



Texas AFT

Texas Teacher

A Union of Professionals

WINTER 2014



Texas AFT helps First Book hit one million mark, page 10

**Poverty is still with us,
and it matters, p. 2**



**Time to choose a new path
in coming elections, p. 4**

NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION by the NUMBERS

11 National Partners
and
100+ Community Partners

100+ Events
across 36 states and DC

12,000+ Groups (large and small) and individuals endorsed "The Principles that Unite Us"

NATIONAL ADVERTISING
CAMPAIGN seen by
30+ MILLION

Radio Ads **12,216,059**

Print Ads **7,275,195**

Web Ads **10,010,000+**

SOCIAL MEDIA
CAMPAIGN reached

Thunderclap **429,354**

Facebook **20,420,829**

Twitter **1,068,489**

MEDIA COVERAGE

120+ Mentions in local and national press outlets

"Day of Action Unites Students, Teachers in Protest"
—The Root, December 8, 2013

"Education Activists Protest, Rally in Scores of Cities"
—The Washington Post, December 9, 2013

"Reclaim School Reform"
—The Nation, December 4, 2013

"Andrea Mitchell Reports," MSNBC

20,006 MoveOn PETITIONS SIGNED and

255,326

EMAILS SENT to policymakers

Reclaim the promise of public education.
www.ReclaimPublicEdNow.org
#Reclaimit

aft Reclaiming the Promise

Public services and institutions that Americans rely on are under assault. Decades of top-down edicts, privatization schemes, and polarization and austerity measures have taken their toll. These attacks stand in the way of meeting our collective obligation to help all children succeed through public education, strengthening our communities and advancing the common good.

It's time to reclaim the promise by fulfilling public education's purpose as a propeller of our economy and an anchor of our democracy; by ensuring access to affordable and high-quality early childhood care and higher education; by creating a health-care system that puts patient care and safety above profits; and by fighting for retirement security and high-quality public services that help ensure safe, healthy and vibrant communities.

You can pledge your commitment at: go.aft.org/promise

Texas AFT members participated in the national "Day of Action" on December 9 to help Reclaim the Promise of Education. Events included:

Austin

On December 6, Education Austin and activists for community-led public education marched from the Capitol's south steps to the Federal Building for a rally to lend their support for great public schools in every neighborhood, for investing in the future of Texas students, and for community partnerships that focus on what's best for students.

Houston

Houston Federation of Teachers members and parents rallied at the Houston ISD School Board meeting to urge members to Reclaim the Promise of public education and stop the misuse of standardized testing.

Corpus Christi

Members of Corpus Christi AFT, officials from CITGO, and other community partners joined with the First Book organization to give away a free book to every student attending local Head Start centers. Local elected officials, judges, business leaders, and representatives of labor, nonprofit and community organizations also attended a roundtable discussion on education issues at Del Mar College.

Socorro

Members of Socorro AFT and tribal leaders of the Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo joined community partners and the First Book organization to give away a free book to every student attending Campestre Elementary in the Socorro Independent School District.



Corpus Christi AFT members gather for First Book distribution on the Day of Action.



AFT President Randi Weingarten (front row center, with young friend) visits with members of local AFT unions in McAllen, La Joya and Edinburg in January. Weingarten also met with local school officials to discuss national education policy, her experiences in Texas and the union's efforts to partner with community to reclaim the promise of public education for all kids.



Stay in tune and in touch. Download the Texas AFT app, p. 9

Reclaiming the Promise Viewpoint	Inside Cover
Feds act on debate over student discipline	2
From the Secretary-Treasurer	3
Election 2014	4
Join the 1,000 Club	5
Legislative update	5
Charter schools don't measure up to hype	6
First Book hits 1 million mark	8
Locals in Action	10
How to join Texas AFT	12
Share My Lesson	13
	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

Poverty is still with us, and it matters



Linda Bridges
Texas AFT President

Fifty years after President Johnson declared an unconditional war on poverty, the battle rages on. AFT President Randi Weingarten says, “For too many of our families, the American dream has slipped further out of reach. The need to eradicate poverty and create opportunity and shared prosperity is as great now as it was 50 years ago.”

Steve Murdock, a former Texas demographer and former director of the U.S. Census Bureau, has examined

the latest census data in his new book titled *Changing Texas: Implications of Addressing or Ignoring the Texas Challenge*. Murdock points out that Black and Hispanic households in Texas in 2010 had median incomes in the \$35,000 to \$37,000 range, compared with \$60,000 to \$64,000 for white and Asian households. Increasing fastest are households with the highest rates of poverty. Murdock projects that poverty rates in Texas could increase from 14.4 percent in 2010 to 17.7 percent in 2050.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) recently issued a report on *Poverty in Texas Today*. The following are a few of the Texas stats (with the years referenced) from the report:

- 2.8 million children are enrolled in Medicaid (2013).
- 26 percent of children ages 0-17 live in poverty (2012).
- 9 percent of the children in poverty are in fair or poor health (2011-2012).
- 41 percent of the people age 25 and up who live below the poverty line do not have a high school diploma (2012).
- 32 percent of workers are in jobs that pay poverty wages (2010).
- 67 percent of children in preschool are below 200 percent of the poverty line (2009-2010).

