

Which poet best describes what our schoolchildren experience each spring?



A In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love



C Use your tools and circle clues.
And you'll rock those STAAR blues.
Show the state how much you know.
Pass the test. Way to Go!
This is what you studied for.
Impress your teachers with your score.
(STAAR pep rally song)



B In time of silver rain When spring
And life
Are new.



D In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt.

answer: unfortunately, it's "C"

Reclaim the Promise of Public Education

OUR **SCHOOLS**, OUR **SOLUTIONS**



May Mobilization Plan Your Event!

In May, we are taking our next step to fight for and reclaim the promise of the public services, healthcare systems, higher education institutions and public schools that are the anchors of our democracy and the basis for the quest for a better life. This May, we will continue to reclaim the promise; we will focus attention on the urgent need to restore equity to national, state and local policies that allow all to dream their dreams and achieve them.

May 17 marks the 60th anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Many AFT affiliates will participate in celebrations of that ruling, which established that we cannot be equal without equal access to education. We will also have actions on Worthy Wage Day / May Day / International Workers' Day on May 1, National Teachers Day on May 6 and throughout the week of May 6-9 for Nurses Week.

Be part of the effort by planning an event or activity, centered on your local or state issue, that brings your members together with others in your community to make a united call for the restoration of equity in all of our lives.

Visit www.texasaftorg/events to register your event and order materials!

Member Benefits



Thinking of treating yourself or your family to a vacation?

Make the **Texas AFT Travel Center** your first stop, so you can take advantage of discounts and special prices available to union members and their families.

To begin with, you're eligible for up to 25 percent off a rental car, van, SUV, or truck from the six largest auto rental companies. (Don't forget to join the Motor Club for 24-hour assistance on the road.)

Wherever you're going, we'll help you find deals on theme parks, zoos, major league baseball games, movies, Broadway theaters, museums, restaurants, and more. Condo rental agents have low prices for you, too.

Going farther afield? You can search for flights and hotels on our **Travel Center** pages. Or save \$150 with our premium partners for escorted tours to Europe, the Far East, Africa, and the Americas.

Sound good? Get ready to enjoy a more affordable adventure. You've earned it!

Visit www.unionplus.org to get started, or contact Barbara Lighthouse at 800-222-3827.



Cy-Fair AFT effort helps custodians
"Stay Cool in School," p. 12

May Mobilization	Inside Cover
Member Benefits	1
Viewpoint	2
Union secures three-year contracts	3
Randi Weingarten visits Texas	3
From the Secretary-Treasurer	4
First Book news	5
Legislative updates	6-8
Nancy Vera profile	9
Election 2014	10
Join the 1,000 Club	10
Locals and Members in Action	12
How to join Texas AFT	13
Share My Lesson	Back Cover

Texas Teacher

Texas Teacher is the award-winning publication of Texas AFT. The publication is printed quarterly.

For advertising inquiries, or to be added to our mailing list, contact editor@texasaft.org.



Texas AFT

3000 South IH-35, Suite 175
Austin, Texas 78704
800-222-3827
512-448-0130
www.texasaft.org

Linda Bridges: President
Louis Malfaro: Secretary-Treasurer
Rob D'Amico: Editor

Texas AFT represents more than 65,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, support personnel, and higher-education employees across the state. Texas AFT is affiliated with the 1.5-million-member American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.



facebook.com/TexasAFT



twitter.com/TexasAFT

What does ‘Reclaim the Promise’ mean?



Linda Bridges
Texas AFT President

For me, “Reclaiming the Promise of Public Education” is based on three core beliefs.

- A belief that high-quality public education is an economic necessity, a moral imperative and a fundamental civil right.
- A belief that public education is a means by which all children can not only dream their dreams but also achieve them.
- A belief that public education is

where all children—those with abundant advantages; those who worry about getting into a good college; those who worry about their parents being deported—deserve the opportunity to succeed.

We know that public education is under attack by people who want to underfund, privatize, and de-professionalize the work you do. They call for cuts to funding for public education and then argue that public education is failing. They emphasize sanctions instead of supports, and then they shift the responsibility onto your backs. We have been subject to the following:

- Top-down edicts
- Mass school closings
- Privatization (The corporate model of school reform seeks to turn public schools over to private managers and encourages competition—as opposed to collaboration—between schools and teachers.)
- High stakes student testing with sanctions instead of supports (Standardized assessments are misused when teachers are fired, schools are closed and students are penalized based on a single set of scores.)

We are at a critical moment. We must reclaim the promise of public education—not as it is today or as it was in the past, but as it can be—to fulfill our collective obligation to help all children succeed.

To put the words into action, reclaiming the promise of public education means:

- Fighting for great neighborhood public schools that are safe, welcoming places for teaching and learning.
- Ensuring that teachers and school support staff are well prepared, are supported, have manageable class sizes and have time to collaborate so they can meet the individual needs of every child.



- Making sure our children have an engaging curriculum that includes art, music and the sciences.
- Ensuring that children and their families have access to wraparound services that meet their social, emotional and health needs. Schools are community institutions, as well as centers of learning. While education alone cannot eradicate poverty, schools can help to coordinate the supports and services their students and families need to thrive. Corporate reform strategies ignore the challenges that students bring with them to school each day, and view schools as separate and autonomous from the communities in which they sit.

