



Texas Teacher



A Union of Professionals • Spring 2011

There's a crisis in public education

**Budget cuts could lead to thousands
of layoffs, widespread loss of
Pre-K, larger classrooms**

**But there is a
solution... Take Action!**



Make plans now to attend the Texas AFT Convention—Friday, June 17, through Sunday, June 19, 2011, at the Corpus Christi Omni Bayfront Hotel.

The Texas AFT Convention is the primary policy-making body of the union. The vitality of the union depends upon democratic participation in the convention by delegates from all locals in good standing. As always, resolutions and constitutional amendments will be in the hands of the delegates, who will set the policies and elect the two Texas AFT officers.

The three-day event will give members an opportunity to shape the direction Texas AFT will take over the next two years. The convention will come to order at 2 p.m. on Friday, June 17, 2011.

On Friday convention committees will make recommendations on submitted resolutions. On Saturday our focus will be on professional issues, with three sets of workshops from which to choose. Our keynote speaker will be Barbara Coloroso, an international bestselling author and consultant on parenting and teaching. Officer elections will take place that evening.

Saturday events and workshops are open to non-delegate members who register for the single day as well as the credentialed convention delegates.

Sunday will consist of action on proposed amendments, resolutions and other convention business. The convention should conclude by 3 p.m. Sunday, or when business is finished.

Representation

Please read the following information carefully. The constitutional provisions for Texas AFT conventions have been adopted to assure Texas AFT members of representation in their governing body. Delegates must be nominated and elected according to the Texas AFT Constitution and the federal Landrum-Griffin Act. The credential process must be followed so convention officers can be sure that the will of the local membership prevails.

How to determine the number of delegates for each local union

The Texas AFT Constitution provides that a local shall be entitled to one delegate for 25 members or less and one more delegate for each additional 25 members (or fraction thereof).

Only locals in good standing may send delegates. (Texas AFT Constitution, Article VII, Section 6.) For 2011, this means locals must be current on per-capita payments through May 2011.

Texas AFT Convention cont. page 12

TEXAS AFT CONVENTION 2011 • CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS



BESTSELLING AUTHOR KICKS OFF PROFESSIONAL ISSUES DAY



Texas AFT will again present a day of workshops—Moving Forward: Professional Issues Day—for Convention 2011 on Saturday, June 18.

Kicking off the workshops will be a keynote address from Barbara Coloroso, an author and consultant. Coloroso is an internationally recognized speaker and consultant on parenting, teaching, school discipline, positive school climate, bullying,

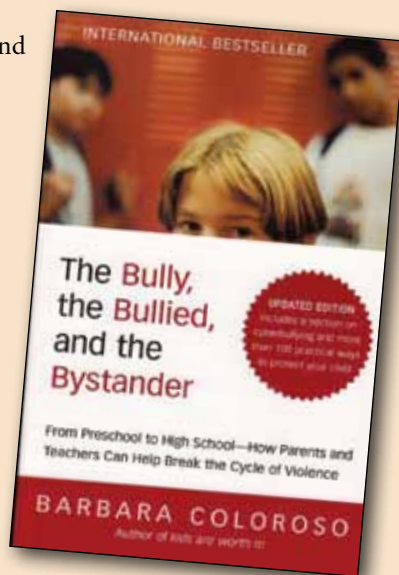
grieving, nonviolent conflict resolution and restorative justice. She also has served as a classroom teacher, a laboratory school instructor, and a university instructor.

Coloroso has appeared on Oprah, CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN and NPR and has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Time*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Newsweek*, and other national and international publications.

Drawing on her decades of work with troubled youth and her wide experience with reconciliatory justice, Barbara Coloroso offers practical and compassionate solutions for the troubling problem of bullying in her latest edition of the international bestseller, *The Bully, The Bullied and The Bystander: From Preschool to High School: How Parents and Teachers Can Help Break the Cycle of Violence*.

The professional issues day will also feature an Awards Luncheon and a full day of workshops, including Workplace Bullying: Not Just for Kids, Teaching What Matters: Reflecting on Teacher Practice to Improve Student Learning, Using the Safe Schools Act, Managing Antisocial Behavior for Support Staff, Teacher Effectiveness, Roadmap to Retirement, and many more.