The CPPP report draws three conclusions we need to pay attention to as a state.

- Poverty in Texas is more pronounced than in the nation. The poor are concentrated in the state’s largest cities and the Texas-Mexico border region.
- Poverty rates are also much higher for the state’s growing Latino population and for African-American Texans.

- Child poverty—particularly among young children—is significantly higher in Texas than in the nation as a whole.

In reviewing the CPPP report it is important to examine data on the number of Texans who are working but remain poor. The study found that most poor families with children in Texas are working families. Of the 686,700 families with children below the poverty line in 2010, 60 percent—412,545—were headed by a worker.

According to CPPP, in the larger universe of Texas families below 200 percent of the poverty line, work participation is even higher. Of nearly 1.5 million poor and “near poor” Texas families with children, 77 percent—or 1.1 million—are working. These families include almost 5.4 million Texans, 2.7 million of whom are children.

Low wages in many of the state economy’s growth sectors contribute to Texas’ large working but low-income population, as do limited public assistance benefits. In 2011, about 31 percent of Texas workers had low-income jobs, above the U.S. average of 27 percent. Texas workers rank near the bottom in terms of having health insurance (50th), employer-provided pensions (46th), workers’ compensation coverage (50th), and unemployment benefits (41st).

Why should we care about these numbers? I believe these stats are a problem for all of us, not just the families affected. The lack of a well-educated work force negatively impacts economic development.


Murdock contends: “If Texas fails to adequately educate its growing population of minority students, the state will have a less well educated and a poorer population than it has today.

Learn more about the “Poverty in Texas” report and other research on poverty and education at:

www.forabettertexas.org



However, if it can successfully educate this population, it could have a younger and more competitive workforce than the nation as a whole.”

I would also propose that in addition to educating this population we must ensure the health care needs of these children are met. As an example, more than 175,000 children in the Dallas area are without health insurance. It is virtually impossible to educate children if they are ill. Health care and job growth must be part of the comprehensive plan to address the needs of our children living in poverty. 

Debate over student discipline spurs feds to act

But in Texas, the issue is local policy, not the Safe Schools Act



Eric Hartman
Texas AFT
Government
Relations Director

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in January came out with some non-binding recommendations urging local school districts not to turn school-discipline issues into criminal-justice matters

except in cases of serious misconduct. That philosophy already is reflected in Texas law.

Here in Texas since 1995 we have had a Safe Schools Act that emphasizes educational placement, rather than expulsion to the street or adjudication and incarceration in the criminal-justice or juvenile-justice system.

Under the Safe Schools Act, for assaults causing bodily injury, for example, a student goes to a separate disciplinary alternative education program, where the emphasis is on academic study and schooling in self-discipline. For an aggravated assault (causing serious bodily injury or using a weapon), to cite another example, a student goes to a juvenile-justice alternative education program in the home community, not to a juvenile or adult prison.

Again the emphasis is on education, not punishment. Only for the most serious criminal offenses do students end up in juvenile or adult prison. Fewer than 1,500 youths are now in state juvenile prisons; compare that to the 5.1 million students in Texas public schools. Only another

few thousand are in local juvenile-justice alternative education programs. These numbers are tiny fractions of the total student population. That is not evidence of a school-to-prison pipeline.

This year the legislature did enact new limitations on one use of the criminal-justice system, namely misdemeanor ticketing for disruptive conduct at school. The thinking was that this type of misconduct should be handled in the schools' internal discipline process, not taken to the criminal-justice or juvenile-justice system. The effect of this legislation is to put even more emphasis on the need for school-based disciplinary measures that allow early intervention to correct misbehavior instead of letting problems fester until the criminal-justice system must take over.

Talk of "zero tolerance" policies that must be corrected is out of date in Texas. We don't have a state "zero tolerance" system, we have a system of sanctions calibrated to match the seriousness of the offense. Sometimes there is overzealous use of sanctions at local discretion; then again, sometimes (again at local discretion) there is a failure to apply sanctions when they should be used. There's a proper balance that must be struck.


Rep. Sylvester Turner, the Houston Democrat who chairs the Texas Legislative Black Caucus, described this balance well in reaction to a spate of violent incidents in Houston-area schools in 2012:

"Bringing weapons to school, engaging in disruptive behavior on school buses, bullying and fighting on our school campuses, breaking into homes and

cars are not acceptable behaviors in our communities...Our children need to know that we love them, we support them, we will be there for them, we will work to make our schools and neighborhoods better for them. But they also need to know that bad behaviors are not the new norm and will not be tolerated."

