



Texas AFT

Legislative Agenda
2017

Sitting on the Sidelines is not an Option!

Public education in Texas is at risk. Our schools and colleges are under assault from corporate interests that aim to profit from the hostile takeover of public education. Their agenda: cashing in on kids.

If these hostile forces get their way, Texas faces a bleak future: continued underfunding that deprives students of the resources they need; more misuse of state test scores to label our schools, students, and educators as failures; large-scale transfers of students and funding from neighborhood public schools to private operators; the deprofessionalization of teaching and disrespect for those who serve in our public schools and colleges. Pensions, health care, compensation, benefits, and basic employee rights are all targeted for demolition.

We have a better idea. We aim to create the conditions in which learning can flourish in our classrooms—and support for our students and the educational team they rely on becomes the paramount value of state educational policy. Education employees, community allies, parents, and students working together with likeminded legislators can reclaim the promise of public education **for every student in Texas public schools.**

Together we can put testing back in its proper place as a diagnostic tool. We can better serve students and their families with a web of supports through Community Schools. We can restore school funding and make sure educational opportunity does not depend on a child's ZIP Code. We can reject vouchers and other privatization schemes. We can redefine accountability so that we measure what matters—preparation of our students for long-term success, not just for snapshot state tests.

We can reclaim the respect we deserve for our work and the support required to meet the needs of every individual child.

We can make this better future for public education a reality, but only if we stick together. Join us as we reclaim the promise of public education in our state. Sitting on the sidelines is not an option!



Louis Malfaro, Texas AFT President



Reclaim the Promise of Public Education in Texas

It's time to reclaim the promise of public education in Texas—to fulfill our common obligation to help all children succeed.

Reclaiming the promise means fighting for **neighborhood public schools that are safe, welcoming places for teaching and learning.**

Reclaiming the promise means ensuring that **teachers and school staff are well-prepared, supported, and have manageable class sizes** and time to collaborate so they meet the individual needs of every child.

Reclaiming the promise means making sure our children have engaging curriculum that **focuses on teaching and learning, not testing**, and includes art, music, and the sciences.

Reclaiming the promise means **ensuring that children and their families have access to wraparound services** to meet their social, emotional, and health needs.

The promise is under attack by those who demand and pursue austerity, polarization, privatization, and deprofessionalization.

By uniting our voices—parents, students, teachers, school staff, and the community—**we CAN reclaim the promise.**

Together, we will ensure that all children have the opportunity to dream their dreams and achieve them. We will put the public back into public education. We will help our public schools become centers of their communities, secure a voice and respect for those closest to the classroom, and fulfill public education's purpose as a propeller of our economy, an anchor of democracy, and a gateway to justice for all, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Reclaim the Promise: Fund Our Schools

Fully Restore Funding for 2018-2019

- Use the state's available revenue (\$10 billion plus, including the Economic Stabilization Fund) to restore funding fully to past levels (an increase of \$300 plus per pupil to get back to the fiscal 2003 level, at a two-year cost of \$3.5 billion).

Fulfill State Promises of Funding Adequacy and Equity

- Revise outmoded funding formulas to reflect the full cost of educating nearly 5.3 million students—60 percent economically disadvantaged, 9 percent with disabilities, 17 percent with low English proficiency.
- Enforce funding equity, so that students have access to the educational resources they need regardless of where they happen to live.
- Guarantee state aid will keep up with enrollment, inflation, and rising state and federal requirements.
- Restore the authority of elected school boards to raise funds locally without triggering a tax-rate election.
- Provide full state formula aid for community colleges, including employee benefits.
- Block private-school vouchers and equivalent drains on public education funding via other privatization schemes like corporate-chain charter takeovers, virtual schools like K12, Inc., “achievement districts,” “home rule” charters, and deceptively labeled “parent triggers” for charterization.

Assure Full Funding for the Long Term

To meet the growing needs of Texas students for the long term, build a new revenue structure.