Individuals wishing to only attend the Moving Forward Professional Issues Day may get registration materials from their local union or a staff representative. The registration fee for the professional issues day is the same as the convention: \$65 (or \$50 if paid by May 27, 2011).



IN THIS ISSUE

Feature

Texas AFT Lobby Day

pages 6 & 7



Texas AFT Convention

Inside Front Cover

Viewpoint

2

From the Secretary-Treasurer

3

Legislative Update

4

Locals & Members In Action

5

Standardized Testing

8, 9

The Rewards of Membership

11

Join Texas AFT

11

No Kid Hungry

13

Social Security Fairness Bill

13

Texas Teacher

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Linda Bridges
Texas AFT President

In Wisconsin, Gov. Scott Walker incorrectly blamed collective bargaining for his state’s budget deficit, even though unions have presented plans to find the money necessary to fix the problem. In Texas, the vast majority of public employees—including teachers—are denied collective bargaining. That, however, doesn’t shield us from some state leaders using our state budget crisis to mount attacks on public employees.

First, let’s take a look at the \$27 billion state shortfall and what’s to blame.

We can attribute some of the shortfall to the economy with declining revenue in taxes for sales, property and other sources.

2008-2009	
Predicted cost of property tax reduction:	\$14.2 billion
Predicted amount of new revenue:	\$ 8.3 billion
Predicted shortfall:	\$ 5.9 billion
Actual cost of property tax reduction:	\$14.2 billion
Actual amount of new revenue:	\$4.9 billion
Actual shortfall:	\$ 9.3 billion
2012-2013	
Likely shortfall:	\$ 9.7 billion

Source: Center for Public Policy Priorities

However declining tax revenue is not the entire story. We must also look at the 2006 legislative change in the taxing structure for public schools. The 2006 school property tax cut—replaced in part by a new business margins tax—created a structural deficit. The chart above details the problem.

Federal surplus money gave us a ticket to avoid the structural problem last legislative session, but that money is gone. So it is clear that parts of our budget woes are man-made, and therefore, it should be easy for legislators to come together to solve this problem. But as I write this editorial, a cuts, cuts, and more cuts strategy has been the order of the day. House Bill 1 and Senate Bill

1 both take a meat ax to public education funding. If adopted HB 1 would cause 100,000 layoffs of teachers and school personnel, and thus school districts are being forced to schedule layoffs on a fast track to meet deadlines.

Texas AFT has urged districts to slow down and tell the legislature to take a more balanced approach. The reality is that there will have to be some cuts; but the approach also should be to use the Rainy Day Fund, fix the structural deficit, maximize federal assistance and create new revenue. Those strategies and some accounting maneuvers can make up a large portion of the shortfall and prevent massive layoffs.

School districts also have options. They could follow Round Rock ISD’s example of tapping into their local reserves, and districts could hold Tax Ratification Elections (TREs) to increase local property taxes.

As we work on a balanced approach to this revenue shortfall, we must be on alert for those who wish to take advantage of this situation to gut state laws that have benefited children and public employees. Some superintendents have been talking to legislators about changing the 22:1 class-size cap—a successful reform enacted in 1984—for grades K-4. They are offering this law as a sacrifice to save money by laying off teachers and cramming more kids into classrooms. But there’s no need to get rid of the law, since districts can obtain waivers from the Texas Education Agency to break the 22:1 cap for a variety of reasons, including financial.

Some superintendents have stated that they don’t want to inform parents that they plan to increase class sizes, and they don’t want to hold public hearings to get extended waivers (both provisions of the waiver process). Is avoiding parental notification and a transparent public process really such a problem that superintendents would scrap one of the most successful reforms in the past 25 years? If you taught grades K-4 prior to 1984, how many students were in your class? I spoke with a teacher in Corpus Christi the other day who had 42 students in her class before the law. This is not history we want to repeat.