Much of the concern voiced by the attorney general and secretary of education related to disparate treatment of students based on race or ethnicity. Whenever minority students are disciplined differently from white/Anglo students for the same type of misbehavior anywhere in this country, then that disparity must be challenged and corrected—period. The only thing that should determine the sanction applied is the nature of the misbehavior, not the race or ethnicity of the student.

Finally, a bit of debunking of some oft-cited data on school discipline in Texas is in order. News reports on the federal discipline recommendations have quoted a 2011 Texas A&M study that said from seventh through 12th grade more than half of Texas students were "suspended or expelled." Here's what those news reports left out: Some 70 percent of all the disciplinary actions reported were in-school suspensions for as little as one class period; fewer than 2 percent of the disciplinary actions were expulsions.

In fact, the Texas A&M study acknowledged that fewer than 6 percent of all Texas students experienced any formal disciplinary action over the course of a school year—a lower rate than in many other states. 



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.)

November election a chance to choose another path



Louis Malfaro
Secretary-Treasurer

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

—Robert Frost

*Yes, there are two paths you can go by,
But in the long run
There's still time to change the road you're
on.*

—Led Zeppelin

Texans have a big choice to make this November: Do we continue down the same path that Rick Perry has led us on for a decade and a half or choose a different road? It is clear that there is a spirited gubernatorial race shaping up that pits Texas Sen. Wendy Davis against Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott. Texas AFT has come out early (and strongly) on behalf of Sen. Davis. Educators will likely play a large role in determining the outcome of this race. After all, there are nearly a million of us, active and retired.

We are predominantly female—the gender that, if past be prologue, has behaved in a less partisan fashion and been more open to the actual candidates and their views. And we have much to gain or lose, as public school educators and advocates for

Sen. Wendy Davis has even offered up the “radical” notion that teachers in Texas are poorly paid and has proposed increasing teacher pay and benefits to retain good teachers and attract a new generation of educators.

children, depending on who wins this election.

As we pick our path, there are several questions on the minds of teachers and school employees.

Will the state put back the money taken out of public schools and make a serious commitment to fully funding the education of Texas schoolchildren?

Senator Davis distinguished herself during the 2011 legislative session with a filibuster of the bill that cut funding to public schools by billions of dollars. Her actions forced a special session of the Legislature and gave advocates of public schools time to mobilize opposition to the cuts.

While deep reductions were ultimately made to public school budgets, Wendy Davis paved the way for the restoration of

education funding and left little room for doubt about where she stands on funding for our schools.

The attorney general has not said whether he will invest more in schools, and as the state’s chief lawyer he has aggressively defended both the cuts made to school funding and the school finance system that will likely be declared (once again) as failing to meet the requirement in the Texas constitution that the legislature provide for an efficient system of public schools. Do we strike out on a new path of investing in public education or remain on the same low road?

Will Texas continue to lead the nation in the number of uninsured residents and in the number of children without access to health care?

Under the leadership of Rick Perry, Texas has refused to accept billions of dollars to implement fully the Affordable Care Act by expanding Medicaid to eligible Texans. Millions of working families, adults and children, are being left out of access to health insurance. Texas has six of the 20 largest metropolitan populations of uninsured children (Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio, Austin, McAllen, and El Paso).

Doctors, hospitals, health advocates and business leaders have all bemoaned the failure of the current Texas governor to draw down the fund available to expand Medicaid. Sen. Davis has called for Texas to accept the federal funds (which our federal income taxes helped to pay for!) and insure as many Texans (kids and adults) as we can. General Abbott does not favor providing health care for the working poor and children of Texas. Do you think he will support a plan to help teachers and school employees get more affordable health insurance for our families?

What will be the new governor’s agenda for supporting and improving public schools in our state?

Greg Abbott has recently been visiting charter schools and online schools to promote the well-worn but wholly unproven argument the “competition and choice” are what we need to help improve education for Texas children. Never mind the inconvenient fact that in Texas, charter schools continue as a whole to underperform neighborhood public schools, and that charter schools that have done well have been found to use




State Sen. Wendy Davis recently visited Corpus Christi AFT to discuss education policy with union members.

selection and push-out practices that enable them to attract higher performing students and send lower performers back to the neighborhood public schools. Special education students and English language learners are underrepresented in charter schools as well.

Sen. Davis has called for increasing support for teacher preparation programs and offering scholarships to promising

young college aspirants who wish to become teachers. She has even offered up the “radical” notion that teachers in Texas are poorly paid and has proposed increasing teacher pay and benefits to retain good teachers and attract a new generation of educators. Imagine that!