By uniting educators, parents, students and the community around this vision of Reclaiming the Promise, and by collaborating to develop solutions that are best suited for our neighborhood schools, we will ensure that all kids have the opportunities they need and deserve, and we will put the public back into public education. It will make every public school a place where parents want to send their children, teachers want to teach and children want to learn. As we do this work, four absolutes have emerged.

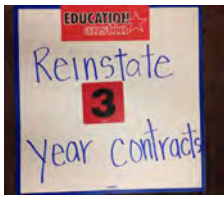
- Our schools belong to all of us; the students who learn in them, the parents who support them, the educators and staff who work in them, and the communities that anchor them.
- Corporate-style reforms that disregard our voices and attempt to impose a system of winners and losers must end. None of our kids deserves to be collateral damage.
- We will only succeed if we work together to reclaim the promise of public education.
- We must be active politically to elect pro public education candidates like Wendy Davis as governor and Leticia Van de Putte as lieutenant governor.

The time is now to Reclaim the Promise of Public Education.
Are you ready? 

Union effort restores three-year contracts in Austin

Education Austin—Texas AFT’s affiliate representing employees in Austin ISD—has mounted a successful campaign to restore three-year contracts for teachers and professional staff. With hundreds of members rallying outside a February 24 school board meeting wearing “3” stickers and signs calling for “Respect,” a majority of the board sided with the union in a 5-4 vote.

The vote closed a dismal chapter stretching back to 2011, when financial hardship prompted the district to lay off more than a thousand teachers and offer only one-year deals to educators—a move that threatened Austin’s ability to attract and retain outstanding educators



in an environment that effectively deprofessionalized teaching and turned the it into little more than at-will employment.

“What this is about is reinstating respect and dignity in the classroom by reinstating a three-year contract for teachers,” said Ken Zarifis, Education Austin president. The campaign to restore three-year contracts drew strong backing



Education Austin Vice President Montserrat Garibay (left) joins union members outside the school board meeting for a rally to restore three-year contracts for professionals.

from parents and other community stakeholders, many of whom came before the school board to declare their support.

“When we treat our teachers fairly, we have a better education outcome for our students, and we have a better outcome for our community,” Austin City Council Member Mike Martinez, whose son is a student in an Austin public school, told the school board moments before the vote.

Opponents claimed the restoration of three-year contracts would give the district less flexibility. But the majority of the board

that backed the restoration noted that a move back to the three-year contracts would help teacher morale, particularly since the district is struggling to find the resources to increase teacher pay.

“The one-year deals were an unwelcome aberration in Austin public schools—a district that has offered multiyear contracts since 1967—and reclaiming the tradition of professional contracts was central to Austin’s efforts to reclaim the promise of public education,” Zarifis added. 🇹🇽



Weingarten visits Texas

AFT President Randi Weingarten has spent a lot of time in Texas of late, with the most recent March visit offering her a look at an innovative, in-district charter school at Travis Heights Elementary in Austin ISD. Union members, parents, teachers and community members—supported by an AFT Innovation Fund grant—created the charter in 2013. Weingarten also served on panels at two Austin conferences—SXSWedu and the Network for Public Education.

It's time to give school employees a seat at the big table



Louis Malfaro
Secretary-Treasurer

*When I was a child, I spoke as a child,
I understood as a child, I thought as a
child: but when I became a man, I put
away childish things.*

—1 Corinthians 13:11

When I was a child, and part of a rather large family, I used to be seated at the kids' table—that ignominious card table—away from the principal dining area where the laughter roared, the matters of the day were discussed, and the people in charge of the whole affair dined. Adults got to sit at the big table and children were assigned to a side board.

When I got older, I was invited to join the adults and partake of not only the meal but also the status, company and place among my equals, lately my superiors.

Isn't it time here in Texas that public school teachers and other school employees got to sit at the big table? Does it really make sense that school districts are run exclusively by unpaid, part-time school boards and school managers/superintendents, most of whom are either long-removed from the world of the classroom or perhaps never taught in one at all? These folks get to

In a handful of Texas school districts, union affiliates have worked with enlightened school boards to set up consultation policies that provide teachers and school support staff with a democratic means to elect their own representative organization.

make all the decisions about our schools to the exclusion of the professional teaching staff and others who do the actual educating of students.

The time has come here in Texas to give teachers and school employees a seat at the big table. This means that school employees in Texas should be freed from state government dictates that restrict our right to negotiate as a group with our school districts. Texas teachers and school employees should be permitted to engage in collective bargaining.

Many recent news stories have featured groups of workers seeking the basic right to a negotiated contract. In Fort Worth, at Texas Christian University, hundreds of food service workers voted last month for union representation through the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). Their agenda: a

collectively bargained contract with Sodexo, the giant food services corporation that employs them. In April of this year, 450 helicopter mechanics and technicians at L3, a military contractor at the Corpus Christi Army Depot, voted overwhelmingly to join the International Union of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. The union organizer who led the campaign said that workers know a contract can address pay and job security issues in a "professional manner while giving them the respect they deserve as skilled technicians."