Some legislators also want to use this crisis to weaken or eliminate quality and fairness standards, such as teacher contracts, planning time, duty free lunch, etc. This is not a time to roll back public employee rights under the guise of a state revenue shortfall. That’s the Wisconsin governor’s plan, and we need to be aware that it’s underway here in Texas, even without collective bargaining for teachers.

A balanced approach is how we can meet people’s needs today and make sure we are positioned to make a strong economic recovery. If we fail to support public education, and if we put college out of reach for our children, we will undermine the future economic prosperity of everyone in our state. 🇹🇽



Louis Malfaro
Secretary-Treasurer

Some 100,000 people demonstrated at the state capital in Wisconsin last month to protest the governor's efforts to revoke collective bargaining rights from teachers, school employees and other public workers.

As we fight here in Texas for our students and our schools against

Rick Perry and his extreme anti-child, anti-elder, anti-disabled, anti-working family agenda, it is important to turn our eyes to the north and understand why Wisconsin is so important to union members in Texas and why securing the right to collective bargaining remains one of the most critical long-term objectives of Texas AFT.

Unions in the United States have been among the greatest forces for the creation of prosperity and economic equality in our nation. For workers in the public and private sectors, fair pay, health insurance, sick leave, a pension and a voice on the job have been attained only as the result of unionization and collective bargaining. Even unorganized workers have benefited from the many gains labor unions have achieved for working Americans over the last century. Recent declines in the well-being of middle-class Americans have been the direct result of a concerted effort by corporate power to diminish and destroy unions.

U.S. labor law guarantees private sector workers the right to collective bargaining. Indeed, federal law and courts have long held that collective bargaining is the preferred method of resolving differences between workers and management. The federal right to collective bargaining does not, however, extend to state and local government workers. Public sector collective bargaining laws vary widely from state to state, and Texas law in this area is among the most anti-worker. With the exception of police and fire fighters in a few limited jurisdictions (and more recently municipal employees in the City of Houston), Texas public employees—including public school teachers and staff—are prohibited by law from engaging in collective bargaining. The rights that Wisconsin workers are fighting to keep are currently denied to

the vast majority of Texas public employees.

Despite anti-worker Texas laws, Texas AFT locals have begun tearing down the walls designed to keep us on the margins. Public school teachers and school employees in Austin, San Antonio, Dallas and other urban school districts engage in non-binding negotiations with elected school boards through the process of consultation. Consultation agreements reached between Texas AFT local unions and school districts have resulted in improvements to school districts in many areas including: student safety, health-care benefits, professional mentoring, student transportation, professional development of teachers and staff, and living wages, among many others. These improvements to the quality of school systems are examples of the benefits derived from labor and management working together through a formal mechanism that recognizes the role and responsibility of the union.

Consultation is not collective bargaining, and the process as it currently exists provides employees with only a limited voice in district decision making. Consultation depends on the political will of local school boards and does not result in legally-binding contracts as is the case with collective bargaining. Still, the consultation process resembles collective bargaining in that school officials meet with our unions to discuss wages, hours, working conditions and other professional matters.

We are organizing now for the day when Texas school teachers and support employees will sit at the table as full partners with school officials and negotiate employment contracts. To reach that goal, Texas AFT and our growing number of local affiliates must continue to organize greater numbers of Texas school employees. Consultation arrangements, which are demonstrating the beneficial effects of union representation, can and should lead to full-blown collective bargaining agreements similar to those in effect in the majority of other states. As public school employees in Texas organize and build stronger unions, the growing size and strength of our unions will be directed toward securing this basic and critically important right. We stand in solidarity with the working men and women of Wisconsin and recognize that their fight is our fight!



ONLY FIVE STATES DO NOT CURRENTLY ALLOW SOME FORM OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING FOR EDUCATORS.

Those states and their SAT/ACT rankings are as follows:

South Carolina:	50
North Carolina:	49
Georgia:	48
Texas:	47
Virginia:	44

On April 3, the Texas House passed its version of the state budget (HB 1), which cut \$8 billion from basic state aid to school districts and \$1 billion in state grants to public schools for programs like full-day pre-kindergarten. For each of the next two school years, HB 1 would leave our public schools on average with some \$900 less per pupil than they are receiving in the current school year. To make their budgets balance, school districts could be forced to lay off from 80,000 to 100,000 teachers and other school employees. In the modern era of school finance, going back 60 years, there is no precedent for this sort of man-made disaster.