As we wind our way toward the general election in November, educators and school employees need to be keeping

our eyes on the candidates and on the roads they propose to lead us down. We surely don’t want to get taken for another ride by candidates who speak of ensuring a “world-class education” for our kids, but never get specific on how they get our state there. In the garbled words of the last governor before Rick Perry: “Fool me once, shame on—shame on you. Fool me—you can’t get fooled again.” 

VOTE 2014

The March 4 primaries will provide voters with the first opportunity in 2014 to support candidates who are friends of public education. Key races for the U.S. Congress and Texas Legislature will be in the mix, as will statewide seats for governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, land commissioner, agriculture commissioner, railroad commissioner, and judicial races.

For a list of Texas AFT endorsed candidates and other election information, visit www.texasaft.org and click on “Election 2014.” Texas AFT members also should be on the lookout on the local level for spring school board races and bond elections in their areas. Check with your local union or www.texasisd.com for local information.

Important Dates for March 4, Primary Election

Last day to register to vote in Primary Election
February 3

Early Voting
February 18 to February 28

Last day to apply for ballot by mail (received, not postmarked)
February 21

Primary Election
March 4

Early voting period for the primary runoff election
May 19 to May 23

Primary run-off election
May 27, 2014

Web sites for election information

State of Texas
www.votetexas.gov
Election dates, voter registration information, candidate lists

BallotPedia
www.ballotpedia.org

Big numbers will help defeat big money!

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.

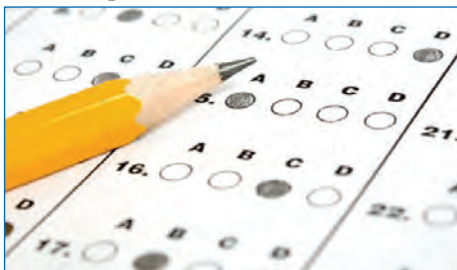


Legislative News

- More misuse of test scores?
- Survey results on the use of Algebra II
- Teacher Retirement System news

Proposed Teacher Standards provide vehicle for comment on new evaluation schemes

In December, Texas Commissioner of Education Michael Williams published proposed new “Teacher Standards” to “inform the development, in the spring of 2014, of a new state-adopted appraisal process.” The commissioner advised that in working up this proposal the Texas Education Agency had convened a stakeholder committee “comprised predominately of teachers to develop and articulate performance standards for Texas



A critical issue in the move toward a new appraisal system is the role students' scores on standardized state tests will play in an individual teacher's evaluation.

teachers.”

The announcement further stated that the commissioner's proposed administrative rules “would establish standards in the areas of instructional planning and delivery, knowledge of students and student learning, content knowledge and expertise, learning environment, data driven practice, and professional practices and responsibilities and would provide descriptors of success with regard to those standards.”

Williams proposes to use these rules as the foundation for a successor to the current PDAS (Professional Development and Appraisal System), which has been in use since 1997, and he intends to roll out the new state-approved teacher appraisal system in the 2015-16 school year.

A critical issue in the move toward a new appraisal system is the role students' scores on standardized state tests will play in an individual teacher's evaluation. In exchange for a waiver of certain requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, Commissioner Williams has given assurances to the U.S. Department of Education that the new Texas appraisal process will use those state test results as a significant factor in measuring the “student growth” attributed to a teacher for purposes of evaluation. Three options under consideration, according to the commissioner's waiver request, are as follows:

“1) minimum percentage weighting of 20% based on Statewide assessments in tested grades and subjects, other measures can be added on top of the 20%;

“2) student growth matrix that is based on Statewide assessments in tested grades and subjects, other measures may be added in addition to the matrix and

“3) the trigger method whereby teachers and principals who do not achieve a minimum student growth amount cannot be rated as ‘effective’ or higher and for tested grades and subjects, the minimum student growth measure must be based on Statewide assessments.”

Nothing like these options appears in the commissioner's proposed teacher standards, which speak in loftier terms about teachers who support their students'



pursuit of both “academic and social-emotional success” and call on teachers to “serve as advocates for their students.” The publication of the commissioner's proposed teacher standards for public comment nonetheless gave us a chance to speak out on the three appraisal options, all of which appear to pave the way for greater-than-ever misuse of standardized tests as the touchstone of student progress.

In January, Texas AFT launched a campaign to provide educators with the tools to offer comments urging the commissioner not to give inordinate weight to standardized state test scores or include campus-wide or individual teacher “value-added metrics,” which he assured he would pursue in the waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education. Some 1,300 of you responded by submitting comments to the commissioner supportive of Texas AFT's position.

None of these appraisal options being touted by the commissioner is supported by credible educational research on “value-added measures.” The overwhelming scholarly consensus is that such measures are not appropriate for use in making high-stakes employment decisions such as teacher evaluations.

These appraisal options also run counter to the language enacted last year in House Bill 5, which calls on the commissioner to use measures of educational performance, “to the greatest extent possible,” other than students' scores on standardized state tests.

