



Texas Teacher

A Union of Professionals

Summer 2013

Your Tool for
Back to School!



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: Time to change the climate at the Capitol, p. 6

Convention 2013

Officer elections, and a new local chartered

Linda Bridges was re-elected as president, and Louis Malfaro was re-elected as secretary-treasurer at Texas AFT's biennial convention in June. Craig Adams, president of Texas AFT's newly chartered Spring Branch AFT local,



President Linda Bridges and Secretary-Treasurer Louis Malfaro.

welcomed members to the Convention. President Bridges delivered a "state of the union" address noting the growing strength of AFT in Texas exemplified by Spring Branch AFT. Building that strength all across the state is crucial for Texas schoolchildren and for education employees from pre-K through college, she said.

The convention weekend included a report on the recent regular session of the Legislature and a full day of workshops on professional issues, including sessions to improve teaching practice and presentations



The newly elected officers of Spring Branch AFT: (back row, from left) Noel Flynn, secretary; Craig Adams, president; Ken Jones, vice president; Denny Dial, board member; (front row, from left) Lora Ringler, board member; Karen Donathen, treasurer; and Beverly Bradley, board member.

on hot policy issues such as "the unintended consequences of using value-added measures to evaluate teachers and students in Houston ISD."

AFT Executive Vice President Fran Lawrence delivered the keynote address for the convention. Her theme: "Rethinking the Way We Do Business—Texas Sets the Pace."

Texas AFT's new and improved union credit card

Designed to meet the needs of hard-working union members

Texas AFT members now have two great card options to choose from:

- A rewards card that earns unlimited 1.5 percent cash back on every purchase. It also comes with a low intro Annual Percentage Rate (APR) for 12 months; or
- A low intro APR for 15 months that's great for transferring higher-rate balances and saving on interest. After 15 months, the rate is lower than the rewards card APR.

Both cards come with union-proud benefits including:

- After just 3 months, improved assistance benefits during strikes, job loss, disability and hospitalization for eligible cardholders.
- 24/7 U.S.-based customer service by phone and online.
- The benefit of a Union Privilege "member advocate" who has your back if you run into an issue where you need assistance with your account.
- Special rebates and savings from other union programs.

Visit www.UnionCardApply.com to find out more!



Savings and protection with your member benefits

When you join Texas AFT four member benefits start immediately. Workplace protections include:

- **\$8 million professional liability insurance**—Texas AFT members enjoy great professional liability coverage, with up to \$8 million per claim, including up to \$3 million in coverage against charges of failure to educate and \$2 million in civil rights cases. This is your professional educational worker insurance, to protect members against lawsuits filed by a student or a students' parents, when the member is acting within the scope of their duties as a district employee.

- **Teacher defense fund**—Every day, Texas teachers face false charges, dismissal, loss of certification, unwanted assignments and many other serious problems. Texas AFT's legal defense fund, 25 experienced attorneys and statewide legal network are there when you need help. And they're backed by labor law experts in Austin and Washington.

- **All Texas AFT members in local unions receive \$25,000 Accidental Death and Dismemberment coverage** through a policy held by the AFT. This policy covers common carrier accidents. Each member should fill out an AD&D beneficiary card and put a copy in his/her personal files.

AFT+ also offers dozens of programs and services to save money for members, including family dental and vision care, cell phone plans, veterinary care, travel, theme parks, movies and sports events, and on-line purchases.

Many members have found that their savings from using the

benefits can cover their union dues!

In times of financial need, our programs support members. For example, our union credit card provides disaster relief and other funds to cardholders experiencing unexpected troubles. Our popular mortgage discount program has been enhanced with a six-month suspended payment plan for laid-off or disabled members. And the Save My Home foreclosure prevention plan has helped members keep their homes.



Visit www.aft.org/benefits and www.unionplus.org to find dozens of discounts and other benefits.

Meet Your Member Benefits Specialist



Member Benefits Representative
Barbara Lightheart

Barbara Lightheart is the Member Benefits Representative for Texas AFT. She responds to telephone and e-mail questions about offerings and handles customer service needs. She also travels around the state to educate new and long-time members, along with staff and union leaders, about the many programs and how to access detailed information.

If you have questions about any benefits please contact Barbara Lightheart, Texas AFT Member Benefits Representative, 1-800-222-3827 or belightheart@texasaft.org.



Local unions ramp up their efforts for First Book to give kids in need free books, p. 3

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Texas Teacher

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To be added to our mailing list, contact Rob D'Amico at 800-222-3827 or editor@texasaft.org.



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It's time to stand up for public education



Linda Bridges
Texas AFT President

The last couple of years have been challenging on many levels. We have dealt with the impact and consequences of severe budget cuts by the Legislature, along with the onslaught of bad education reforms pushed by the billionaire boys club and others.

From 2000 to 2010, Texas accounted for half of the U.S. child population growth, which means when Texas kids do better, the U.S. does better. During the 2011 legislative session, Texas lawmakers cut \$5.4 billion dollars from public education and per-student spending fell to its lowest point in over a decade. Funding for Medicaid—of which more than two-thirds of enrollees are children—was reduced by almost \$2 billion dollars. If public investments are an indication of a state's priorities, then Texas has not been prioritizing children and families.

Texas is often ranked as one of the best, if not the best state, in which to do business. At the same time, Texas is consistently ranked as one of the worst states to be a kid.

