

AUSTIN (Nexstar) — After more than two decades serving students as a special education paraeducator, Tammy Reyes feels right at home in her Galena Park school. The struggle begins, however, when she finds no place to go home after school.

Legislative Update

Texas AFT's 2023 Respect Agenda

Our union's top priority is to fight for the resources our schools need to keep our students and staff safe, healthy, and thriving. Our demands for the Texas Legislature include:



Respect in our paychecks.

Across-the-board statewide raises for all certified and classified school employees will help stop the school staffing crisis.



Respect for our classrooms.

Close the class size loopholes! Every year, the Texas Education Agency lets districts dodge class size laws, leaving parents in the dark, students in overcrowded classrooms, and educators with overwhelming workloads.



Respect for our schedules.

We need a defined work year with a specific number of contract days. Educators shouldn't have to sacrifice weekends with their families to fill the gaps left by the state's chronic underfunding of our public education system.



Our Respect Agenda

As we planned our agenda for the 88th legislative session, we started with the experts and asked for our members' opinions in comprehensive surveys and focus groups, which then fed our *Texas Needs Teachers!* report. The information we learned, coupled with the research from the *Lost Decade* report, determined that our top priority would be to fight for the additional resources our schools need to keep our students and school employees safe, healthy, and thriving.

Specifically, our members sought respect in their paychecks, respect for their classrooms, and respect for their schedules. Our member-activists had to be the centerpiece of our legislative fight, showing legislators that teachers and school support staff know their worth and are ready to fight for it. Our new digital organizing strategies also meant that members who could not make it to Austin could get involved and could get their friends and family involved too. In fact, your advocacy was so powerful that legislators began forwarding their calls!

Our Fight Against Privatization

Leading up to the session, it became clear that despite the \$33 billion in surplus funding for the state, the governor and lieutenant governor were determined to push privatization efforts instead of properly funding public schools. Never had we seen the millions in campaign spending and marketing efforts by billionaires determined to privatize our public schools with vouchers and more charter schools while demonizing the educators and school staff who serve all public school students.

Our members made clear that we could either have well-funded public schools or privatization, but we could not have both. The House had already signaled its opposition to vouchers by adding the Herrero Amendment to its version of the state budget earlier in the session. In response, in the final days of the session, the Senate set up a hostage situation with teacher raises in exchange for vouchers that would defund our schools. That ploy failed because you did what you do every single day: put the needs of your students above all else.



McAllen AFT members joined with others in the community to protest at an April 2023 stop on Gov. Abbott's "parental empowerment" tour, touting school vouchers at almost exclusively private religious schools.





Forrest Wilder
@Forrest4Trees

The regular legislative session just concluded in late May without an increase to per-student funding or teacher pay. Lawmakers had a \$32.7 billion revenue surplus at their disposal. “Is this a joke?” asked the president of [@texasaft](#).

A Lost Session'

We consider this “a lost session” for public education. The Legislature could have made long-lasting improvements to public schools, but it chose not to. It was only the relentless fighting by our members’ that won a cost-of-living adjustment for retired teachers and stopped the very real threat of the privatization of our public schools through vouchers and more full-time virtual charter schools.

This is why the governor is threatening a special session on school finance that could include privatization — but not until September 2023, when teachers and support staff will be hard at work.

But if the governor thinks he can sneak a voucher past the vast majority of Texans who oppose privatization, he’s mistaken. Our members were hard at work in May too, and they still denied him the voucher he campaigned for all session.



Nearly 500 Texas AFT members from across the state traveled to the Capitol on March 13 for our Public Education Advocacy Day. The day included a member orientation, meetings with representatives, a People’s Hearing with testimony from members and experts, and a rally outside the Texas AFL-CIO.

Higher Education

In 2022, at our union's national convention, the American Association of University Professors formally merged with AFT at the national level. While at the state level, Texas AFT and Texas AAUP are not merged, our union had an almost immediate opportunity to stand in solidarity with Texas AAUP as they withstood an onslaught of attacks this legislative session.

While lobbying against these attacks on behalf of our own higher education locals, Texas AFT also provided support to Texas AAUP.