Federal insistence on making students' scores on standardized tests a “significant factor” in the appraisal of individual teachers cannot negate current

state law, which does not authorize the state to impose this methodology on school districts as part of any new state-recommended appraisal criteria.

Although the official period of public comment for the proposed standards rules ended on January 28, we encourage you—if you haven't already—to send your comments to the commissioner and urge him not to subvert state law and his own goals for students' "academic and social-emotional success" with a further misuse of standardized state test scores.

You can comment online by visiting www.texasaft.org and clicking on the "Take Action" section of our home page.

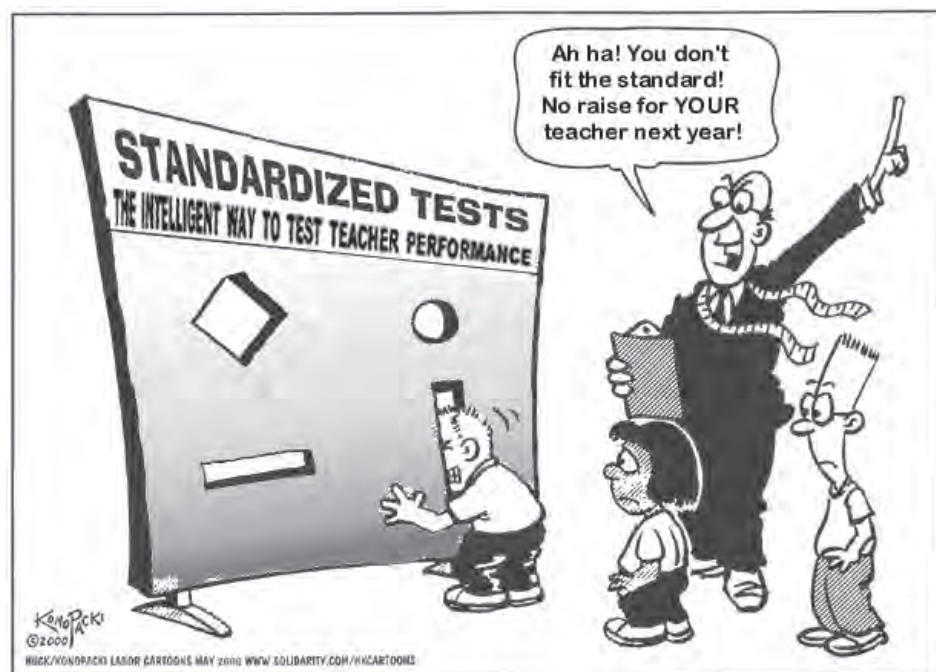
An issue of equity: Algebra II not a graduation hurdle, but still a key to college access

In testimony submitted on January 28 to the State Board of Education, Texas AFT buttressed key points with results from an online survey on the role of Algebra II in new draft rules for high-school graduation. AFT legislative counsel Patty Quinzi told the Board:

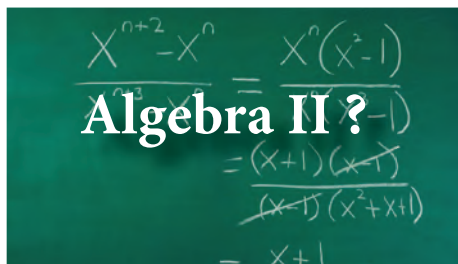
"Texas AFT does not propose that the Board revisit now its nearly unanimous initial decision to adopt graduation requirements under which Algebra II will be required to attain a Science/Technology/Engineering/Mathematics (STEM) endorsement and to demonstrate the distinguished level of achievement necessary to be eligible for automatic college admission. We believe that this decision, making other endorsements available without requiring Algebra II, does conform to legislative intent in House Bill 5.

"However, we also believe that the Board should enter into this experiment with caution and with due regard for concerns that have been raised about the potential for the lowering of common standards and for inequity in the name of local flexibility. This legislatively directed change in policy truly is an experiment, a significant departure from the prior view that the default standard for all students should include completion of Algebra II."

Quinzi testified that Texas AFT's



survey of members and other educators, parents, and community stakeholders indicated closely divided opinions on the proposed standard omitting the Algebra II requirement for many students. Just over 50 percent of 1,200 respondents favored requiring Algebra II only for the STEM endorsement. But nearly 46 percent



preferred either requiring Algebra II for all endorsements or requiring either Algebra II or a math course of equivalent rigor, as determined by subject-matter experts, for all endorsements.

The nearly even split on the merits of requiring Algebra II or an equivalent for all endorsements occurred even though at the same time 59 percent of respondents said they did not consider completion of Algebra II a prerequisite, as a practical matter, for college or career success. Yet under HB 5 and the proposed Board rules, Algebra II does remain a touchstone of college readiness and an eligibility hurdle for automatic college admission.