Even our students seem to understand the value of a union

contract. Northwestern University football players recently won the right to form a union and negotiate a contract after a ruling by the regional National Labor Relations Board (now on appeal) that recognizes them as workers. These overworked, underpaid and taken-for-granted folks (sound familiar?) decided that they wanted a say in their hours, working conditions and, yes, pay and benefits.

From food service workers to highly skilled workers to those who have traditionally worked for little or nothing, gaining the right to a negotiated contract is a fundamental desire—one that is shared by Texas public school employees. But the anti-public employee laws of our state (among the most oppressive in the nation) prevent us from exercising our basic rights, and that's wrong.

Texas law prohibiting collective bargaining for public school employees makes it hard for school districts to partner with and obtain independent input from teachers and other employees who work directly with students. In a handful of Texas school districts, union affiliates have worked with enlightened school boards to set up consultation policies that provide teachers and school support staff with a democratic means to elect their own representative organization. Under these consultation policies, the school administration and elected consultation representative engage in collaborative discussions about budgets, district initiatives, systems that affect employees and students, program design and school improvement efforts.

In school districts where our union represents teachers and staff through these consultation policies (San Antonio, Austin,




Corpus Christi, South San Antonio) there has been real progress through union-management partnership and agreements on a wide range of issues, including professional training of staff, mentoring, bus route bidding processes, employee evaluation systems, budget allocation, and testing of students—not to mention bread-and-butter issues like pay, sick-leave banks, stipends and health-care offerings.

As school districts attempt to address

complex and challenging issues like curriculum rigor, student assessment, teacher evaluation, discipline, rising health-care costs, designing effective compensation systems, supporting teacher quality and the like, having a clearly established and institutionalized mechanism for engaging the front-line professional experts becomes increasingly necessary for meeting goals.

Consultation policies are showing the way in districts where they have been

adopted. School employees and our unions must push for more school districts to adopt these policies.

As we demonstrate to the public that involving teachers and staff in the decision-making process at the school-district level benefits our schools, our students and district employees, we open up the space necessary to change the restrictive laws that currently keep teachers and school employees stuck at the kids' table. 



Above, Socorro AFT sponsors a "Today a Reader, Tomorrow a Leader" event that provides books directly to students, while Education Austin volunteer Sherlon Nash (below right) gets ready for big crowds at a distribution day that provided cases of 50 books to teachers and giveaways to students.

40,000 x 2 =

A whole lot of books that bring smiles to kids' faces!
Socorro AFT and Education Austin each launched successful First Book drives in March to distribute 40,000 books in their school districts.

Texas AFT has partnered with First Book to provide these free, new books to children in low-income families. More than 2,000 Texas educators have signed up to be First Book partners, which allows them access to giveaways for their students. For more information, visit www.firstbook.org/aft.



Legislative News

- Unfinished business on standardized testing
- News on graduation standards
- Teacher evaluation models based on test scores

Committee hears of unfinished business on testing

The Texas House Public Education Committee met on March 26 for an interim hearing on testing issues and new graduation standards, and advocates from the ranks of both parents and teachers made a compelling case to use the next legislative session to complete the unfinished business of ending the misuse of testing.

Forceful testimony came from Dineen Majcher, parent advocate and leader of

Under the STAAR EOC system, the number not passing all exams and thus not on track to graduate is around 75,000—or one out of every four members of the class of 2015.

the influential group formally known as Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment (TAMSA) but better known by its informal moniker—Mothers Against Drunk Testing. Majcher gave the Legislature full credit for reducing the number of end-of-course (EOC) exams required by the state for graduation last year, but she pressed hard for more steps to limit the number of tests in elementary and middle school and to shift toward diagnostic rather than high-stakes, punitive uses of test results.

Majcher praised a bill recently filed in Congress (H.R. 4172) to cut the number of tests required by the No Child Left Behind Act from 14 to six, and she urged state lawmakers to direct the commissioner of education to cut back state assessments to the minimum required by federal law. That would immediately eliminate three tests now administered in elementary and

middle school, she noted. Like Texas AFT, she called for a new effort to pass legislation (HB 2836) vetoed by Gov. Perry last year that would have made multiple inroads against high-stakes testing. Among these changes: reducing the length of state tests, while also allowing more time for children with special needs, such as English Language Learners, to complete the exams; and requiring independent, third-party evaluation of the state assessments to demonstrate that the exams are valid and reliable.

Majcher also cut through the bureaucratic fog to answer precisely a question about the alarming number of students who thus far have not passed one or more of the STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) exams required for graduation.

Earlier in the hearing, committee chair Rep. Jimmie Don Ayccock had asked a TEA witness a pretty straightforward question. Before the advent of the STAAR end-of-course exams, he asked, how many students were not passing the TAKS exams required for graduation? And how does that compare to the number not passing the EOC hurdle now? The TEA witness sidestepped the question, responding only that “we anticipate significant improvements this spring.” It was left to Majcher to step in and provide some actual numbers from TEA’s own database.