- Close property-tax loopholes that shift the burden from commercial to residential ratepayers.
- Close loopholes in the business franchise tax.
- Sunset unjustified sales-tax exemptions for business and professional services (but keep “lifeline” exemptions for health care, child care).

Reclaim the Promise: Help Our Students Succeed

Create the Conditions for Classroom Success

- Provide full-day, voluntary Pre-K and Kindergarten for all.
- Guarantee early extra help for struggling students.
- Ensure staffing to serve high-need students in regular classrooms.
- Expand bilingual, ESL, and dual-language instruction.
- Ensure properly certified teachers in every class.
- Raise standards for entry into the teaching profession. Provide mentoring and research-based, teacher-directed professional development.
- Expand scholarships for instructional aides to become teachers.
- Assure teachers and paraprofessionals of time to prepare and collaborate.
- Enforce K-4 class-size caps, cap class size in Pre-K and higher grades, and bar overuse of online courses in lieu of in-person college instruction.
- Strengthen quality standards for state-authorized charter schools and virtual (distance-learning) schools; block charter expansion.
- Block nullification of state quality standards and safeguards under the guise of local innovation.
- Block implementation of misleading A-F grades for schools, which merely stigmatize students, schools, and neighborhoods.

End Misuse of Standardized Tests

- End misuse of state assessments as the main measure of success, taking full advantage of new federal law.
- Tighten limits on local benchmark testing tied to state assessments.
- Use multiple measures to gauge growth and guide instruction; include performance-based assessments and measures of social/emotional learning.
- Ban use of “value added” models for individual educator evaluation.
- Use tests properly designed for pupils with disabilities, English Language Learners.

Use Community-Developed Solutions to Improve Schools

- End top-down, punitive sanctions; use community-developed solutions to improve schools, and use community-based accountability measures.
- Expand use of the Community School model to build wraparound services for students and their families into neighborhood schools.

- Engage parents as full partners in developing school-improvement plans.
- Hold school districts accountable for providing a supportive environment for learning that reflects real employee, parent, and community input.

Improve School Discipline, Safety, and Health

- Uphold teachers' and bus drivers' authority to remove disruptive students while promoting positive behavior supports and restorative practices; ensure administrator training in proper, non-discriminatory use of the Safe Schools Act.
- Notify parents if their child's school lacks full-time nurse staffing.
- Enforce state law requiring seatbelts on new school buses.
- Narrow the scope and use of videotaping in special-education classrooms to the minimum required for student safety. Sunset the video recording law to ensure that benefits are weighed against costs before the program continues.

Reclaim the Promise: Respect and Reward Educators and Support Staff

Provide Affordable Health Care and Retirement Security

- Boost state health-care funding for all education employees and retirees, first reversing the long-term shift in costs onto employees and aiming ultimately for the state to cover the full cost for every employee and half the cost for dependents—health coverage as good as the governor’s!
- Safeguard defined-benefit TRS pensions—benefits you cannot outlive.
- Provide a catch-up cost-of-living increase for all TRS retirees.
- Let education employees/retirees elect a majority on the TRS board.
- Expand and improve health benefits for adjunct higher-education faculty.
- Secure the repeal of unfair federal Social Security benefit cuts that victimize school employees.

Provide a Living Wage

- Raise educators’ pay to match pay for comparable private-sector jobs in Texas.
- Pay a living wage to all education employees, Pre-K/16.

Defend Due Process and Employee Rights

- Clearly define the work day, work year, and work assignment; ensure extra pay for extra work.
- Stop out-of-field assignments of educators and support staff.
- Strengthen employee contract, compensation, and due-process rights.
- Ensure basic due process and other employee rights in state law for all education employees, Pre-K/16.
- Train administrators to respect employee rights; define and penalize retaliation for employees’ exercise of rights under state law.
- Preserve employees’ right to voluntary payroll deduction of union dues.