We call HB 1 a “man-made disaster” because the large majority of House members continue down a path of resisting additional use of the Rainy Day Fund or even closing any unfair tax loopholes, which some members have rejected as “raising taxes.” (The nearly party-line vote was 98 to 49, with all but two Republican House members supporting the bill and not a single Democrat voting for it.) Worse, the House leadership hasn’t moved toward fixing the structural deficit created in 2006 when legislators launched an ill-conceived plan to decrease property taxes and replace the money with a “business margins tax” that didn’t produce enough revenue, thus leaving the state \$10 billion in the hole every two years.

“Yes, we will be in financial trouble again in two years if legislators don’t address the structural deficit,” said Linda Bridges, Texas AFT President. “But the economy will continue to improve and the Rainy Day Fund will replenish to improve our fiscal situation a bit, so it is unconscionable for lawmakers to do lasting damage now to our children and our future with devastating cuts that will lead to layoffs of thousands of school employees, larger class sizes and none of the resources needed to meet rising achievement standards.”

The process is far from over, however, as members of the Senate have indicated they want to add \$6 billion to funding for public schools above the base level in the original version of the budget filed in January. Both Republican and Democratic senators have spoken out for use of the Rainy Day Fund for 2012-2013. The Senate’s chief budget writer, Senate Finance Committee Chair Steve Ogden, Republican of Bryan, has said flatly that the legislature needs to find more revenue to correct the structural deficit created by the botched tax overhaul in 2006. He has even called for a corporate income tax to replace the business margins tax. Clearly the Senate has its own ideas on the budget, and the final product will not be known until a House-Senate conference committee finishes its work late in the session.

So the fight goes on. Though better than the House disaster, even the current Senate draft of the education budget would leave our schools short by roughly \$400 per pupil below current levels—an unprecedented cut.

Many House members claim they are taking their marching orders for these draconian cuts from voters who elected them with a message to reduce spending. Yet that position doesn’t jibe with public opinion polls that show that 82 percent of the public doesn’t want any cuts to public education, and some 71 percent would even be willing to raise taxes to keep class sizes small.

Additionally, the outcry and persistent protests from educators, parents and community leaders is having an impact, particularly on senators who are elected by a broader swath of voters and are hearing loud and clear that these cuts will move our state—already near the bottom of the list on many indicators for funding education and other vital services—even further backward.

While there have been some bright spots—for example, House passage of a bill to use about \$3 billion of the \$9.4 billion Rainy Day Fund to plug the hole in the current biennium’s budget—many more damaging bills were pending at Texas Teacher deadline. Included in that list are significant cuts to the Teacher Retirement System state pension and health-care contributions, bills that would authorize extensive and permanent use of furloughs and rollbacks of teacher pay, and bills that would gut key quality standards like the 22:1 class-size law.

Still, thanks to your efforts legislators are feeling the pressure to come up with better solutions. We need continued pressure on lawmakers in the coming months to ensure they act on the message that lasting damage to our state’s future is unacceptable. 🇹🇽



LOCALS & MEMBERS IN ACTION



Texas AFT has mobilized members and community allies in record numbers to speak out on the need to take a balanced approach to balancing the state budget and fully funding education.

In February, Texas AFT launched a statewide campaign—Our Kids. Our Future. Texas Can Do Better—with a Web site, Facebook page, petition, online letter campaigns and partnerships with coalitions of parents, educators and community leaders. Also included was a more specific campaign to “Keep the 22:1 Class-Size Law,” which has drawn strong support from thousands across the state.

Here’s a brief look at some of the numbers from our efforts and events, and information on how you can join the movement and take action.

Our Kids. Our Future. Texas Can Do Better

www.txcandobetter.org
www.facebook.com/txcandobetter
www.twitter.com/txcandobetter

Some 8,000 people have signed the petition, and 8,500 submitted online letters to legislators. A statewide radio campaign in March provided a call to action, and the campaign recently added “Member Stories,” videos of teachers, school employees and parents who outline the importance of their work and impacts proposed cuts would have on their schools and children.