In 2011, she reported, the number of students not passing all TAKS exams was 22,578. In 2012, the number was 14,915. That translates into roughly one out of every 20 students. Under the STAAR EOC system, however, the number not passing all exams and thus not on track to graduate is around 75,000—or one out of every four members of the class of 2015, which will be the first cohort required to graduate



under the STAAR system. That dramatic, fivefold increase in the number of students at risk of not graduating, Majcher said, should make lawmakers think again about what they are really accomplishing with the high stakes attached to the STAAR exams.

She and other witnesses also made clear, and committee members acknowledged, that those high stakes are not required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The high-stakes testing system is entirely within the power of the Texas Legislature to maintain, alter, or eliminate. And so by the end of the day’s hearing the parameters of a renewed legislative debate in 2015 over the role of high-stakes state testing were in plain sight.

Graduation standards

Regarding graduation standards, questioning from committee members drew a noteworthy concession from the commissioner of higher education, Dr. Raymund Paredes. Paredes acknowledged that claims made for the critical importance of Algebra II in college readiness had been overblown last session. He agreed with committee member Rep. Mike Villarreal, a Democrat from San Antonio, that other math courses such as statistics could provide equivalent rigor. Paredes still maintained that taking four years of math is best for college readiness.

Villarreal agreed that the more math, the better, but he stressed that Algebra II has taken on outsized importance largely because the state has chosen to make it a gateway course for automatic admission to universities under the Top 10 Percent rule.

Several committee members, including Democratic Reps. Harold Dutton and Alma Allen of Houston, focused on the issue of inequitable access to the counselors and appropriately certified teachers needed to help students navigate the complexities of the many choices available to them under new graduation requirements. Texas AFT shares that concern. As we said in previous testimony to the State Board of Education, flexibility cannot be allowed to become an excuse for inequity. Yet as of now the Texas Education Agency can offer no guarantee that every student will have access to the full array of courses, including Algebra II, needed to make the expanded menu of graduation options meaningful for all students.

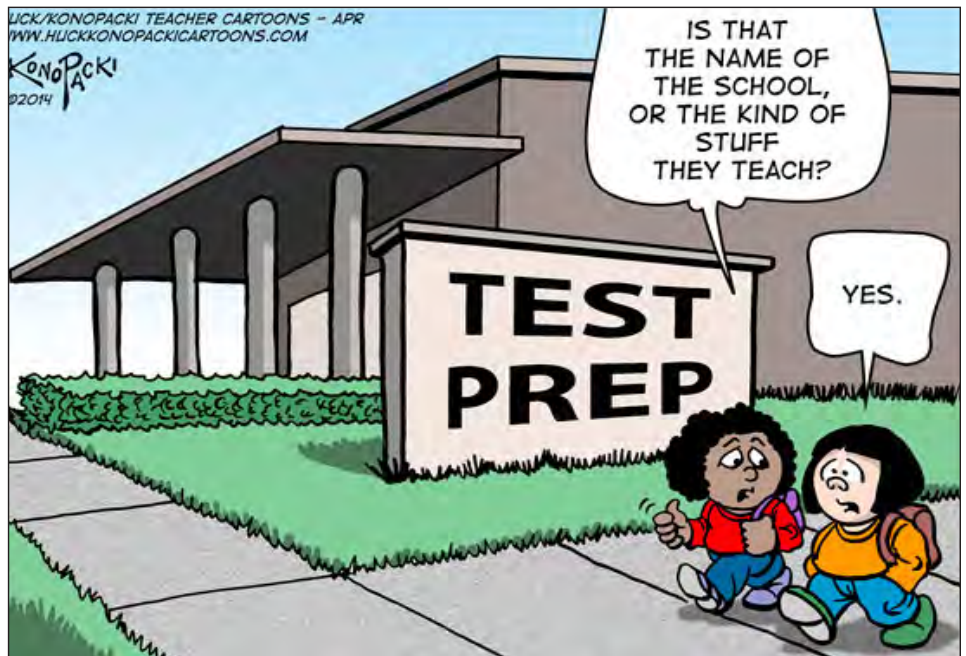
The Senate Education Committee was expected to meet for a hearing on testing issues on April 14, after the *Texas Teacher* deadline.

Evaluations based on test scores

By May 2 Commissioner of Education Michael Williams has promised the U.S. Department of Education he will produce “final guidelines” for teacher evaluation that threaten to make the obsession with standardized testing in Texas classrooms worse than ever. Commissioner Williams has committed himself to meet federal demands for the use of scores on state assessments by a teacher’s students as a “significant factor” in each teacher’s individual evaluation.

The commitment to produce these “final guidelines” appears to contradict simultaneous assurances from the commissioner that the final shape of a new evaluation scheme would be guided by results of evaluation pilot projects in selected districts that will not be completed until after the 2014-2015 school year.

The commissioner also has told educators there will be extensive stakeholder involvement in the development of a new recommended state appraisal system, plus opportunities



Texas AFT: Your advocate to end the misuse of testing

Texas AFT, in testimony at the March 26 Texas House Public Education Committee hearing, pushed for an agenda that would tackle unfinished business on the misuse of testing, including:

- Taking significant steps in the 84th session toward a more reasonable accountability system—including addressing testing in grades 3 through 8—by again passing two bills: Rep. Bennett Ratliff’s House Bill 2824 and HB 2836, both of which passed the legislature unanimously but were vetoed by Gov. Perry.