The simple fact is that when Texas chooses to invest in children, Texas children do better. Texas is often ranked as one of the best, if not the best state, in which to do business. At the same time, Texas is consistently ranked as one of the worst states to be a kid. In 2012, Texas ranked 44th in overall child well-being. According to the recent Kids Count—a report from the Center for Public Policy Priorities—estimates, more than a quarter of Texas children lived in poverty, more than half did not attend preschool, and one out of every 10 Texas children lacked health insurance. When one out of every 11 kids in the country lives in Texas, this is not good for Texas or the United States. Investing in children is not just the right thing to do, it's one of the best investments Texas can make.

The Kids Count report found that investments in health and nutrition have implications for children's education outcomes, and investments in education have implications for their health outcomes. Investing in the whole child is important and necessary to promote children's well-being now and Texas's well-being in the future.

Positive outcomes for our children are not the result of luck or happenstance. They are the inevitable results of smart policy

decisions to prioritize our children and invest in our future. The Texas of tomorrow will inherit the youth of today. A better Texas starts now by investing in healthy, educated, and well-cared for kids.

The question looming before us is how to ensure smart policy decisions and wise investments in our kids when we are mired in a fight for the existence of public education itself. This legislative session we have seen bills introduced to promote charter school expansion, takeover of neighborhood schools by charter operators, taxpayer dollars for private-school vouchers (in the guise of "opportunity scholarships" and "taxpayer savings grants"), so-called "achievement districts (designed to allow for further "charterization" of public schools) and numerous other attempts to privatize our schools. Diane Ravitch in her blog referred to the onslaught in Texas as if someone threw a whole bowl full of spaghetti at the wall believing something would stick. Your hard work during the session ensured that the "bowl of spaghetti" did not stick. I'm not saying that the wall was not a mess. I'm simply saying most of the bad bills did not stick.

Knowing that there would be challenges ahead, our Texas AFT Executive Council—the governing body for our union—engaged in a strategic planning project that lasted more than a year and resulted in a 10-year plan to respond to the challenges ahead.

We owe it to ourselves to come together as educators and fight back against those who attack our schools and public school employees. We must stand strong as the front-line voice for our members and our students so that their voice is heard in the Legislature, the halls of Congress, and in the media.

We know what is right and wrong about our schools, and we are the solution to ensure every student receives a quality education. When I say we, I am speaking about all of us—teachers, counselors, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, maintenance employees, custodians, higher education employees and more. We are the ones who advocate for educational policies that are good and sound and stand up for what's right for our schools, our students, and our members.


By joining Texas AFT, you make our union stronger, and your participation—as an active member who stands up for public schools—inspires and empowers others to do the same.

A note on a great new tool for school employees

An important part of our plan is aimed at providing you with the tools to do your job. With that in mind, we took a proactive course to provide meaningful programs for our teachers and students, and one of these that I'm most proud of is **ShareMyLesson.com**. This program was launched at our

Summer Leadership Training and is a remarkable Web site that provides teachers, paraprofessionals and others with lesson plans and teaching tools for the classroom. Share My Lesson also sets up a learning community among its users.

You'll read more about Share My Lesson in this issue of Texas Teacher. But I wanted to be sure and mention that Texas

AFT has more than 11,000 members who have joined the site, and we are in second place for total number of registrants, only behind New York State. However, when you take into account the number of members who have signed up versus our total membership (density), Texas is number one in the country with members participating! 

Local unions ramp up First Book distributions



Texas AFT locals handed out thousands of free books to students this spring as part of the union's collaboration with  First Book, a non-profit organization that makes new, high-quality books available to children in need. To date, First Book has distributed more than 100 million books and educational resources to programs and schools serving children from low-income families throughout the United States and Canada.

"When you ask some of these students how many books they have at home, sometimes the unfortunate answer is 'none,'" said Texas AFT President Linda Bridges. "That's what makes this program so special and so valuable. Nothing can replace the feeling you get when you see a child write their name in their book and take it home to read."

Several of our locals have participated in First Book events, including the Houston Federation of Teachers, Alliance-AFT in Dallas,



our Associate Membership Program (AMP), and Alief AFTSE. Additionally, in partnership with AFT and the AFL-CIO, we have distributed books at the Univision-COPA events in Pflugerville, Houston and Dallas. One of our most exciting distributions occurred in San Antonio, where the San Antonio Alliance (in partnership with the National Teachers Associates) distributed books to every second and seventh grader in San Antonio ISD under an initiative titled "Books Build Character."

A book came to life for kids in

Top left, Texas AFT and Univision volunteers help distribute some 1,800 books to children at a Univision-COPA event in Pflugerville in June. Above right and center, San Antonio ISD students take part in the "Books Build Character" book distribution by the San Antonio Alliance.

Alief ISD, where the local union there brought a book tour to Landis and Collins Elementary Schools. The tour for the *Magic Tree House*—a popular children's book series by Mary Pope Osborn—brings the book characters Jack and Annie to life through song and audience participation. Alief AFTSE provided bookmarkers with parenting and reading tips in English and Spanish, and classrooms took pictures with adults role-playing the book's two main characters—Jack and Annie.

Additionally, First Book will offer Alief teachers the opportunity to apply for grants to receive class sets of *The Magic Tree House* book series for their classrooms and campus library.

You can learn more about First Book and apply to help with distributions at www.firstbook.org.

They've got the big money, but we've got the big numbers



Louis Malfaro
Secretary-Treasurer

You'll see in our update (page 6) that in the regular legislative session ending in May we halted numerous attempts to privatize our public schools, and we were successful in restoring a good portion of the \$5.4 billion that was cut from public education in 2011. It's clear, though, that the climate at the Capitol needs to change. Texas lawmakers need to build a strong foundation for our schools with adequate revenue, respect for

the teaching profession, and accountability systems that support achievement rather than serve as a means to tear down our schools and turn them over to private interests.