Guarantee Employee Voice in Local Policy-Making

- Maintain the ability of school boards to develop policy in consultation with employees’ democratically elected representative organization.
- Let school boards bargain with an elected organization on local contracts—as police, firefighters, and other public employees in Texas already can.

Reclaim the Promise: Higher Education

It's time to reclaim the promise of higher education by ensuring that all have access to high-quality and affordable higher education. **Reclaiming the promise** means ensuring rigorous instruction that is student-centered and faculty-driven, with academic freedom and support for independent and innovative research. **Reclaiming the promise** means making college affordable and accessible to all and relieving the burdens of those costs that have been shifted onto students and families. **Reclaiming the promise** means ensuring that students are taught and mentored by faculty and staff who are well-prepared, professionally supported, and have a voice in academic decisions.

The promise is under attack by those who demand and pursue austerity, polarization, privatization, and deprofessionalization. An accessible, affordable, and high-quality system of public higher education is critical to the health of our state—to ensure that students reach their fullest potential and to enable us to continue to develop as a just society, a vibrant democracy, and an engine of economic opportunity.

Affordable and Accessible

- Limit tuition increases and increase financial aid.
- Assure textbook affordability.
- Maintain in-state college tuition rates under the 2001 Texas Dream Act for undocumented students who are Texas high school graduates and longtime Texas residents.
- Maintain tuition set-asides to reduce college costs for low-income and middle-income students.

Student-Centered and Faculty-Driven Instruction

- Oppose simplistic performance funding proposals.
- Ensure research-based, appropriate use of online instruction as a supplement to, not a substitute for, in-person teaching and learning.
- Maintain the role of community colleges in developmental and adult basic education.

Supported Faculty and Staff

- Increase funding for instructional employee salaries.
- Expand/improve health benefits for adjunct faculty.
- Increase the ratio of full-time professors to part-time adjuncts by creating more full-time positions with full benefits.
- Guarantee payroll deduction of dues for each employee's chosen professional organization.
- Guarantee basic due process in personnel decisions affecting all faculty and staff.
- Simplify transfer of course credits from community college to university.
- Provide full state formula aid for community colleges, including employee benefits.

Campus Safety

- Restore prior law barring concealed handguns on public college campuses except in the hands of law-enforcement officers; do not proceed with implementation of concealed-carry at community colleges.

Reclaim the Promise: Affordable Health Care and Secure Retirement

It's time to reclaim the promise of a secure retirement to fulfill our common obligation to ensure that all Texas education employees, after careers of hard work and service, are able to live independent, quality, dignified lives. Retirement security is a shared responsibility for employers, workers, and our state and nation.

Reclaiming the promise means universal access to secure retirement plans into which the state and our employers pay required contributions.

Reclaiming the promise means ensuring that every worker is covered by retirement plans that provide consistent and adequate income to maintain a reasonable standard of living and benefits that cannot be outlived.

Reclaiming the promise means that earned retirement benefits are securely funded and safeguarded from market volatility.

The promise is under attack by those who demand and pursue austerity, polarization, and privatization.

By uniting our voices—employees, employers, and the community—we can reclaim the promise of economic security and dignity for all.

Health Security

- Boost state health-care funding for all education employees and retirees, first reversing the long-term shift in costs onto employees and aiming ultimately for the state to cover the full cost for every employee and half the cost for dependents—health care as good as the governor's!
- Expand and improve health benefits for adjunct higher-education faculty.

Economic Security

- Safeguard defined-benefit TRS pensions—benefits you cannot outlive.
- Make it the goal of state policy to enable all school employees to retire under the Rule of 80 at 70 percent of their active salary with an annual cost-of-living adjustment.
- Provide a catch-up cost-of-living increase for all TRS retirees.
- Let education employees/retirees elect a majority on the TRS board.
- Secure the repeal of unfair federal Social Security benefit cuts that victimize school employees.