Nearly 90 percent of respondents said that, if Algebra II were deemed essential to college readiness, then the state should be required to ensure that all students have equal access to appropriately prepared and qualified teachers and to the resources needed to take and pass Algebra II.

"Thus an overwhelming majority, regardless of their views on requiring Algebra II to graduate, wanted to hold the state responsible for ensuring equitable availability of the qualified teachers and resources needed to provide Algebra II to all students," Quinzi said. "Texas AFT shares this stance in solidarity with other educators and civil-rights advocates. Flexibility cannot be allowed to become an excuse for inequity."

Given the high levels of uncertainty regarding this issue of equity as the experiment with flexible graduation requirements unfolds, Texas AFT encouraged the State Board to set an early date for the review of these proposed rules in light of practical experience with their implementation. Then either the Board itself or, if necessary, the Legislature on the Board's recommendation, can quickly make any necessary course corrections to achieve balance between flexibility and the assurance of equity.

Continued on page 8

TRS pension shows strong gains, but health-care costs focus of concern

The Texas Teacher Retirement System (TRS) board of trustees in December received good news about investment gains recorded by the pension fund. As of September 30, 2013, the market value of the pension fund's assets had grown to \$119.7 billion, at or near the highest level ever reached, thanks to double-digit returns on the investment of pension dollars over the past year—an annual gain of 10.2 percent, to be precise.

The TRS board will hold its next meeting at the Region 2 Educational Service Center in Corpus Christi from February 12 to 14. The three-day meeting will place particular focus on health care and will include a “town hall” component enabling audience members—those at the site and those watching by Webcast—to ask questions of participants.

In the meantime the sustainability of TRS-Care, the health plan for retirees, and of TRS-ActiveCare, the statewide plan that covers active school-district employees in most districts, will be under study by TRS

As of September 30, 2013, the market value of the TRS pension fund's assets had grown to \$119.7 billion, at or near the highest level ever reached, thanks to double-digit returns on the investment of pension dollars over the past year.

staff and consultants.

For TRS-Care, the retiree program, the gap between incurred medical costs and available plan revenue is widening rapidly. Given current contributions, premiums, plan design, and cost trends, the TRS-Care program is expected to stay solvent through fiscal year 2015.

But major shortfalls are expected beginning in fiscal year 2016. Such shortfall forecasts have been a recurring feature of the program, established as a stopgap by the legislature in the 1980s and funded only two years at a time. TRS-Care has never been provided with secure funding streams for the long haul.

For TRS-ActiveCare, the state program for active employees in most districts, the salient trend is a shift of participation toward lower-benefit, lower-cost options as larger and larger

premium costs are incurred. Health-care coverage premium assistance for active school employees—whether in ActiveCare or in local district plans—was set by the legislature in 2001 at a minimum of \$225—\$75 per month from the state and \$150 per month from the employing local school district.

The state's assistance has not been raised since that time. Nor has the statutorily required local contribution, although many districts have increased their premium-sharing assistance.

The effect of this stagnant employer share on employees is well illustrated by an examination of the ActiveCare plans, which show increases in premiums and a shift of participation to lower-cost plans. (For specifics on premium costs and participation in various plans, visit www.texasaftblog.com/hotline and search for “TRS.”)

Texas AFT will take active part in the ongoing TRS discussions about how to pay for these vital health-care programs. A crucial element of any funding solution must be increased contributions from the state and employing districts. Your active involvement in the discussions can help make that happen. 🇹🇽

Charter schools don't measure up to the hype

Reprinted from the January 16, 2014, *San Antonio Express-News*

It's fitting to discuss charter schools as we're celebrating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Dr. King would surely disapprove of corporate charter chains, such as BASIS and Great Hearts, using taxpayer money to create enclaves for privileged students that look and act very much like elite private schools, all the while calling themselves “public” schools.

What a distortion of the original idea of charters, which was that groups of teachers and parents, within a public school, would propose doing something different to reach students most in need.



By Shelley Potter, president of the San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel

schools and set out to discredit public schools through a three-step agenda: starve public schools, criticize them, then privatize them.

While there are a few community-based charters that have stayed true to this original mission, many, many more charters have simply figured out a way to siphon off public money for their own purposes. Corporate charter proponents set themselves up as competitors to public

Charters have cloaked themselves in the veil of “choice,” including “choice” for minority students. Some supporters have even proclaimed charters to be the civil rights movement of our time. Let's remember, Dr. King said, “In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans. ...”

It's the charters who choose the child, not the other way around. While charters describe themselves as “open enrollment” and “non-selective,” there is much evidence that some charter chains are quite adept at creating barriers to students they do not want.