Wouldn't it be a nice change of pace to see a cadre of legislators on a rampage to provide equitable revenue streams to schools (without the threat of school-finance legislation), smaller class sizes, and teacher pay that is attractive enough to compete with other professions? Wouldn't it be great if legislators spent an enormous amount of time and energy working on an accountability system that didn't rely on the misuse of testing, and instead developed sound measures for measuring student growth that focused on helping the students instead of labeling them as failures?

Changing the climate often means changing the players—the lawmakers we elect. Nothing beats a strong, grass-roots mobilization of

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.



public education supporters to lobby for our cause both during legislative sessions and at the polls, and we've proven that we can muster that effort. That said, the reality is that the team pushing the privatization agenda has an advantage on another key component to effective lobbying and winning elections: money. I'm sure it won't shock you to hear that corporate interests—including testing-related companies, charter operators and virtual-school outfits looking to make money off one of the country's largest public education systems—put a significant amount of money into state legislative races to gain favor for their agenda. And they aren't shy about hiring an army of lobbyists—as was the case this session with Texans for

Education Reform, a front group for private interests that sent a score of high-profile political operatives and former lawmakers into the halls of the Capitol to push their plans.

Thankfully, we have something to counter the big donations flowing to these candidates. We have big numbers, as in 600,000-plus school employees, not to mention the millions of concerned parents who rely on our public schools to educate their children. Recent history in national elections has shown that a large number of small donations end up trumping a lesser number of large donations when people understand the stakes of an election.

With that in mind, we've launched the "1,000 Club," an opportunity to become a founding member of a club that stands up to private interests with small, ongoing donations to the Texas AFT Committee on Political Education II, or "COPE II."


This political action committee supports candidates who are proven friends of public education, regardless of political party. The first 1,000 contributors at the level of \$10 per month or more will be registered as founding members and will receive a T-shirt that shows you're standing up to change the climate at the Capitol. Some members may already be giving to COPE II at a lower level and are still welcome to up their donation to join the 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 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!)

We're hoping that with 65,000 Texas AFT members, the 1,000 Club will fill up quickly, then grow further to be an even greater force in grass-roots fundraising supporting Texas public education.

Finally, we realize that with stagnant pay and increasing health-care costs, every dollar counts in a school employee's budget. Yet we've shown repeatedly in the past that an investment in dues money—particularly at the higher levels needed to support full local Texas AFT affiliate unions—pays off with higher salaries and better working environments in members' local school districts.

We're confident that even a small investment from thousands of public school employees statewide to COPE II will spur the change we need at the Capitol to improve our schools and support our profession.

To sign up for COPE II, or for more information, go to www.texasaftcope.org or call 800-222-3827. 

Texas educators flock to Share My Lesson

ShareMyLesson.com is a Web site where educators can come together to share their very best teaching resources and collaborate together, and Texas educators have embraced the site wholeheartedly since its launch a year ago. Developed by teachers for teachers, this free platform—founded by the American Federation of Teachers and TSL Education—gives access to high-quality lesson plans and provides an online community where teachers can collaborate with, encourage and inspire each other.

Texas is second only to New York in the number of subscribers to the site, which now has more than 255,000 total users, with some 2.4 million downloads since its launch.

Ambassador program launches

New for 2013 is the Share My Lesson Ambassador program, which encourages site users to spread the word and recruit more subscribers. Volunteer ambassadors are asked to sign up for any of three categories:

Wizards—Designed for Internet junkies, Wizards will be first in line to share the latest Share My Lesson news on Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and more.

Gurus—These ambassadors help grow Share My Lesson's content library, which currently has 260,000-plus lesson plans. Gurus will leverage existing knowledge of curriculum and standards to supplement ratings and reviews.

Champions—These are the natural recruiters who are interested in engaging other educators, conducting workshops, and demonstrating what's essential about Share My Lesson.

You can learn more about the Share My Lesson Ambassador



sharemylesson

program at www.sharemylesson.com/ambassador.

New resources for all school employees

Share My Lesson values the contributions of all school employees.

To support them, Share My Lesson offers these specialized collections—beyond lesson plans—of resources and materials to help them be successful, including materials relating to anti-bullying, classroom management, paraprofessionals and school support staff issues, and school nurses.

Quick access to diverse resources

Joe Naughton—a teacher at the Ferndell Henry Center for Learning, an alternative education school in For Bend ISD—found himself constantly trying to develop quality lesson plans quickly to meet the needs of a variety of students at different grade levels and in different course work.

“For example, I was called upon this spring to work with a senior in a sociology course,” he recalled. “I went to sharemylesson.com and was able to construct coursework and find all the resources I needed.” Naughton, who has been teaching for 10 years, said he plans to get more involved in the site, including the community forums and possibly the “Ambassador” program, and he’s prepared some of his own resources to upload.

“I find the site tremendously helpful,” he said. “We’re often called upon to teach students in multiple disciplines at one time, so this is a great resources for our school.”



Joe Naughton

Cross-Country Collaboration

Joe Karb is a middle school social studies teacher from Springville, New York—just miles from the Canadian border. Wanda



Joe Karb

Longoria is a secondary school teacher from San Antonio, Texas, whose focus is English Language Arts. Ordinarily, their paths would never cross.

Share My Lesson brings them together. In Joe's words: “The greatest resource we have as teachers is each other.” We spoke to them about the benefits of this online community:

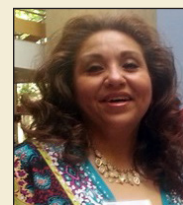
Joe: Share My Lesson is a great way not only to find material but to share material.

In the past, if you had a good lesson maybe you'd share it with one colleague, but that was pretty much the end of it.