Keep the 22:1 Class-Size Law

www.22to1.org
www.facebook.com/22to1
www.twitter.com/22to1

More than 11,000 people responded to the need to keep the class-size law by signing a petition, and some 2,000 more sent letters to their lawmakers. An accompanying blog outlines the issues and highlights the absurdity of claims from class-size detractors.

Click to Call Campaigns

Sending an email to your legislators is quick and easy, but Texas AFT has made phone calls to their offices just as convenient. Members are directed to a Web site where they input their address and phone number, and on submission, they are provided with talking points and automatically connected with their legislator’s office. Some 1,600 people took part in the Click to Call on three events related to the state budget.

Text Messaging

More than 1,400 people have opted in to receive text messages from Texas AFT for information on events and action campaigns. Text messages are a great way to get a quick response. For instance, text messages were sent with a direct link to the Click to Call campaigns, which allowed members to connect with their lawmakers directly and immediately. To sign up, go to www.texasaft.org and click on “Political Action.”

Lobby Day and Community Rally

The traditional lobby day and rally at the Capitol on the first day of spring break during legislative sessions drew a record crowd—4,000 participants who carried umbrellas to signify that “It’s Raining” and the need to use the Rainy Day Fund. After the rally, members met with legislators and lobbied on the Texas AFT agenda for public education.

Tele Town Halls

Two successful Tele Town Halls—in which Texas AFT called members and those who signed up for the event for a phone conference—gave participants a chance to ask questions of a panel of Texas AFT leaders, respond to poll questions and get information on current action steps on the state budget. Some 6,500 people participated in the first conference on March 6, and 5,500 joined the call for the second on April 3. Both calls generated significant numbers of petition signers and phone calls to legislators.

Coalition Work and Events

Texas AFT is a member of Texas Forward, a coalition of 37 nonprofits—representing the interests of education, health and human services, and the environment—with a message to take a balanced approach to balancing the state budget. Texas Forward, the Texas State Employees Union and many other organizations

Locals & Members in Action continued on page 12

**Our Kids
Our Future**
Texas Can Do Better



A RECORD CROWD


Carrying umbrellas in AFT blue and every other color of the rainbow to promote the use of the state's Rainy Day Fund, Texas AFT members, parents and community leaders rallied at the Capitol on March 14 to ask for a balanced approach to balancing the state budget.

"It was the most successful lobby day Texas AFT has ever had," said Linda Bridges, Texas AFT President. "A typical lobby day turns out about 1,000 members, but this week, 4,000 Texans from communities across the state came together—teachers, support staff, parents, churches, students and other friends—to fight for our kids. It was inspiring and historic."

Bridges noted that educators understand the need for some budget cuts but also know there are things lawmakers can do to

make the cuts less devastating. She was joined by AFT president Randi Weingarten and leaders of half a dozen AFT local unions in rejecting attacks on teachers and the middle class.

Texas AFT members rallying at the Capitol also brought little gifts for their lawmakers: cans of sardines signifying what classrooms will turn into if the state abandons its law limiting class sizes to 22 students in kindergarten through fourth grade. Each can featured a picture of kids squeezed into a sardine can, along with the message that crowded classrooms mean limited learning.

The successful rally followed a Saturday, March 12 event sponsored by Save Texas Schools that drew a crowd of 11,000 education advocates from all walks of life. 



TEXAS AFT LOBBY DAY AND RALLY



Photos: Jody Horton

Local efforts to reduce testing win results for Austin educators

BY ROB PATTERSON



Education Austin President Ken Zarifis

The biggest obstacle to effective teaching for former middle school teacher Ken Zarifis was the burden of district requirements related to standardized testing.

“Benchmark testing in language arts alone was taking almost a week,” he recalled. “And those tests were required by the district to be given every six weeks.”