HB 2824 aimed to empower 23 school districts in the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium to serve as incubators of alternatives to STAAR exams, including locally developed assessments and nationally recognized college-prep exams. If granted a federal waiver or if federal law changed, participants also could have cut back on the number of tests to allow more time for in-depth teaching and learning.

HB 2836 would have required tests to be designed to reduce the amount of time it takes to complete them (two hours for students in grades 3-5, and three hours in grades 6-8, instead of the current tests aligned to a four-hour time limit). The bill also would have required the state to reduce the amount of testing in lower grades to the minimum required under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. HB 2836 also contained a provision that said before a state achievement test could be administered it “must, on the basis of empirical evidence, be determined to be valid and reliable by an entity that is independent of the agency and of any other entity that developed the assessment instrument.”

- Passing language, adopted by the Senate in its version of HB 5 but omitted from the conference committee report, that would have barred uses of state achievement tests for purposes for which they are not demonstrably valid and reliable. This provision would be a bulwark against the continued misuse of test results for punitive, high-stakes ratings of school districts, schools, students, and educators.

for public comment when the new scheme is spelled out in proposed administrative regulations. However, Commissioner Williams at the same time has betrayed impatience with comments from educators questioning the legal basis and policy wisdom of evaluations based on students' test scores. Earlier this year he said dismissively that teacher organizations should just "slow down and let us finish this product."

That sort of condescension only accentuates the concern that the new evaluation methodology will not take teachers' views into account in any serious way before it is a finished product—an accomplished fact. Yet the commissioner really needs to hear what teachers and their representatives are saying, because he is standing on quicksand both legally and in terms of sound educational policy.

Teacher organizations should "slow down and let us finish this product."

— Michael Williams,
Texas Commissioner
of Education



The key Education Code provisions on teacher evaluation, Sections 21.351 and 21.352, do not authorize the commissioner to dictate to school districts that scores of an individual teacher's students on state assessments will be a significant factor in the evaluation of that teacher. Yet the commissioner has committed himself to developing evaluation formulas, according to his No Child Left Behind waiver agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, that would indeed bow to federal demands to do precisely what state law does not authorize him to do—mandate that scores of a teacher's students on state assessments count as a significant factor in the individual teacher's evaluation.

The commissioner's waiver agreement with the feds also clearly envisions the use of value-added methodology relying on students' test scores as the basis for measurement of each teacher's effectiveness. Yet, notwithstanding the marketing claims of the high-stakes testing-industrial complex, the flaws and limitations of using value-added methodology based on students' standardized test scores are well-established. The evidence shows that, as a high-stakes measurement used to sort, rank, and evaluate teachers, value-added

methodology is a defective product.

A recent study funded by the U.S. Department of Education itself found significant variations in teachers' value-added scores, concluding that the variations do not reflect the quality of teaching but rather are likely due to "measurement error." The Rand Corporation and the Board on Testing and Assessment of the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences both concluded that the results of applying value-added methodology should not be used to evaluate individual teachers. The experience of teachers with a black-box value-added evaluation scheme in use in Houston ISD underscores the instability and unreliability of measurements using this methodology. (Note: Texas AFT is mounting a legal challenge to that Houston evaluation system.) Adoption of such an unsound methodology for teacher appraisal statewide will only undermine the ability of teachers to deliver high-quality instruction that cultivates in each student persistence, critical thinking, problem-solving, and high levels of social-emotional development.

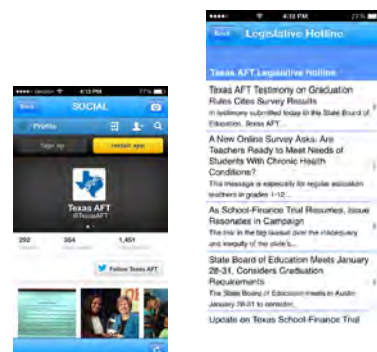
At press time, Texas AFT was preparing to raise testimony before the Senate Education Committee on April 14. We also will provide you with a timely online opportunity at www.texasaft.org to share your views on this matter, not only with the commissioner of education, but also with members of the Legislature. It is these lawmakers, not Commissioner Williams, who will have the last word on the fate of whatever new evaluation scheme is hatched under the "final guidelines" to be announced by May 2.



For an in-depth look at teacher evaluation issues, see "Teacher Evaluation as Part of a Comprehensive System for Teaching and Learning," by Linda Darling-Hammond, in the current edition of AFT's *American Educator*. You can find it online at www.aft.org > News and Publications > Periodicals.

Download the new Texas AFT app!

Want to receive instant notice when there's an Action Alert on issues that affect you as school employees? Need quick access to the *Legislative Hotline*, *Texas Teacher* and breaking news? Download the Texas AFT app for iPhones, iPads and Droid devices at iTunes or Google Play. (Simply search for "Texas AFT.")