Wanda: Sharing ideas, perspectives, materials...it's a community of teachers working together to make our jobs easier and more effective. In the past, you were isolated to your classroom. Today, you are interconnected with teachers everywhere.

Joe: It's a good feeling when you're able to share something that will make a difference. When I first started, we didn't even have email in the school. I'd have to pass along hard copies to colleagues if I had a good lesson worth sharing.

Wanda: As a young teacher, I spent hours every week trying to figure out how best to teach the subject matter. Today, I go to the



Wanda Longoria

site and get three to four times as much planning in one session than I got in one week back in the day.

Joe: I put in some key words, and for every teaching unit this year

I've been able to find a resource that lines up with that subject.

Wanda: I'm constantly looking for relevant connections to our real world.

Joe: My colleague and I created a lesson on the Syrian crisis, which we shared on Share My Lesson. Two days later we had 1,000 hits on the lesson. Now we have the potential to impact teachers and thousands of kids. It's incredible!

2013 Texas Legislature

We Weathered the Storm. Now We Need to Change the Climate.



Texas teachers and all education employees weathered an unprecedented storm of hostile legislation in the 2013 regular session of the Legislature. Texas AFT's team from the grass roots to the Capitol fought back hard, pressing for a better deal for public education from preschool through college. We gained back much of the funding lost two years ago, and the great bulk of the bills attacking public schools and teachers met with failure. We made headway on testing reform and other issues of importance to Texas AFT members.

But the Legislature has now gone into overtime twice at the behest of the governor, and outcomes on major issues remain unsettled. The governor can place any issue he chooses on the legislative agenda for the second month-long special session that started July 1. He has not yet opened the agenda to education issues, but he could do so at any moment.

While we remain ready to do battle again in the second special session or any later one, here is an interim update on the status of major issues and bills of the 2013 regular session.

Attacks on Schools and Educators

Public schools and the teaching profession came under coordinated attack this session as never before.

In 2011, the would-be dismantlers of public education in Texas used the excuse of a recession and an erroneous forecast of a revenue shortfall to justify education cuts and curtailment of educator contract and salary rights.

This time, private interests used front groups like the newly created "Texans for Education Reform" to push an even

broader attack on educational quality standards and educator safeguards than we saw in 2011. They had many bills filed that added up to an attempt to do away with public education as we know it and move Texas toward a privatized education system.

By standing up for public schools and standing together in defense of the education profession, we stopped nearly all of their bills. Not one of the many private-school voucher bills filed this session made

2014 - 2015 State Budget

- **85% of formula aid lost in 2011 budget cuts is restored.**
- **\$600 million in cuts continues for two more years.**
- **Per-pupil funding still more than \$500 short of level reached before recession and budget cuts.**

it to the House or Senate floor for a vote. A passel of other bills to hand over public schools to private charter operators (in the guise of "parent trigger" legislation like SB 1263 or "achievement district" bills like SB 1718, for example) also came to naught. We managed to block multiple bills to put greater emphasis on students' state test scores in teacher evaluation.

The privatizers did score two limited breakthroughs. SB 2, the charter-expansion bill by Sen. Dan Patrick (R-Houston), authorizes a bare majority of a school board to convert a whole feeder pattern of neighborhood schools into charter campuses without teacher or parent input, nullifying key statutory protections for students, parents, and

teachers and other education employees. HB 1926, a "virtual learning" bill by Rep. Ken King (R-Canadian), authorizes private, for-profit entities to provide online courses at taxpayer expense to students enrolled in traditional public schools and charter schools. But HB 1926 still leaves Gov. Perry and other backers of full-time, online instruction disgruntled, because it limits the amount of instruction most students can receive online.

School Funding

The 2014-2015 budget restores 85 percent of the formula aid that school districts lost in the budget cuts of 2011 (\$3.4 billion out of \$4 billion). Of course, that figure also means a continuation of 15 percent, or \$600 million, in cuts of formula aid for two more years, and it also means that average annual funding per-pupil remains more than \$500 short of the level reached before the recession and ensuing budget cuts.

Even so, restoration of the bulk of formula aid means that most school districts will have money to restore jobs, raise pay, reduce class sizes, or take other measures to undo the damage to children's education. Texas AFT local affiliates and members already are in the forefront of efforts to capitalize on the restoration of state per-pupil aid.

The two-year budget plan does much less to restore grant funding, which was cut by \$1.4 billion in 2011. Under SB 1, though some grant funding is restored, the bulk of the massive cuts enacted in 2011 will continue for two more years in valuable programs such as full-day prekindergarten

and the Student Success Initiative offering extra help for students struggling to pass state exams.