Frequent criticism has been leveled at charter chains for “creaming” — pulling in only the highest-achieving and/or

most dedicated students. Marketing tactics and application policies can be set up to favor certain parents. Not offering transportation and charging fees for textbooks, field trips, athletics, band and other activities can discourage low-income parents.

A lack of services/resources for special needs children steers those families away. And high-needs students can be pushed out in a variety of ways. UT professor Julian Vasquez Heilig testified before the Texas Senate Education Committee that “on average, African-American leavers (attrition and dropout) are double and sometimes triple in charter schools compared to traditional urban public schools.”

The results of all this are reflected in the student makeup of many charter chains—fewer minority students, fewer English language learners, fewer economically disadvantaged students, fewer special education students—all of which looks very much like a return to separate and unequal.

In spite of their ability to exclude students they don’t want, official state data shows that charters, overall, have weaker academic results, less-qualified teachers, and higher student and teacher turnover than public schools with similar students.

Because these schools are labeled “public,” we’re all footing the bill. Public schools must be accountable for the use of public tax dollars. Yet charters don’t have locally elected school boards that voters

have the power to change if they don’t like how their tax money is spent.

Studies show that charters spend more per student on administration and less per student on instruction than neighborhood public schools. A recent report noted that middle school charters in Texas spend \$495 more per pupil per year on administration than traditional public schools. For a middle school of 1,000 students, that’s \$495,000 a year. For five

While there are a few community-based charters that have stayed true to this original mission, many, many more charters have simply figured out a way to siphon off public money for their own purposes.

such middle schools, that would amount to almost \$2.5 million per year.

Questions have also surfaced regarding business practices and conflicts of interest. A September *Forbes* article noted, “Charter schools are frequently a way for politicians to reward their cronies.”

The *Arizona Republic* found that some charter chains “bought a variety of goods and services from the companies of board members or administrators, including textbooks, air conditioning repairs and transportation services.”


Yet venture philanthropists have contributed millions of dollars to bring corporate charter chains to San Antonio, and some local businesspeople

and politicians seem poised, perhaps unwittingly, to sell out our neighborhood schools to those who see education as simply a huge, untapped market—a profit venture. The move toward charters, if left unchecked, will slowly starve the great public school system this nation has created to serve all students regardless of race, class, religion or ability.

Our real public schools in San Antonio help to build strong neighborhoods and a sense of community. Our public school districts offer real choice—magnet schools and technical and career-oriented programs. They have highly qualified, experienced teachers, active/engaged learning, a range of extracurricular activities that help kids build confidence and character, and a diverse student body that prepares kids for the real world.

Dr. King said: “Let us be dissatisfied until the dark yesterdays of segregated schools will be transformed into bright tomorrows of quality integrated education. Let us be dissatisfied until integration is not seen as a problem but as an opportunity to participate in the beauty of diversity.”

Striving for quality and diversity is as important today as ever. As a mother, quality and the richness and beauty of diversity are what I want not only for my child but for all children.

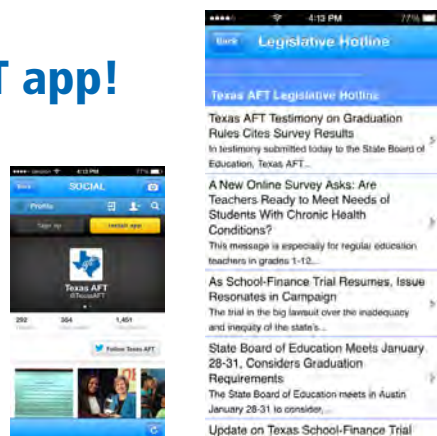
It can best be accomplished through supporting and strengthening our neighborhood public schools. 



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 AFT members distribute books on the "Reclaim the Promise Day of Action" in December.

AFT partnership with First Book hits 1 million mark

The American Federation of Teachers and First Book announced in December that they have distributed one million new, free children's books to public schools and to community and educational groups nationwide serving children in low-income families.

Texas AFT members played a big part in that number, with some 40,000 books distributed at the Children's Museum of Houston in November, along with distributions in Dallas, Corpus Christi and Socorro last year, with more events planned for 2014. More than 2,000 educators in Texas have signed on to become First Book partners allowing access to book giveaways.

"There's something special about seeing a student's eyes light up with a new book," said Texas AFT President Linda Bridges. "And it's a great way for educators to work with their peers, their union, and other community partners to promote reading. Members who participated in the events have told us it's been a very moving experience."

The one-million-mark announcement was made at a First Book event in Baltimore, where more than 400,000 books are being distributed.

"We know that the sky's the limit when children fall in love with books," said AFT President Randi Weingarten. "We're so happy to help encourage a love of



A Corpus Christi elementary student shows off her "First Book."



reading, which is the reason for the AFT's partnership with First Book. It's just one way we are reclaiming the promise of public education and helping to ensure children are prepared for school, college, career and life."

