



# PSRP Report

For paraprofessional & school related personnel members of Texas AFT Summer 2013

## Hard work during session pays off with funding for pay raises, new staff

With the recession and ensuing budget cuts in 2011, most school employees across the state have seen little or no increase in pay over the past few years.

Thanks to hard work from our grass-roots lobbyists—Texas AFT members—legislators restored some 85 percent of the formula aid (\$3.4 billion) to districts in the legislative session ending in May. And PSRPs statewide are seeing the results with pay raises and increased staffing.

“We’ve succeeded at getting an across the board \$1-per-hour raise for support employees,” said Juan Luna, staff representative for La Joya AFT. “That’s the first raise for these employees since 2006, and it’s well deserved.”

*See “Pay” on page 5*



## New law amends Safe Schools Act to give more authority to bus drivers

Bus drivers will now have more authority to maintain a safe environment when transporting students after the passage of a new provision to the Safe Schools Act.

SB 1541 by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte (D-San Antonio) and House author Rep. Alma Allen (D-Houston) bolsters the authority of school

bus drivers to remove disruptive students. The law requires each district’s code of student conduct to specify the circumstances in which students may be removed from a school bus, and it affirms that drivers may remove a student to maintain effective discipline.

Credit for sparking this legislative

*See “Bus drivers” on page 3*



For a Spanish version of this report, contact your local office or Texas AFT at 800-222-3827. Para recibir una copia de éste reporte en español, favor de llamar a la oficina de su sindicato local, o Texas AFT a 800-222-3827.

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# A new tool for PSRPs and our union ... Grab a copy!

When I tell people I represent PSRPs in Texas, the first question is “What is a PSRP?” I answer, Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel, which is a real mouthful! But even when I spell it out, many people still don’t understand who we are and what we do.

Even people who work in the schools with us might think only about the people they see every

counselors, librarians, other PSRPs, administrators, school board members, and more, and also outside our schools in the greater community at large.

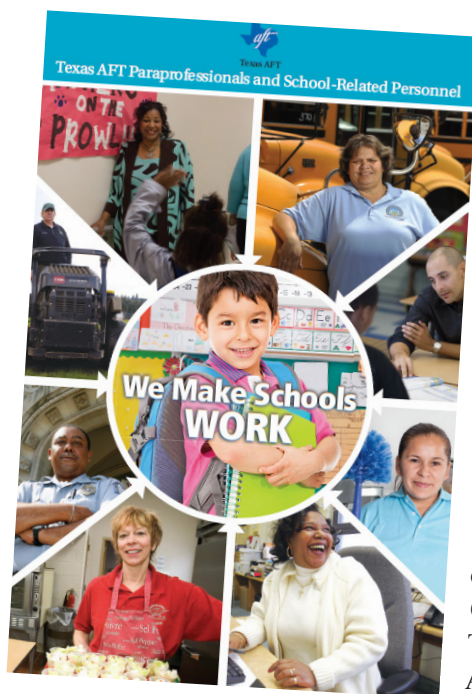


Rachel Martinez  
Texas AFT PSRP  
Committee Chair

budgets get tight, and the ongoing issue of mutual respect in the workplace.

Your local union should have plenty of copies ready for you to use when talking to prospective members, to your church, to your community groups, to anyone who cares about you and cares about our schools. It is up to us to share this information with others so they can truly understand our role in the schools. Sometimes we all forget how many different jobs there are in this large and varied group called PSRPs!

You can read a bit more about the brochure on page 4. Grab a brochure and join me in spreading the word! We just might get some new allies in the community and some new members in our union!



day, and forget that there is a whole team of hard-working individuals scattered throughout the district, working in the central offices or service centers, handling maintenance and school security, cleaning and cooking, and transporting students, whether they are seen by everyone or not.

And outside our schools, even fewer people realize how many hundreds of different jobs we have! Well, Texas AFT wants to help us educate our communities, both inside our schools with teachers,

Our state PSRP Committee has helped shape a new tool for us to use, a brochure—entitled “We Make Schools Work”—available in English or Spanish that helps educate anyone about who we are, what we do, and what issues are near and dear to us. It is also designed to help us organize other PSRPs who are not yet members of our union.

I can’t tell you how excited I am about this new piece of literature! I have already shared it with the Executive Council of our AFL-CIO Central Labor Council and got a great response! This is the fulfillment of a Texas AFT convention resolution and the realization of a dream of mine, an easy tool that any of us can use to explain to others what we do as education employees and why we are union members.