The Fight for Academic Freedom

Many of the attacks levied at higher education this legislative session mirror attacks that have been directed at public education in the past: the rollback of workplace protections, censorship of educators, and the general silencing of diverse voices.

The three key bills laid out as priorities by Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick that targeted higher education professionals were:

- Senate Bill 16, banning “CRT” in higher education
- Senate Bill 17, banning diversity, equity, and inclusion programs on college campuses
- Senate Bill 18, banning tenure

Through the collective efforts of Texas AFT, Texas AAUP, and many other stakeholder groups, the worst of the attacks went unrealized. SB 16 did not pass, and SB 17 and SB 18 were amended to be weaker than their originally filed versions. While SB 17 severely rolls back DEI programs, SB 18 no longer bans tenure.

Funding Our Community Colleges

After decades of underfunding, community colleges in Texas finally will see a funding boost from the Legislature. House Bill 8, the community college finance bill, would increase community college funding by \$650 million. These funds would be distributed via formulas that emphasize “outcomes” whereas the current formula emphasizes “contact hours.”

While Texas AFT has issues with the method for distributing these funds, we are pleased that the Legislature has finally provided community colleges with additional funding that they desperately need. Now, we await the governor's signature.



Texas AAUP members and allies protest bills attacking higher education and academic freedom on May 3, 2023, coinciding with a mini advocacy day for Texas AFT members too.



Building Power: AAUP and AFT Formalize Affiliation: The 2022 AFT national convention hall erupted in cheers, applause, high-fives, and a few dance moves as AFT President Randi Weingarten and American Association of University Professors President Irene Mulvey signed a formal agreement to affiliate, creating a powerful force for higher education advocacy.



Austin Community College President David Albert and Brian Evans, vice president of the Texas Conference of the AAUP, meet with Rep. James Talarico in January 2023.

Texas AFT Retiree Plus

The Road to COLA

Since its inception, the primary goal of Texas AFT Retiree Plus has been to win a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) retirees across the state. In Texas, a retired educators' annuity is set at the time of retirement and will not increase without direct intervention by the Legislature to raise that annuity, even as the cost-of-living continues to rise dramatically due to inflation. After years of Retiree Plus advocacy, the Legislature finally voted in the 88th Legislature to provide retired educators with a one-time benefit increase, as well as a one-time supplemental check for retirees 70 years and older.

While we're disappointed these increases are much less than retirees deserve (the maximum increase is 6% and the minimum increase is 2%) and that more recent retirees were not included in the COLA, even this victory would not have been possible without Retiree Plus activism.

Retirees at the Capitol

This legislative session, Retiree Plus members contacted their legislators with letters, phone calls, and visits to Capitol offices.

For the first time, Retiree Plus had its own advocacy day at



Retiree Plus members gathered at the Texas Capitol on April 24, 2023, to advocate for a real cost-of-living adjustment for retired educators. Retiree Plus Chair Rita Runnels spoke at a press conference in the morning with Reps. John Bryan, Mihaela Plesa, and Josey Garcia.

the Capitol, in addition to the broader Texas AFT advocacy day. Dozens of retirees from across the state arrived in Austin on April 24, 2023, for a press conference and visits to legislative offices. This press conference came just a few days before the Texas House passed the first TRS COLA in over a decade.

Over several weeks throughout the legislative session, Retiree Plus members traveled to the Capitol to testify about retiree needs, specifically focusing on the need for a TRS COLA. Testimony gave the opportunity to directly communicate to legislators what they are going

through and why a COLA was so necessary. Retirees described their own personal struggles making ends meet with the high levels of inflation that they are experiencing.



Retiree Sharon Snowton testified before the House Public Education Committee. She's pictured with Rep. Jacey Jetton and HFT member, Cheryl Laws, a full-time nurse.



“I do not have cable television — can’t afford it. I do not have a cellphone or cellphone plan — can’t afford it. I do not have credit cards — cannot afford them. I do not go shopping for clothes. All my clothes are what I wear now: vintage like me. I need a COLA.”

**SHARON SNOWTON
RETIRED EDUCATOR
SOUTHWEST DALLAS AFT**

Sharon is pictured after testifying to the House Public Education Committee. Pictured here with Rep. Jacey Jetton and Houston Federation of Teachers member Cheryl Laws.