In addition to the Texas events, AFT-First Book projects have included creating a library at St. Mary's Orphanage in Mobile, Alabama.; distributing thousands of anti-bullying books at Cleveland public school assemblies; giving out bilingual and Spanish books to students and families at COPA soccer tournaments; and providing more than 50,000 books to New Orleans students in 19 schools.

To learn more on how you can partners with AFT and First Book, visit www.firstbook.org/aft. 

Above and below, students and teachers browse the First Book selections at a Children's Museum of Houston event, where more than 40,000 books were distributed.



Fort Bend grant provides uniforms

The Fort Bend Employee Federation presented Ridgemont Elementary School with a \$5,000 Adopt-a-School grant from the national AFL-CIO on January 21 to purchase uniforms for the school's 694 students.

The Adopt-a-School grant, which was one of 21 awarded to public schools nationwide on the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, is to help students understand the civil rights and workers' rights struggles of the past. And not coincidentally, the presentation at Ridgemont Elementary took place a day after Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

In keeping with the purpose of the award, students discussed the meaning of equality and how understanding the past can help them be part of a society where there is no discrimination based on race, sex, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

"We chose to use the grant to help families defray the cost of uniforms. Uniforms allow kids to focus on their classes, not on distractions like certain types of clothing," says Karrie Washenfelter, president of the Fort Bend Employee Federation. "A great education is the pathway to opportunity and an economic necessity. We want to do whatever possible to give every child a leg up for a successful life."

Corpus Christi AFT wins consultation seats

Corpus Christi AFT won 10 of 12 seats in an elected consultation ballot in December.

Elected consultation is 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.

"Preserving a unified, dignified and legitimate voice for all employees at consultations is crucial to protecting

the benefits, wages and working conditions of school employees," said Corpus Christi AFT President Ray McMurrey. Corpus Christi AFT first won the role of an elected consultation representative in 1979, when it became the first union in Texas to develop the process, which is now in place with Texas AFT unions in several districts across the state.

Northeast Houston AFT's Strategies for Student Success

Northeast Houston AFT has launched a new series of professional-development workshops called Strategies for Student Success. The workshops are part of AFT's collection of quality, research-based workshops geared to give educators tools and resources for the classroom.

The first workshop in October, "Using Questions to Teach & Learn," focused on the proper application of Bloom's Taxonomy and how best to use questions to engage students. Ana Pomar, Texas AFT education issues director, presented the training, which provided professional-learning credit for participants. "We understand the importance of providing quality resources for our members," said George Carinhas, Northeast Houston AFT chair. "So we are taking an active role in providing these workshops for our teachers and paraprofessionals."

Second in the series in November was "Effective Group Management Practices." In total, the Strategies for Student Success series will include eight workshops throughout the school year providing more than 12 hours of professional-development credit. A full listing of workshops and dates is at <http://nehouston.tx.aft.org/events>.

Fort Bend union kills pay freeze

The Fort Bend Employee Federation secured a victory for



HESP leaders work on a project to increase internal capacity in a new local union development program designed by AFT and Cornell University. AFT Lone Star College and CyFair AFT also sent teams of leaders to the January kickoff in Washington, D.C. Pictured are (front row, from left) Marsela Cook, Wretha Thomas, Emanuel Walker-Brown, (top row, from left) Michael Lockett and Marilyn Bingham.

school paraprofessionals, bus drivers, secretaries, and food service workers in November, by successfully persuading the Fort Bend ISD School Board to scrap a policy that froze the pay of many of these workers.

Paraprofessionals and others in this category who reached the top of their "grade code"—which designates their position and pay level in the district—were told they could never receive a pay raise, even if their peers who had not reached the top grade code or held other positions like teachers and administrators were given increases.

"If after many years with Fort Bend ISD you found yourself at the top of your grade code, you'd have no hope of a pay raise, despite your years of dedicated service," explained Karrie Washenfelter, the local union's president. "New employees, your supervisor, and definitely your boss in the administration building would have been eligible, but not some 200 other employees in the district who fell under this pay freeze." Washenfelter addressed the board at its October meeting to outline the unfair situation, one that was damaging employee morale, and the board unanimously deleted the policy at its November meeting.



**Stand Up.
Stand Together.**



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

Sheldon 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




**Bring the
Olympic Winter Games
to your classroom**

Download lesson plans, activities and videos in science, history, and more >

**Union Members Save
on Wireless Service**

Save with the **ONLY** national **UNIONIZED** wireless provider

Save 15% off
select monthly wireless service plans



Visit www.unionplus.org > Home & Technology > Wireless Phones for more information. Or call the Texas AFT member benefits representative, Barbara Lightheart, at 800-222-3827.

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



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



FREE

Online Community Forums

For All Educators

Teaching Resources

Content Partners





A Union of Professionals

www.sharemylesson.com
By teachers, for teachers