Corpus Christi's Nancy Vera on why she calls the union her family

By Rob Patterson

While in her early teens, Nancy Vera already knew she would be an active union member someday. She recalls seeing a picture in the local Corpus Christi newspaper of John Cole—then president of Texas AFT and founding president of Corpus Christi AFT—at the local food stamp office making the case to the media that “teachers needed food stamps because they were paid so low.”

“I saw them leading the charge for teachers’ rights,” Vera says. “I felt it was my calling to be a teacher and an advocate for teachers and students.”

Vera followed that calling and eventually became a teacher and union activist. (She currently teaches English Language Arts at Cullen High School in

disrupt his classes. She went to Corpus Christi AFT asking for guidance, and the union provided invaluable support in getting her a separate classroom. “It was like a home away from home and a refuge,” she says of the local union office. “I knew if I needed help I could go there and talk to people. And that gave me the courage and resolve to get even more involved with the union.”

Vera then spent 10 years working out of Dallas and traveling the country conducting presentations on educational initiatives for the Texas State Teachers Association and its national affiliate, the National Education Association. On her return to Corpus Christi, she began teaching again while working toward her doctorate, which she received in

Educational Leadership from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

Vera says she is passionately committed to helping disadvantaged students, designing and instituting special educational programs, and spearheading fundraising efforts for schools. She and Corpus Christi AFT President Ray McMurrey also initiated a six-part public access TV show, “CCAFT Legislative Report,” in the last legislative session to educate the community

about the legislative process and inform them on the status of school issues at the state Capitol.

As president of Corpus Christi’s League of United Latin American Citizens, Vera put together a virtual museum of the city’s Mexican-American history called “Inspirational Voyages,” which is




Nancy Vera

accompanied by a bilingual oral history show, “Cuéntame,” that airs on a local radio station. “This is local history that hadn’t been documented,” she says. “I wanted to ensure that it was documented, not just as an archive, but out there where

“Everyone has down periods and lulls, and I feel like I can go to the local union hall and feel better, because I am surrounded by people who are supportive.”

people have access to it.”

Vera explains that her union is not just an integral part of her educational career. It also plays a dominant role in her life. “I live a lifestyle that is about lifting people up,” she says. “I focus on helping the disenfranchised and the marginalized, and I work to promote social justice and peace.”

She is proud that her school has the highest number of AFT members of any Corpus Christi ISD campus, and she compares her union to a family. “Because we are all educators,” she says, “we confide in each other on issues. Everyone has down periods and lulls, and I feel like I can go to the local union hall and feel better, because I am surrounded by people who are supportive. We feel alike. We know the cause. It’s solidarity, and that’s what we’ve got here.” 



Vera created “Inspirational Voyages,” an online museum of local Mexican-American history, along with a companion radio show “Cuéntame.”

Corpus Christi and serves as vice president of Corpus Christi AFT.)

Vera graduated from Corpus Christi State University and began teaching drama at CCISD’s Cullen Place Middle school, where she encountered a problem while sharing a classroom divided by a partition with another teacher, who would ask her to keep her students quiet so they wouldn’t

VOTE 2014

Education in the spotlight for governor race

Pre-K proposals from Davis contrast with Abbott's excuse for minimal funding



State Sen. Wendy Davis addresses a room full of supporters in Pharr, Texas, during a recent campaign tour in her bid for governor.

Candidate for governor Wendy Davis continued her focus on public education early this year by announcing a significant

"Yes, we embrace high standards for pre-K. But those standards already are in place, and pre-K is a proven foundation for future learning."

— Texas AFT Secretary-Treasurer Louis Malfaro

policy initiative to expand pre-K access for Texas children, while her opponent—Attorney General Greg Abbott—proposed a small-scale increase in pre-K funding and a demand for greater accountability.

As governor, Davis said, she would work to ensure access to quality, full-day pre-K for every eligible child. (Eligible

children under current law include the economically disadvantaged, English Language Learners, children of military families, children in foster care, and homeless children.)

"We know that every dollar invested in pre-K programs can return up to \$16 in dividends," Davis said in a Houston press conference. "Yet in Texas," she said, "nearly seven in ten low-income students are not enrolled in pre-K, and the state only funds three hours a day. It doesn't take a financial genius like Warren Buffett to know that this is an investment worth making."

In contrast, Abbott said in late March that expanding pre-K to all Texas children would be "an act of negligence and waste." He insisted that identifying and assuring quality pre-K has to come first, as if we don't already have significant research

that demonstrates what quality pre-K looks like. Abbott also talked up the need for pre-K assessments, conjuring up the specter of even more standardized testing that is developmentally inappropriate. The candidate later claimed that he didn't intend to imply that standardized testing would be used in pre-K.

The day after Abbott made his pre-K pitch, teachers and educators groups—spearheaded by our local affiliate for Austin ISD, Education Austin—held a press conference to question Abbott's logic. "Yes, we embrace high standards for pre-K," said Texas AFT Secretary-Treasurer Louis Malfaro. "But those standards already are in place, and pre-K is a proven foundation for future learning."

Texas AFT President Linda Bridges noted that Abbott's funding proposal would add about \$118 million in state aid, which wouldn't even put state pre-K funding back to its pre-2011 level, after the Legislature cut grant money for full-day pre-K by \$200 million. That cut was part of the \$5.4 billion in total public education spending axed by the 2011 Legislature, and the reduced funding is a major issue in the school finance lawsuit that Abbott is defending as attorney general.