The inside cover lists dozens of different job descriptions to remind readers how varied our jobs are, and the inside pages go over some of the big issues that are common to almost all support personnel: the desire for meaningful professional development, the Fair Labor Standards Act and abuse of overtime, the threat of privatization or contracting out our jobs as school

## Want more PSRP news?

Want to hear about how laws affect you in the workplace?



Sign up for the Texas AFT Legislative Hotline by e-mail at [www.texasaft.org](http://www.texasaft.org)

## PSRP Report

Linda Bridges, President  
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Media coverage of protests by Houston ISD drivers and members of the Houston Educational Support Personnel local helped provide momentum for passage of the new law giving bus drivers more disciplinary authority.

## Bus drivers From page 1

initiative goes to the president of Texas AFT’s Houston Educational Support Personnel local in Houston ISD, Wretha Thomas, and the members of her local. Effective testimony in support of the bill was provided by Karen Barnes, a bus-driver trainer and leader in our Education Austin local in Austin ISD.

The law also strengthens the Safe Schools Act to allow a school bus driver to remove and send a student to the principal in order



Education Austin’s Karen Barnes gave powerful testimony in support of SB 1541 at a Capitol hearing.

to maintain discipline on a school bus. The principal is required to employ discipline management techniques consistent with the district’s student code of conduct.

For serious misconduct on a school bus that would compel expulsion or disciplinary alternative placement if it occurred in a classroom, the same consequences

**The issue goes beyond dealing with students who disrupt the learning of others. It is a matter of dealing with misconduct that can threaten life and limb as we transport our children to school.**

— Linda Bridges, Texas AFT President

must apply: the driver must send the student to the principal, and the principal must take the action required.

“Like teachers, school bus drivers are entrusted with keeping our children safe, and this bill gives them needed tools to handle serious issues of disruptive and dangerous conduct,” said Texas AFT President Linda Bridges. “The issue goes beyond dealing with students who disrupt the learning of others. It is a matter of dealing with misconduct that can threaten life and limb as we transport our children to school. A school bus driver needs support in responding to serious misconduct on the bus.”

Members of the Houston Educational Support Personnel Union (one of two Texas AFT affiliates in

Houston ISD) brought this issue to the forefront last year, when they gathered at district headquarters to demand action to correct dangerous conditions that jeopardize safety for students and drivers alike.

Said HESP President Wretha Thomas (as quoted in the Houston Chronicle): “We have kids jumping out of the back of the school bus while buses are moving.” She added: “We have kids every day that come on the bus smoking marijuana. We have kids on our buses every week fighting. We have bus drivers being disrespected every day.”

Several of the HESP bus drivers present spoke of physical assaults on drivers and shots fired at school buses. Ruby Carter told the Chronicle, “We’ve had drivers get completely knocked out. Some of the kids are way bigger than the drivers.”

Thanks go to all the members who took action by sending online letters in support of this legislation to their lawmakers.

# We make schools WORK

## Texas AFT Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel

*The following is an abbreviated version of the new outreach brochure for PSRPs. To order copies, call 800-222-3827.*

### Our Work

There are thousands of paraprofessionals and support personnel across the great state of Texas. We share a pride in our work and our schools, but our students are always first in our minds and our hearts.

Our jobs are varied—there are hundreds of job titles describing the work we do. We know the core services we provide are essential to the success of our public schools. We know we make schools work. We have daily contact with students on the bus and the playground, in the cafeteria and the classroom, in the hallway and the front office. We work behind the scenes to ensure clean and secure buildings, smooth administrative functioning, quality nutrition, safe buses, and needed support for all who deliver services to students.

### Our Issues

The issues that concern us are as varied as our job titles, but there are some key areas that affect almost all of us.

**Professional Development:** We love our work and we want to do the best job possible. To that end, we desire professional development that enhances our skills and helps us shine as we serve our students. The union has developed partnerships in several districts across the state to help provide the quality training we want. We believe all school districts should offer meaningful professional development for every category of employee.

**Privatization:** When school districts feel a financial crunch—all too common in Texas with our history of devastating cuts to public education—there is a temptation to contract out core services in an attempt to save money. Extensive research shows how these misguided attempts to save money typically cost the district in different ways. There is a loss of direct accountability to the public and the parents as the contracted employees report to a private company instead of the school district, while the privatized support personnel are either out of a job or must work for less pay and fewer benefits. Texas AFT believes contracting out is wrong: harmful to our students and harmful to those who have worked diligently in our schools.

**Overtime Abuse:** Another result of the immense pressure on schools to perform at ever-higher levels with reduced staff (and limited funds) is the practice of encouraging employees to work overtime without compensation. The Fair Labor



Standards Act provides clear guidance on overtime, and Texas AFT has worked hard to create manuals, pamphlets, and training materials to inform workers and their bosses of the federal law.