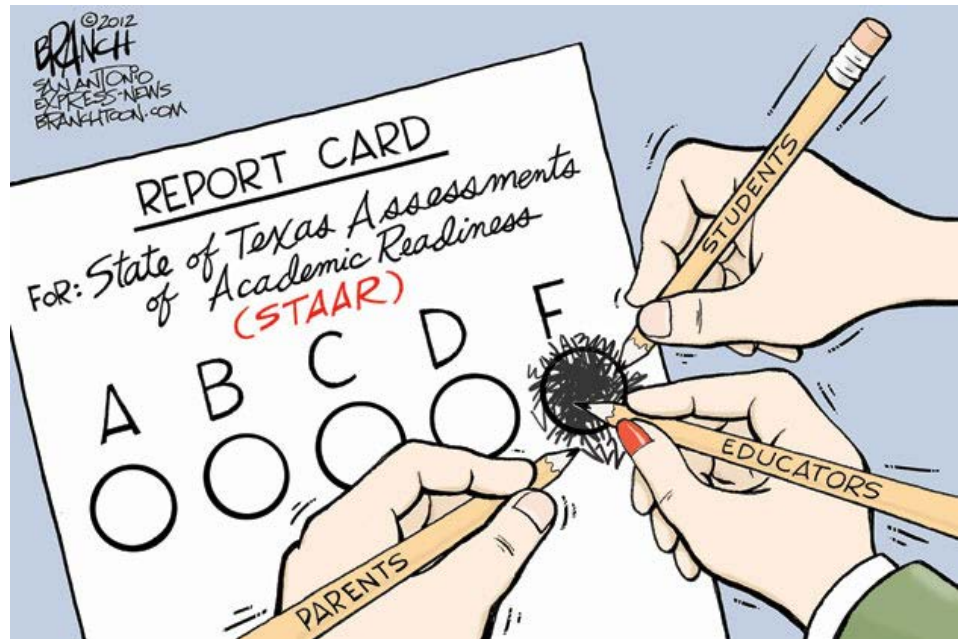
Legislative leaders say these ongoing cuts in public education are necessary because available funding is limited. But lawmakers left more than \$8 billion untouched in general revenue and in the Economic Stabilization Fund (the Rainy Day Fund reserve). At the same time, in other legislation, they have cut state revenue by \$1.4 billion in order to give that money to businesses via various kinds of tax breaks.

On a positive note, under SB 1 funding of Texas children's public education will depend significantly less on the happenstance of high or low property wealth in the school district where those children live. This improvement in equity presumably will put Texas in a better position as the state continues to face a strong legal challenge in state district court to both the equity and the adequacy of school funding. A final ruling from the state supreme court, expected next year, could give the Legislature another strong push to complete the job of restoring education funding to a level that meets the state's constitutional obligation to the schoolchildren of Texas.

Accountability and Testing

HB 5 by Rep. Jimmie Don Aycock (R-Killeen) limits state end-of-course tests to Algebra I, Biology, English I, English II, and U.S. History. Thus, required end-of-course tests will decrease from 15 to five. The English I and English II tests will assess both reading and writing. Districts will have the option of administering post-secondary readiness tests in Algebra II and English III, but passing these exams will not be required for graduation, and the exams will not count in state accountability ratings. The bill does not reduce state testing in lower grades, though it does limit local benchmark tests to two per state exam.

The state accountability system will use a new A-to-F grading system for school districts but will retain the



Significant ground was gained on addressing overtesting in high school with HB 5, which reduced the number of end-of-course exams. But attempts to end the misuse of tests were stifled, and vetoes from Gov. Rick Perry killed bills to help address overtesting in lower grades.

existing ratings of exemplary, recognized, academically acceptable, and academically unacceptable for campuses. Unfortunately, HB 5 omits language Sen. Wendy Davis (D-Fort Worth) had inserted in the Senate version that would have precluded the use of state achievement tests for purposes for which they are not demonstrably valid and reliable. In other words, under HB 5 the current misuse of test results for punitive, high-stakes ratings of school districts, schools, students, and educators can continue.

Gov. Perry also vetoed another testing-related bill, HB 2836 by Rep. Bennett Ratliff (R-Coppell), containing a provision very similar to the Davis amendment requiring independent validation of achievement tests. In addition, a second Bennett Ratliff bill (HB 2824) authorizing high-performing districts to experiment with alternatives to STAAR state achievement exams to measure student performance fell victim to a Perry veto. A third bill, HB 866 by Rep. Dan Huberty (R-Humble), would exempt high-performing students from some STAAR exams in grades three through eight, but it won't take effect unless a

waiver of No Child Left Behind Act testing mandates can be secured from the federal government.

Retirement Benefits

SB 1458, the main Teacher Retirement System bill of the session, combines some real gains for the 800,000-plus active and 300,000-plus retired TRS members with a significant takeaway of earned benefits from hundreds of thousands.

The takeaway: SB 1458 will require employees who do not have five years of service credit by August 31, 2014, to work until age 62 if they want full, unreduced retirement benefits. Their pension will be reduced 5 percent for each year below age 62 when they retire. About 190,000 current employees could be affected by this benefit cut.

The bill also sets age 62 as the new



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minimum needed to qualify for a TRS-Care retiree health plan other than the lowest-level, catastrophic coverage, unless by August 31, 2014, the TRS member meets a rule of 70 (age plus years of service equal to 70 or more) or has at least 25 years of service credit. This benefit cut will curtail access to retiree health coverage for hundreds of thousands of current employees. (Note: A person who is not grandfathered and who retires before age 62 would become eligible to step up to a TRS-Care plan offering more than catastrophic coverage upon reaching age 62.)

Some real gains: Considering where it started, SB 1458 improved significantly over the original Senate proposal. The improvements are directly attributable to the tens of thousands of active and retired teachers and other education employees and supporters who worked long and hard this session to push for a fairer deal on retirement contributions and benefits. Well over 50,000 of you took advantage of Texas AFT's e-letter and call-in facilities to lobby your legislators on SB 1458.

These efforts helped achieve important goals: enhancing the long-term sustainability of the Teacher Retirement System pension fund; providing overdue relief for many current retirees; and sharing more equitably the responsibility of making adequate contributions to the pension fund. Entries we can book on the positive side of the SB 1458 ledger include these:

- State contributions will increase to 6.8 percent (from 6.4 percent currently) starting in September, and state law will prohibit any reduction in state contributions without a parallel reduction in employee and district contributions.
- Higher contributions for active employees will be phased in gradually, over four years, staying at 6.4 percent through August 2014, then rising to 6.7 percent in fiscal 2015, 7.2 percent in fiscal 2016, and 7.7 percent in fiscal

2017. The employee contribution in all years will be more than matched by state and district contributions. A district contribution of an amount equaling 1.5 percent of payroll will be required starting in fiscal 2015 (only districts that pay into Social Security will be exempt).