"Abbott isn't expanding pre-K, he's just scrambling to show he supports a popular and proven program by adding a modest sum of money that doesn't even make up for the cuts he's defending in court," Bridges said.

The Davis proposal also includes a new emphasis on reading instruction in grades K-3 so that every child can read on grade level by third grade. To that end, Davis would put a priority on increasing the ranks of educational aides, who are

crucial providers of the one-on-one help many students require to become fluent readers. Those ranks also were decimated by layoffs after the 2011 cuts. Abbott said he wants to reconstitute the reading and math academies for teacher training, similar to the Texas Reading Initiative, developed during George W. Bush's term as governor, but also later a victim of budget cuts.

Texas AFT has endorsed Davis for governor.

Ready for school board elections?

Many districts across the state will hold board of trustee elections on May 10. Contact your district for a list of candidates, then check with your local union to find out more on endorsements and issues.



State Sen. Leticia Van De Putte, second from right, campaigning for lieutenant governor in Austin on April 7. Also pictured, from left, are Texas AFT Secretary-Treasurer Louis Malfaro, Texas AFT President Linda Bridges, Education Austin Vice President Montserrat Garibay, Education Austin President Ken Zarifis and Education Austin Vice President Trasell Underwood.

Van De Putte stresses investment in education during statewide tour

State Sen. Leticia Van De Putte hit the road for a statewide bus tour in March and April and emphasized her lengthy record of support for public education. Van De Putte, the Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor, will face off against the winner of the Republican primary runoff in May between current Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst and State Sen. Dan Patrick.



Van de Putte ended the tour with a press conference at Travis Heights Elementary in Austin and called for policies to promote student achievement, such as state money for full-day pre-K, ending the misuse of testing and fully funding public education. Texas AFT has endorsed Van De Putte for lieutenant governor.

Your chance to support true friends of public education!

Grass-roots support of candidates and volunteering to help their campaigns are keys to securing electoral victories for friends of public education.

But unfortunately, corporate interests promoting educational pseudo-reforms and efforts to privatize our schools are dumping a lot of money behind candidates who espouse their agenda.

You can help fight back with your own donations, no matter how small, to the Texas AFT Committee on Political Education (COPE II), which supports candidates of all parties who support public education. Recent history has shown a large

number of small donations can outgun fewer donations from deep pockets. Visit www.texasaft.org and click on *Membership* > *Join the 1,000 Club* to pledge your support to COPE II. By joining the 1,000 Club as a founding member, you'll receive a free T-shirt showing you are ready to stand up for change at the Texas Capitol!



Texas AFT only can solicit from its members and their immediate family members for contributions to COPE II. (If you are unsure about eligibility, give us a call.) For more information on COPE II, visit www.texasaft.org or contact Louis Malfaro, Texas AFT secretary-treasurer, at 800-222-3827.

Locals and Members in Action

Cy-Fair AFT helps custodians keep their cool

Cy-Fair AFT celebrated a victory for custodians in April after the Cy-Fair ISD school board agreed to change district policy to provide relief for custodians who previously worked in extreme temperatures during the summer.

Custodians had to endure working in buildings with no air conditioning for much of their shifts during the hot summer months, and many workers noted serious health effects like dehydration and heat stroke, with some forced to use sick leave just to recoup from the stifling conditions. The district policy had allowed air conditioning only from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. to save money, but custodians worked from 6:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

"We surveyed our members and found this to be the number-one concern with custodians, with more than 90 percent of them calling for us to take immediate action on the issue," said Nikki Cowart, Cy-Fair AFT president. "We responded with a sustained 'Stay Cool in School' campaign that included a petition, newsletter pieces, support cards filled out by other school employees and wristbands



Wristbands help raise awareness of the plight of custodians working in dangerous conditions.

cooling the building early and trying to keep it cool. Additionally, the custodians will now work in "attack" teams, with large groups cleaning a campus all at once to minimize exposure in schools that get hotter than others.

"Our campaign was a great example of all school employees pulling together on a serious health and safety issue, and we're also grateful that the district responded positively on behalf of its employees," Cowart said.

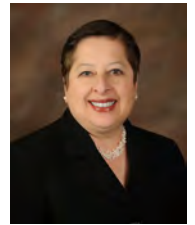
"We now have a model for mobilizing members, while also working constructively with the district."

to bring awareness to the issue."

Cowart said the district was prompted to conduct an internal review of its policy and agreed to implement new air conditioning hours of 5 a.m. to 2 p.m., with the strategy of

Palacios honored with Hall of Fame induction

Longtime Texas AFT member and retired Corpus Christi ISD early-childhood teacher Rebecca Palacios has been named to the National Teachers Hall of Fame. Palacios in June will be formally inducted into this select group, numbering just over 100 since the honor was first awarded in 1992.



Rebecca Palacios

Palacios has fully earned this honor for a career marked by many professional achievements both in and outside the classroom, including National Board Certification as a master teacher, service as vice-chair of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and multiple appearances as an educational expert before the Texas legislature, the U.S. Congress, and international educational forums. She continues to be active professionally as a senior curriculum adviser. Palacios also throughout her career has been an activist in her union at the local, state, and national level.