Although the Texas Legislature made some

headway in addressing overtesting in the 2009 legislative session, the current Legislature seems to be on the wrong track again with bills that potentially could add even more burdensome testing to classrooms and add more emphasis to test scores for teacher evaluations and pay. With so much concentration on the state budget shortfall, tackling overtesting and performance evaluations on the local level may become more important than ever.

Education Austin—Texas AFT’s local affiliate for Austin ISD—launched an effort five years ago that provides a good model for starting that process. In response to concerns from members like Zarifis, the union created an “Overtesting Committee” to address the enormous amount of time eaten away by testing and test preparation. (Zarifis recently left the classroom to serve as co-president for Education Austin.)

At first, the union committee ran into a brick wall of opposition from administrators. “I testified before both houses of the Texas Legislature that I was spending upwards of 44 days of my instructional year on the TAKS test and district-mandated tests,” Zarifis said. “But the superintendent at the time and his administration absolutely would not listen to the idea that we could possibly be overtesting.”

Zarifis said a new superintendent brought a more receptive

approach. “They agreed to our proposal that we create a new committee that brought in principals, district administration and teachers along with the union to find where we can eliminate needless tests, and to see how we can then make better quality tests,” he said.

Education Austin members received nine spots on the 26-member committee, which the district dubbed the “Joint Labor-Management Assessment Committee (JAC)”, and the union spurred significant, positive changes starting in the 2010-2011 school year, including:

- A nearly 70 percent reduction in district-mandated tests throughout Austin ISD.
- All beginning of the year benchmark tests were eliminated except for fifth and eighth grade science and fourth and seventh grade writing.
- The district also no longer administers end-of-year benchmarks other than ninth grade science. Middle of the year tests remain in place.

Austin ISD also agreed to adhere to the state “10 percent” rule that Education Austin was instrumental in getting passed at the Legislature in 2009. It stipulates that only 10 percent of annual classroom instructional time (18 school days for Austin ISD) can be used to administer local district tests.

Even with the positive changes, Austin educators still have serious misgivings about how the one-size-fits-all nature of multiple choice tests fails to accurately gauge the abilities of students. “It’s trying to capture too much information in a snapshot,” said JAC member Judith Hutchinson, a fourth and fifth grade special education teacher at Austin’s Pickle Elementary.

The analysis of the data obtained from standardized tests and its interpretation and accuracy also is a concern. “When you disaggregate data you can get something that looks like a big cause and effect or a strong correlation when there’s really just a couple of extremes that sway it,” Hutchinson said.

Hutchinson also decried how the amount of testing can affect her special education students that don’t take the tests. As schools utilize all their teachers to perform test prep, “We would shut down when there was testing of any kind going on, and all the special education kids would be warehoused,” she noted. “They would lose days when they should have been getting really intense education. In the first year of our [JAC] work, I figured out that I had lost 25 percent of the educational time in the school year.”

But will the Legislature add even more emphasis on standardized testing?


Such tests also fail to take into account the wide variations among students in learning style and abilities, plus socioeconomic and cultural factors. “District tests are notorious for their bias in these areas,” Zarifis said.

The stress of testing also has a negative effect on the students, noted Zarifis. “If you have a test every six weeks and a benchmark at the beginning, middle and end of each year, and then if you are testing on what you are teaching, the students are just beat up by all of it.”

rather than just a multiple choice test. Now we’re at the moment of how do we change assessment. We need to have a common vision of the data we want, why we want it, and how we are going to use it. If we can’t answer those questions, then we don’t need this data.”

Many Austin educators stress that the final component in their effort is to involve educators in both the formulation of assessments and how they are used. And that requires a shift in how teachers are educated as well as further professional

development for working teachers. “We need to train teachers on how to do ongoing testing and how to do it well, and demand that such training be there and we show proficiency in being able to do that,” Hutchinson said.

“There is a whole educational industrial complex that has profited hugely from this stress on standardized testing,” Hutchinson added. Hence the ultimate goal is not just to give teachers the time they need to teach, but also to integrate testing into what actually happens in classrooms. “We need to put educators back in charge.” 

Although the Texas Legislature made some headway in addressing overtesting in the 2009 Legislative session, the current Legislature seems to be on the wrong track again with bills that potentially could add even more burdensome testing to classrooms and add more emphasis to test scores for teacher evaluations and pay.