- SB 1458 will all but ensure a 3-percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for about 195,000 TRS members who retired before September 2004—nearly 60 percent of all retirees and about twice as many as originally proposed. If delivered as expected sometime this fall, the COLA (capped at \$100 a month) will mean a small but permanent increase in pension annuities—the first such TRS cost-of-living increase since 2001, a period in which inflation has eroded pensions' purchasing power by more than 30 percent.
- SB 1458 will help sustain the already-strong TRS defined-benefit pension program for current retirees and for active employees now working in our schools, colleges and universities, and for all future education employees. Bolstering the pension fund's long-term actuarial outlook will help us continue to fend off attacks on defined-benefit pensions. We can expect these attacks will intensify as private interests seek to replace defined-benefit pensions with 401(k)-style individual accounts, which do not guarantee a lifetime benefit but do offer rich profit-making opportunities for private fund managers.

Passage of SB 1458 is not the end of the fight for a balanced and fair deal on pension and health benefits for TRS members. The fight for a fairer deal for all education employees, active and retired, will continue, perhaps in an anticipated special session on school finance and certainly in the next regular legislative session. So be ready.

Guns on Campus

HB 1009 by Rep. Jason Villalba (R-Dallas) authorizes school districts

Changing the Climate

Weathering a storm of hostile legislation and making some headway on school funding, testing, and other issues are no mean accomplishments. Texas AFT members can be proud of what they achieved in the 2013 regular session. But the enemies of public education are not going away. They will continue pushing relentlessly an agenda that has three basic elements: Underfund public education. Declare public schools a failure. And then privatize them.

We need to do more than just weather the storm of these attacks session after session. We need to do what it takes to change the climate in the state Capitol to one of unstinting support for our more than six million students from pre-K through college and unstinting respect for the teaching profession and for all who labor to make our students successful. (See "Join the 1000 Club" on page 5 for how to help.)

We can change the climate in Austin, but only if we join forces with education-friendly allies to build a better Legislature and better team of statewide elected officials. A crucial phase of our climate-change project will start with the March 2014 primaries and the November 2014 general elections. Look for much more on this theme in coming issues of the *Texas Teacher*.

(Meanwhile, for more on the 2013 legislative action, check www.texasaft.org for our back-to-school report on notable laws of the 83rd regular session that will affect you and your students.)



and open-enrollment charter schools to designate school employees as "school marshals," who would receive two weeks' worth of training in how to defend their campus against armed attack. These employees would have to be holders of concealed-handgun licenses and would be authorized to keep their weapon ready




Thousands of Texas AFT members, fellow educators, and parents sent letters to their lawmakers objecting to privatization attempts—accompanied by a flag making a firm statement that public schools are not for sale.

to hand at school. Gov. Perry vetoed another guns-on-campus bill, SB 17 by Sen. Patrick, which would have authorized Department of Public Safety training for up to two school employees per campus who are CHL holders to provide security against attack. Perry said the bill failed to make adequate provision for secure storage of weapons on campus. Other bills to authorize carrying of guns on college

campuses never made it to the governor's desk.

Four Texas AFT Priority Bills Become Law

Four bills passed by overwhelming margins and signed by the governor on June 14 will help achieve Texas AFT priorities for student discipline, access of higher-ed adjunct faculty to health coverage, and rights of educators to timely action by the commissioner of education on their grievance cases. Here's a quick summary:

- SB 1541 by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte (D-San Antonio) and House author Rep. Alma Allen (D-Houston) bolsters authority for drivers to enforce discipline on board their school buses and protect students' safety. Effective date: June 14, 2013.
- HB 1952 by Rep. Senfronia Thompson (D-Houston) and Sen. Van de Putte requires principals and other administrators charged with enforcing
- the Safe Schools Act to undergo periodic training, with special emphasis on the distinction between ordinary disciplinary referrals to the principal and formal discretionary removals of disruptive students from the classroom by their teachers. Effective date: June 14, 2013.
- HB 2127 by Rep. Donna Howard (D-Austin) and Sen. Kirk Watson (D-Austin) expands eligibility of adjunct faculty at public institutions of higher education to buy into the state Employees Retirement System health plan. Effective date: September 1, 2013.
- HB 2952 by Rep. Justin Rodriguez (D-San Antonio) and Sen. Kirk Watson (D-Austin) puts an end to multi-year delays in commissioner decisions on grievance appeals by educators. HB 2952 sets a 240-day deadline for the commissioner to decide these cases, with an extension of up to 60 days allowed if the parties to the case agree. Effective date: June 14, 2013. 

Chances for pay raises increase, but local action is needed

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. With the restoration of some 85 percent of the formula aid to districts, the prospects are much improved for increases this year.

This restored funding totals \$3.4 billion that districts can and should use to raise pay, increase district health-care contributions, hire and rehire staff, and reduce class size.

But this process is not automatic. And Texas AFT local affiliates already are at the forefront of local 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.

School employees also need to be aware of another key piece of legislation that may help boost the chances for pay increases or ways to hold the line on increasing health-care costs.

The legislature allocated \$330 million for fiscal 2015, starting September 1, 2014, to help school districts cover the cost of contributing an amount equal to 1.5 percent of payroll to the TRS pension fund. (See "Retirement Benefits" on page 7 for an outline of Senate Bill 1458.)