**Respect:** Respect is the most intangible of our issues, but one that shows up regularly in conversations with our co-workers. Perhaps bus routes are distributed to “favorites” instead of through a clear system that all agree is fair. Maybe cafeteria workers are left out of school lockdown drills or holiday parties. Lower pay, unpaid vacation and skimpy benefits do not show respect. Or support personnel are not given a voice in decision-making within our own profession, looked over instead of looked to for their expertise. The union is committed to empowering support personnel to stand up and demand the same respect we show parents, students, co-workers and our employers.

### Our Union

As school support personnel, we understand the value of standing together as a union, working to create a voice that can be heard in our schools, in our districts, and at the Capitol.

We join Texas AFT for many reasons: we want someone watching our backs, a structure to help us make needed changes, member benefits that help our families save money, job security, and professional development. We are proud to be part of a union that celebrates all its members: paraprofessionals and school related personnel, teachers and counselors and librarians, nursing professionals, community college faculty and staff, and more. We are encouraged to attend workshops to improve our skills in union leadership and effectively advocate our own unique issues. We choose to participate—to actively embrace our role in the union.

**Texas AFT is the way to make our voices heard!**

## Texas AFT leader honored with Albert P. Shanker Pioneer Award

Rachel Martinez, a long-time champion of PSRPs and their efforts to gain rights and respect in the workplace, recently was awarded the Albert P. Shanker Pioneer Award.

The award was presented in March at the AFT PSRP Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and is given to union members who have:

- Demonstrated leadership skills in the union, on the job and in the community;
- been a leader in the fight to win recognition for the important work PSRPs do in our nation's schools;
- overseen development and implementation of innovative programs to address PSRP issues;
- been active and a leader at all levels of the union; and
- through their work, made the



Rachel Martinez, center, leads a team of San Antonio Alliance members for a Texas AFT Lobby Day.

union and our schools a better place for PSRPs and students. Martinez—executive vice president of the San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel—started her career as a parent volunteer, and was hired in 1994 by San Antonio ISD as a community liaison after the district noted her skills in working with parents and school employees. She quickly found a home as an active member of the local union and became part

of its leadership team in 2003. (Rachel also is the chair of the Texas AFT PSRP Committee and regular columnist for this newsletter!)

“We’re fortunate to have a union leader who always is at the forefront in looking out for PSRPs,” said Texas AFT President Linda Bridges. “A lot of the work Rachel has done has been emulated by our other local unions, so she’s a role model, a mentor and last but not least, someone who is relentless in seeking solutions for the challenges PSRPs face in the workplace.”

Readers of the *PSRP Report* will know that Martinez has successfully led school employees in efforts to gain respect and professional development opportunities, ensure overtime pay, stop privatization of core services, protect the health and safety of employees, and garner higher pay.

## Pay ————— From page 1

Initial legislative proposals would have restored much less funding—as low as 28 cents on the dollar. But thousands of letters and phone calls helped spur a more significant result.

But pay raises, of course, are not automatic, and Texas AFT local affiliates already are at the forefront of efforts to ensure that the employees and kids who bore the brunt of the harsh 2011 budget cuts now get the benefit of restored funding.

For a complete summary of the Legislative session, see [www.texasaft.org](http://www.texasaft.org), and click on “2013 Legislative Wrap-Up.”

## Become a founding member of the 1,000 Club:

Texas AFT under state law is not allowed to use member dues money for political contributions to candidates. So voluntary contributions from members to the Committee On Political Education (COPE II) are the only means to provide direct financial support to candidates. Additionally, Texas AFT can only solicit from its members and their immediate family members for contributions to COPE II. (If you are unsure about eligibility, give us a call and we will help you figure it out!

For more information on COPE II, visit [www.texasaft.org](http://www.texasaft.org) or contact Louis Malfaro, Texas AFT secretary-treasurer, at 800-222-3827.

Join the 1,000 Club as a founding member and we’ll send you a T-shirt showing you are ready to stand up for change at the Capitol.







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Paraprofessionals providing direct support to students, support personnel who drive school buses, leaders who manage the office, or school nurses who support the health needs of young people—each provides critical support to the education enterprise that allow students to achieve and thrive.

Share My Lesson values the contributions of these key people and all PSRPs in our education workforce. To support them, Share My Lesson offers these specialized collections of resources and materials to help them be successful. Collections include resources for:

- Anti-bullying
- Classroom Management
- Coping with Natural Disasters
- Coping with Traumatic Events
- Paraprofessionals and School Support Staff Training

**[www.sharemylesson.com](http://www.sharemylesson.com)**