We make schools WORK

Texas AFT Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel

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



Their roles are varied with hundreds of job titles describing their work—core services essential to the success of our public schools.

Find out more about PSRPs and the vital role they play on the school team by downloading Texas AFT's brochure, "We Make Schools Work," at www.texasaft.org > News > Publications & Reports. (Printed copies also are available. Call 800-222-3827.)





How to Join...

1. Check the list of local unions and organizing committees and their school districts below. If you work in one of those districts, contact the local union or organizing committee directly.
2. If not, you will be joining the Associate Member Program. Contact us directly at 800-222-3827, or go to texasaft.org and click on "Membership."

Aldine ISD: Aldine AFT (281) 847-3050	El Paso ISD: El Paso Federation of Teachers & Support Personnel (915) 562-3738	Northside ISD: Northside AFT (210) 733-9777
Alief ISD: Alief AFTSE (281) 589-6644	Flour Bluff ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482	Pflugerville ISD: Pflugerville AFT (512) 448-0130
Amarillo ISD: Amarillo AFT (806) 359-4487	Fort Bend ISD: Fort Bend Employee Federation (281) 240-1865	Round Rock ISD: Education Round Rock (512) 448-0130
Austin Community College: ACC AFT (512) 448-0130	Galena Park ISD: Northeast Houston AFT (713) 453-7500	San Antonio ISD: San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel (210) 225-7174
Austin ISD: Education Austin (512) 472-1124	Goose Creek ISD: Goose Creek Education Federation (281) 427-2091	Sheldon ISD: Northeast Houston AFT (713) 453-7500
Bastrop ISD: Bastrop AFT (512) 448-0130	Gregory-Portland ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482	Socorro ISD: Socorro AFT (915) 593-2801
Brazosport ISD: Brazosport Federation of Teachers (979) 265-9701	Houston ISD: Houston Federation of Teachers (713) 623-8891	South San Antonio ISD: South San Antonio AFT (210) 227-8083
Calallen ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482	Houston ISD: Houston Educational Support Personnel (713) 660-8435	Spring Branch ISD: Spring Branch AFT (713) 468-4700
Channelview ISD: Northeast Houston AFT (713) 453-7500	Killeen ISD: Killeen Federation of Teachers & Support Personnel (254) 690-2538	Tuloso-Midway ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482
Corpus Christi ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482	La Joya ISD: La Joya AFT (956) 682-1143	Victoria ISD: Victoria AFT (512) 448-0130
Cy-Fair ISD: Cy-Fair AFT (713) 466-1125	Lone Star College: AFT Lone Star (281) 889-1009	Waco ISD: Waco AFT (254) 755-0276
Dallas ISD: Alliance AFT (214) 942-4663	McAllen ISD: McAllen AFT (956) 682-1143	West Oso ISD: Corpus Christi AFT (361) 855-0482
Del Rio ISD: Del Rio AFT (512) 448-0130	North East ISD: Northeast AFT (210) 227-8083	
Edinburg ISD: Edinburg AFT (956) 502-5340		



Subscribe to Texas AFT text messaging!

Be sure to stay up to date on all our events and action campaigns by subscribing to our Texas AFT text message system! **Just compose a text message as you would to your friends, and text "TEXAS" to 69238.**

You'll get a confirmation text that lets you know you've signed up successfully and prompts you to personalize your location for local information texts.

(You may unsubscribe at any time, and there is no charge for this service, but normal data and message rates on your phone plan may apply.)

Texas AFT
3000 South IH 35, Suite 175
Austin, Texas 78704



NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTIN, TEXAS
PERMIT NO. 2917

WIN A CRUISE

Relax and unwind. WIN 1 of 3 cruise packages
Upload your resources by June 13 for a chance to win!

sharemylesson
By teachers, for teachers

The banner features a large cruise ship, the Carnival Breeze, sailing on the ocean. To the right, a smiling woman holds a tablet displaying the Share My Lesson website interface. The text "WIN A CRUISE" is in a large orange circle, and the Share My Lesson logo and tagline are prominently displayed.

Are you part of the nation's largest community of educators sharing resources?

In just a year and a half, educators and parents have downloaded more than 5 million free teaching resources on ShareMyLesson.com.

"Our leaders repeatedly tell teachers how critical they are to our students' education and their futures, but at the same time they have been hamstrung by austerity budgets that have drastically cut instructional resources and other tools and support teachers need," said Randi Weingarten, president of the American

5,000,000 DOWNLOADS
www.ShareMyLesson.com

Federation of Teachers. "Teachers are hungry for these resources, and increasingly are turning to Share My Lesson."

Educators and parents can upload, download and rate tried-and-true

materials on the site for free. There are now more than 460,000 registered users and 300,000 lesson plans, videos, handouts and teaching and parenting tips.

Created by the American Federation of Teachers and TES Connect, Share My Lesson is the fastest-growing professional online community for educators in the United States. As a result of the innovative platform and high-impact content, it recently won the 2014 Codie Award for "Best Crowd Sourced Solution."