Reclaim the Promise: Support Professionals (Paraprofessional and School-Related Personnel)

It is time to reclaim the promise of public schooling that recognizes the crucial roles of support professionals—paraprofessionals and school-related personnel. **Reclaiming the promise** means ensuring that these support professionals—including bus drivers, custodians, secretaries, food-service workers, and more—receive the training and support they need to meet the needs of the individual children they serve.

Reclaiming the promise means providing these support professionals with the time and tools they require to carry out their proper assignments.

Reclaiming the promise means ensuring that support professionals are treated with simple decency in personnel decision-making.

Reclaiming the promise means maintaining high quality in the public services provided by support professionals, rejecting misguided moves to contract out services that are guided by faulty cost-benefit analysis.

The promise is under attack by those who demand and pursue austerity, polarization, privatization, and deprofessionalization. By uniting our voices, we can reclaim the promise. Together, we can advance the common good by insisting on support for high-quality services provided by support professionals for the benefit of our students, their families, and their communities.

Time and Tools

- Assure adequate and effective training, upon hiring and ongoing.
- Stop inappropriate assignments to serve in roles for which employees are not trained.
- Limit custodian workload (square footage).
- Increase funding for paraprofessionals' tuition scholarships to become teachers.
- Uphold bus drivers' discipline authority under state law.
- Provide planning periods for paraprofessionals.
- Enhance safety in transportation by enforcing the seatbelt requirement for new school buses and by providing bus monitors.

Simple Decency

- Ensure basic due process for support professionals in decisions affecting their employment.
- Provide administrative leave with pay for support personnel pending a decision on proposed adverse employment action.

Reclaim the Promise: School Nurses

It is time to reclaim the promise of health care provided by school nurses for our students in public schools.

Reclaiming the promise means leveling with parents when the promise of full-time nurse staffing on their child's campus is not being fulfilled.

Reclaiming the promise means marshaling the resources to fulfill the promise of full-time nurse staffing to serve the children on every campus.

Reclaiming the promise means respecting the professional standards applicable to school nurses for the sake of student health and safety.

Reclaiming the promise means providing school nurses with the time, tools, and staffing ratios required to meet professional standards for the care of the children in their schools.

The promise is under attack by those who demand and pursue austerity, polarization, privatization, and deprofessionalization.

By uniting our voices—parents, students, school nurses, other education employees, and the community—we can reclaim the promise. Together, we will ensure that all children have access to the professional school-based health services they need.

Nurse Staffing

- Require parental notification if their child's school lacks full-time nurse staffing.
- Assure adequate nurse staffing on every campus to meet professional standards of care.

Professional Standards

- Uphold nurse qualifications (discourage replacement of RNs with LVNs).
- Eliminate error-prone spinal screenings.
- Provide state-funded Epi-pen training and access under medical supervision to treat allergy-induced anaphylactic reactions.

Time and Tools

- Include school nurses in the legislative language that guarantees a 30-minute duty-free lunch to other professional school personnel.



Reclaim the Promise: Call to Action!

This is no time to sit silently on the sidelines. To reclaim the promise of public education, we need to stand up, stand together, and speak out for our students, for all education employees, and for public education. Legislators listen best to messages from folks in their home district. Inform yourself about the issues and ask your state senator and state representative for their support.

To ID Your State Senator and State Representative:

Go to www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us.

Visit us at www.texasaft.org to stay up to date with the Legislative Hotline and Action Alerts, and to write to legislators directly by fax or e-mail.

Texas AFT “Direct Call” to Legislators:

Dial 1-888-836-8368, give your state senator’s or representative’s name, and ask to be connected.

Prefer Writing a Letter?

Senators: P.O. Box 12068, Austin 78711

Representatives: P.O. Box 2910, Austin 78768

Governor: P.O. Box 12428, Austin 78711

(to call the governor toll-free: 1-800-843-5789)



Texas AFT

A Union of Professionals

www.texasaft.org



@TexasAFT



www.facebook.com/texasaft