Phyllis Ruffin, TRS Board of Trustees Finalist

In May 2023, Texas AFT retiree Phyllis Ruffin was selected as a finalist to fill a vacant position on the Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) Board of Trustees. Tens of thousands of votes were cast by active and retired employees across the state. Ruffin, a retired behavior interventionist and paraprofessional with Alief ISD, received almost 20,000 votes for the “at-large” trustee position on the board. As one of the top-three vote getters, Ruffin’s name was one of three finalists sent to Gov. Greg Abbott for consideration.

Phyllis Ruffin, right, with Retiree Plus Chair Rita Runnels and Rep. John Bucy.

Locals & Staff

Local Unions & Organizing Committees

- AFT College of the Mainland Organizing Committee
- AFT Lone Star College
- Aldine AFT
- Alief AFTSE
- Alliance/AFT
- Amarillo AFT
- Austin Community College AFT
- Bastrop Federation of Teachers
- Bexar County Federation of Teachers
- Brazosport Federation of Teachers
- Brownsville Educators Stand Together (BEST AFT) Organizing Committee
- Corpus Christi AFT
- Cy-Fair AFT
- Del Rio AFT
- Edinburg AFT
- Education Austin
- Education Round Rock
- El Paso AFT
- Fort Bend Employee Federation
- Goose Creek AFT
- Greater Waco AFT Organizing Committee
- Houston Educational Support Personnel (HESP)
- Houston Federation of Teachers
- Killeen Federation of Teachers
- La Joya AFT
- McAllen AFT
- Northeast Houston AFT
- Northside AFT
- Pflugerville AFT
- PSJA AFT
- San Antonio Alliance
- Socorro AFT
- Southwest Dallas AFT
- Spring AFT Organizing Committee
- Spring Branch HFT
- Texas AFT United Solidarity Chapter
- Victoria AFT

Texas AFT Leadership & Staff

LEADERSHIP

- Zeph Capo, president
- Ray McMurrey, secretary-treasurer

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & FINANCE

- Nancy DeLeon, office manager
- Molly Tovar, administrative assistant
- Ofelia Rodriguez, administrative service coordinator
- Trishan Turner, membership support specialist
- Patricia Estrada, membership support specialist
- Claudia Flores, membership support specialist
- Cameron Greer, community engagement coordinator

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

- Patty Quinzi, director of public affairs and legislative counsel
- Kelsey Kling, government relations specialist and policy analyst
- Alejandro Peña, government relations specialist and policy analyst
- Eli Melendrez, staff writer and researcher
- Dwight Harris, lobbyist

STRATEGIC CAMPAIGNS

- Susan Polouski, special assistant to the president
- Anthony Elmo, political director
- Nicole Hill, communications director

- Katherine Daniel, lead digital organizer
- Marco Guajardo, digital organizer
- Jami Vines, political organizer
- Sierra Wiggers, digital organizer and graphic designer

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- Jamie Womack-Williams, state education issues and Bridges Institute director
- Derrick Donnell, senior organizer
- Shelley Potter, consultant
- Andrea Benton, lead organizer
- Vilma Morera, lead organizer
- Elena Herrera-Gonzalez, lead organizer
- Greg Rodriguez, lead organizer
- Diana Falcon, lead organizer
- Mike Young, lead organizer
- Thomas Jones, organizer
- Bianca Castro, organizer
- Cynthia Flores, organizer
- Emily Million, organizer

OPERATIONS

- Tanner Williams, director of operations
- Dianne Gutierrez, associate director of operations
- Don Welch, associate director of operations
- Kat Kupelian, senior organizer
- Daniel Dean, data manager
- Isaac Crone, data specialist
- Jennifer Ruiz, membership resolution specialist
- Alexia Solis, membership resolution specialist
- Luis Tovar, membership resolution specialist

"What do you think public education will be like five years from now? If they are passing the kinds of rules they are passing right now, how much worse can it get? Joining our union is a positive way to fight for our children, our schools, and our democracy as a whole."

**MICHAEL TRONCALE
TEACHER
CY-FAIR AFT**





A Union of Professionals
Texas AFT
AFL-CIO



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