The Austin teachers are fully aware and supportive of the need for assessments, said Kirk White, a sixth grade social studies teacher at Bailey Middle School who serves on the JAC. “It’s not that it’s useless to do these things,” he said. “Sometimes it is instructive. But there’s too much of an emphasis on the tests. There are so many ways that you have of measuring how you are doing. You are always assessing students in one way or another.”

Zarifis said now that the Austin ISD JAC has managed to reduce the amount of testing, a priority remains to stay on guard and limit testing. “Now that we’ve poured a little water out of the glass, we don’t want it to get filled back up with more tests. That’s going to be our struggle.”

But just as important, Zarifis noted, is “to diversify what assessment means, to have a broader spectrum of assessments



BILLS FOCUS ON ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION CHANGES

At Texas Teacher press time, several bills affecting accountability and teacher evaluation were pending.

For years now the fans of standardized testing have tried to sell the Texas Legislature on the idea that teachers' evaluations should depend on their students' test scores. The latest vehicles for this idea are SB 4 by Sen. Florence Shapiro (Republican of Plano) and HB 1587 by Rep. Rob Eissler, (Republican of The Woodlands).

SB 4 AS INTRODUCED SAYS: "The recommended appraisal system must provide that at least 50 percent of the appraisal is based on a measurement of the teacher's effectiveness and the annual improvement of the teacher's students' achievement." It goes on: "the recommended appraisal process of teacher with primary instructional responsibilities in a subject and grade for which assessment is administered under [the state accountability system] must provide that the 50 percent measurement is based on standardized achievement data of the teacher's students...."

HB 1587 SAYS the commissioner of education must develop a new "performance evaluation system for teachers" that will base "a significant portion of the evaluation on the teacher's student learning objectives and outcomes, which must include student performance on assessment instruments under [the state accountability system]...."

The two bills were scheduled to be heard on March 29 in the Senate Education Committee and House Public Education Committee respectively. Texas AFT planned testimony pointing out the lack of scientific validity of this misuse of test data, which would only aggravate the educationally deforming emphasis on standardized testing in our schools. A better way forward—if our state really wants to make progress on measuring and improving teachers' effectiveness—is the collaborative design by teachers and their school districts of local models of alternative evaluation methods intended to improve effectiveness, using multiple measures, which can be tried out and rigorously evaluated. The last thing needed now in our classrooms is a top-down directive from the state imposing a new, test-driven methodology of teacher appraisal.

On the positive side, the House Public Education Committee heard testimony on March 1 for HB 233 by Rep. Scott Hochberg (Democrat of Houston), which would strike a blow against

the excessive emphasis on standardized testing in our schools. Students in third, fifth, and eighth grade would still take the state's tests, but for students who do well on these tests his bill would eliminate standardized testing in the intervening years. Texas AFT supported this simple but consequential piece of legislation, which would hinder current efforts to make standardized tests more than ever the be-all, end-all of education. It was no surprise that the bill drew vehement opposition from a long-time spokesman for the testing industry—or that it drew strong support from a broad array of educator and parent witnesses.

Another notable bill to reform our test-driven education system is HB 1307 by Rep. Mike Villarreal (Democrat of San Antonio). The bill would establish a pilot program in which 20 middle schools could apply to design and use alternative exams instead of the state TAKS or upcoming STAAR exams. Teachers at the selected schools would work with the Texas Education Agency to develop the tests. The legislation would require the assessments to address the use of planning skills, processing skills, and critical and creative-thinking skills. The assessments could include examinations, quizzes, group or individual projects, lab work, portfolios, oral presentations, or exhibitions. No more than 50 percent of a student's assessment grade could be based on answers to multiple-choice questions. TEA would audit students' scores, compare student performance before and after participation in the alternative assessment program, and report on teachers' professional satisfaction.