Districts that do not pay into Social Security will be obligated to pay that 1.5 percent of payroll into the pension fund starting


that September, but the allocation from the state will cover that cost for the fiscal year starting September 2014. That state allocation will make it easier for districts to muster local revenue for pay raises or health-care premium sharing.

All districts will get their share of the \$330 million, even districts like Austin ISD and San Antonio ISD that do pay into Social Security and therefore do not owe the 1.5 percent starting in September 2014.

Districts not obligated to pay into the pension fund will be free to spend the money on other local expenses, including salary increases. Therefore, these districts will have an extra measure of flexibility in making decisions on where to spend money in their local budgets.

That's where you come in. Whether your district benefits from the SB 1458 allocation or not, it's clear that many districts are facing better forecasts for revenue.

It's up to Texas AFT members and their local organizations to monitor local decisions on the budget now that the revenue picture has improved.

Together we can help ensure that you get the pay and benefits you deserve as Texas recovers from the self-inflicted wound of the 2011 budget cuts. 



Texas AFT

STAND UP FOR KIDS



We are educators joined together for the common good. We support one another's personal and professional success, and together we stand up for what's right for our schools and our students.

Texas AFT is part of your school community. We are colleagues who help each other teach our students and make our schools the best they can be.

By joining, you make our union stronger, and your participation—as an active member and an excellent educator who stands up for public schools—inspires and empowers others to do the same.

We owe it to ourselves to come together as educators and stand up!

STANDING TOGETHER Locally

Texas AFT is the only Texas school employee organization with a significant number of local unions and Associate Member Program offices organized to provide direct representation for educators and school employees.

Our local union affiliates are on the front lines to advocate fair pay and quality work environments and provide statewide coverage for professional development, mentoring and training. By organizing a collective voice locally, we have the power to protect school employees from unfair

employment practices, and together we can elect true friends of public education in state legislative and congressional districts throughout Texas.

STANDING TOGETHER As a Family

Being a member of a union means you are part of a family of educators and other workers with a shared vision for public education. Other organizations may provide professional training, some legal protection and other perks, but Texas AFT adds an emphasis on empowering you and your co-workers to improve the quality of your profession by building local unions.

STANDING TOGETHER As a Team

Texas AFT represents all non-administrative certified and classified public school employees in traditional public schools and some charter schools. Texas AFT represents the interests of teachers, counselors, librarians, diagnosticians, custodians, cafeteria

workers, bus drivers, nurses, teaching assistants, clerical employees, and the other men and women who work so hard to make our schools succeed. Texas AFT also represents faculty and staff in universities, colleges and community and junior colleges.

Although we believe it takes a team to run our schools, we do not represent administrators, since it would be a clear conflict of interest in cases where we assist teachers and other personnel in employment matters.

STANDING TOGETHER Statewide and Nationwide

With more than 65,000 members, Texas AFT is a statewide organization encompassing 26 local unions in school districts across the state, and the Texas AFT Associate Member Program also serves thousands of teachers through additional local offices.

We are also affiliated with the 1.5-million-member American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO, with 12 million members.

The tools and support you need to succeed

Training and Conferences

Texas AFT sponsors numerous workshops for educators to improve their skills, including:

- Leadership conferences to train leaders for advocacy, organizing and involving members, and conflict resolution.
- Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel (PSRP) workshops designed especially for support personnel and those providing core services.
- Professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals on various topics including: Foundations For Effective Teaching, Managing Antisocial Behavior, Classroom Management and many more. All professional development is TEA-approved for certificate renewal.
- Training for the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS). Unlike the PDAS training offered by districts, Texas AFT training focuses on your rights within the evaluation system and ways to improve your score on each domain.
- Safe Schools Act training to ensure teachers know how to use the law to protect themselves and improve the

learning environment for all schoolchildren.

- National Board Certification support for teachers and collaboration with districts to offer support locally.

Publications

Texas AFT produces a variety of print and electronic publications that inform and advise educators, parents and students, including:

- *Texas Teacher*, an award-winning magazine for members that offers news on education and resources for professional development.
- *Texas AFT Legislative Hotline*, daily e-mail reports from the Legislature on breaking news and issues that need membership action. Between sessions, the Hotline serves to update members on important changes in education law and policy, particularly issues that affect your pocketbook.
- *PSRP Report* and *We Make Schools*



Texas AFT members get ready for visits to lawmaker offices at Texas AFT's Lobby Day, which occurs in March of each legislative session.

Work—publications in English and Spanish for Texas AFT paraprofessionals and school related personnel.

- *American Educator* and *American Teacher*, AFT's superb professional journal and its magazine.

Teaching Resources

Texas AFT provides teachers with tips and materials for classroom management, lesson planning and other resources found on the AFT Web site at www.aft.org and www.sharemylesson.com.

The Texas AFT Difference Building Local Unions Step by Step...

Texas AFT believes that strong local unions are the best means of ensuring the compensation, respect and resources that our professions deserve—which in turn lead to better schools for our children. We are different than some other “teacher groups” because we actively seek to form local unions and secure the right to collective bargaining. Here’s how it works:

1) **Public school employees organize as part of our Associate Member Program** for statewide membership. In areas without local affiliates, Texas AFT staff help recruit enough members (usually several hundred) to form an “organizing committee” dedicated to growing into an autonomous local union.

2) **The organizing committee prepares to “charter,”** which

means to affiliate as a full local union in Texas AFT and AFT nationally. The organizing committee, with assistance from Texas AFT, develops a governing structure, identifies and trains leadership, and continues to recruit new members.

3) **The organization votes to “charter.”** Members vote on whether to form a full affiliate. AFT at the national level then grants the local a charter.

4) **Local unions seek consultation agreements.** Many local affiliates then work toward achieving elected consultation, a designation (usually by election among all affected school employees) as the organization that formally negotiates with a district on employee wages, benefits and working conditions.

5) **The unions achieve collective bargaining.** Texas AFT works to change state law to allow collective bargaining contracts for school employees.



Texas AFT members join parents and students at the Capitol this spring to protest budget cuts and misuse of testing.

Partnerships

Texas AFT has actively worked with state and local governments on policy initiatives, many of which originated with Texas AFT—such as the Safe Schools

Act, which established teachers' authority to remove violent and disruptive students. Texas AFT also works with groups like Texas Forward (which seeks revenue reforms to meet state needs),

coalitions to fight private-school vouchers and keep the class-size law, and parent groups like Save Texas Schools.

Standing Together with One Voice

A team of AFT representatives in Washington speaks out for members on issues including the pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind), education funding and the misuse of testing.

Here in Texas, our legislative staff is well-known and respected in Austin and serves as the leader in fighting for public schools.

However, Texas AFT knows that you and your colleagues in your schools are the most effective agents for change, and we work to mobilize members on a variety of issues affecting your profession. Together we stood strong at the Capitol this spring when attempts were made to defund and privatize our schools.

Texas AFT members by the thousands participated in our Lobby Day at the Capitol in March and at the Save Texas Schools rally in February.

Members met with legislators in their districts statewide and sent thousands of e-mails and made thousands of phone calls to advocate our cause.

On one issue alone—the TRS pension bill—more than 50,000 school employees sent letters to their legislators asking for a fair deal.

Thousands more helped write and call to help pass legislation that reduced the number of standardized tests. And our efforts helped defeat private-school voucher bills and other destructive bills that would have facilitated takeover of neighborhood public schools by private operators.

Your membership, support and activism strengthen Texas AFT's legislative team at the Capitol, and help ensure that the voice of professional


educators have a say on decisions that affect us, our schools and our students.

In Your School District

Texas AFT staff also cut through red tape and help resolve thorny issues at your workplace. Our attorneys work with representatives in the field to defend your rights under state law. Our advocates have the knowledge and experience to represent your interests on issues like planning time, duty-free lunch, certification and evaluations.

If you need an attorney, we offer the finest, including Texas AFT General Counsel Martha Owen, who has been recognized in Best Lawyers in America. Texas Monthly magazine has named her a Super Lawyer every year since 2003. Texas AFT Associate Membership Program in-house counsel Julissa Herrera helps members access a statewide network of attorneys with years of experience in school-related issues.

Join Us!

To join Texas AFT, see the next page to see if you have a local union or organizing committee covering your school district to call directly. If not, you will sign up as member of our statewide Associate Member Program by calling 800-222-3827 or visiting www.texasaft.org and clicking on "Membership." 



Subscribe to the Texas AFT Legislative Hotline to keep in the loop with important education news. Visit www.texasaftblog.com/hotline.



We've got you covered

**With 38 local and regional
offices throughout Texas,
we're ready to stand up with
you for our schoolchildren
and our professions.**

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

Alief ISD: Alief AFTSE
(281) 589-6644

Amarillo ISD: Amarillo AFT
(806) 359-4487

Austin Community College: ACC AFT
(512) 448-0130

Austin ISD: Education Austin
(512) 472-1124

Bastrop ISD: Bastrop AFT
(512) 448-0130

Brazosport ISD: Brazosport Federation of Teachers (979) 265-9701

Calallen ISD: Corpus Christi AFT
(361) 855-0482

Channelview ISD: Northeast Houston AFT
(713) 453-7500

Corpus Christi ISD: Corpus Christi AFT
(361) 855-0482

Cy-Fair ISD: Cy-Fair AFT
(713) 466-1125

Dallas ISD: Alliance AFT
(214) 942-4663

Del Rio ISD: Del Rio AFT
(512) 448-0130

Edinburg ISD: Edinburg AFT
(956) 502-5340

El Paso ISD: El Paso Federation of Teachers & Support Personnel (915) 562-3738

Flour Bluff ISD: Corpus Christi AFT
(361) 855-0482

Fort Bend ISD: Fort Bend
Employee Federation
(281) 240-1865

Galena Park ISD: Northeast Houston AFT
(713) 453-7500

Goose Creek ISD: Goose Creek
Education Federation (281) 427-2091

Gregory-Portland ISD: Corpus Christi AFT
(361) 855-0482

Houston ISD: Houston Federation
of Teachers (713) 623-8891

Houston ISD: Houston Educational
Support Personnel (713) 660-8435

Killeen ISD: Killeen Federation
of Teachers & Support Personnel
(254) 690-2538

La Joya ISD: La Joya AFT
(956) 682-1143

Lone Star College: AFT Lone Star
(281) 889-1009

McAllen ISD: McAllen AFT
(956) 682-1143

North East ISD: Northeast AFT
(210) 227-8083

Northside ISD: Northside AFT
(210) 733-9777

Pflugerville ISD: Pflugerville AFT
(512) 448-0130

Round Rock ISD: Education Round Rock
(512) 448-0130

San Antonio ISD: San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel
(210) 225-7174

Shelby ISD: Northeast Houston AFT
(713) 453-7500

Socorro ISD: Socorro AFT
(915) 593-2801

South San Antonio ISD: South San Antonio
AFT (210) 227-8083

Spring Branch ISD: Spring Branch AFT
(713) 468-4700

Tuloso-Midway ISD: Corpus Christi AFT
(361) 855-0482

Victoria ISD: Victoria AFT
(512) 448-0130

Waco ISD: Waco AFT
(254) 755-0276

West Oso ISD: Corpus Christi AFT
(361) 855-0482

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