"Instead of focusing teaching on fill-in-the-bubble tests, we want to create a new generation of tests that empower educators to teach high level creative and critical thinking skills," Rep. Villarreal said. "We want to ensure that schoolchildren develop a love of learning and the skills they will need to compete in the real world." 🇹🇽



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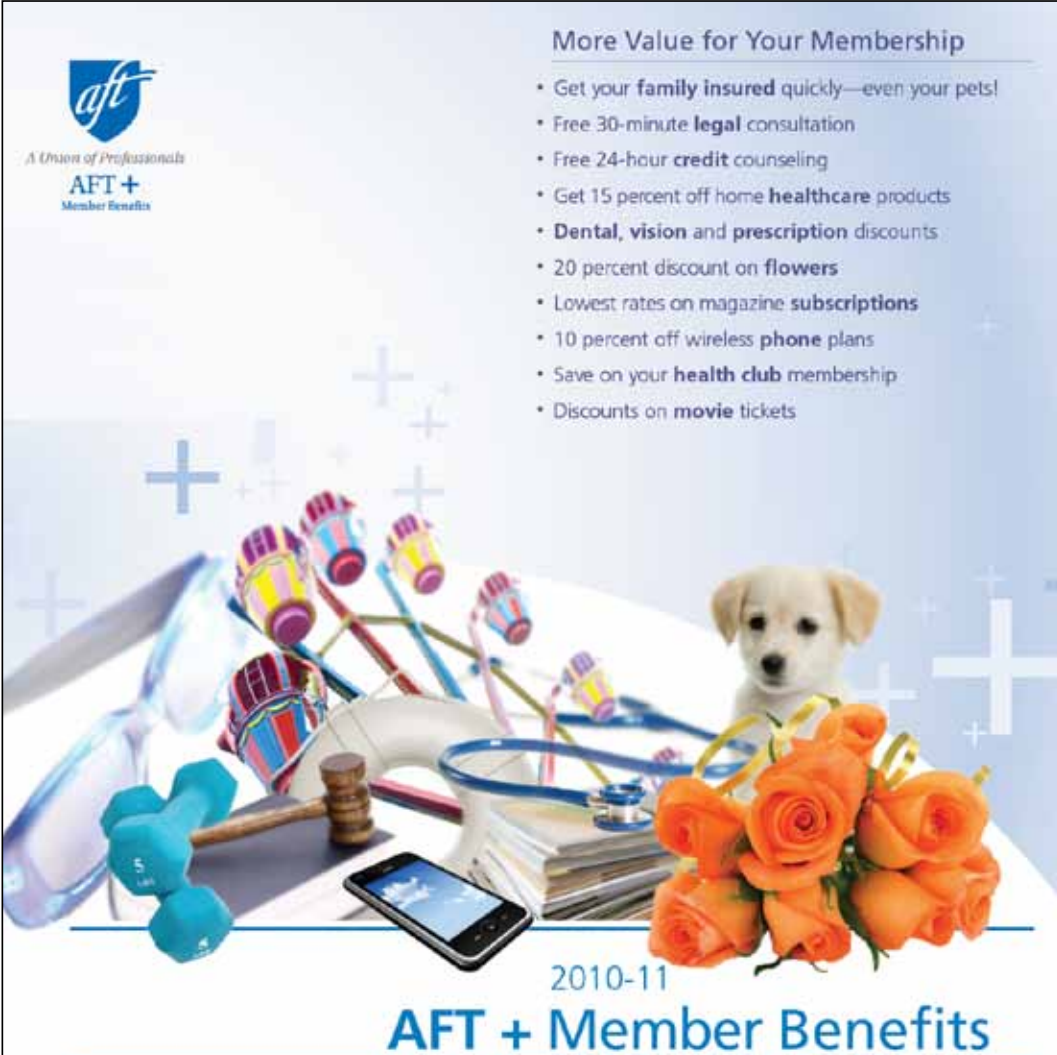
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- Free 30-minute **legal** consultation
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- Get 15 percent off home **healthcare** products
- **Dental, vision** and **prescription** discounts
- 20 percent discount on **flowers**
- Lowest rates on magazine **subscriptions**
- 10 percent off wireless **phone** plans
- Save on your **health club** membership
- Discounts on **movie** tickets

2010-11
AFT + Member Benefits

RENTAL CARS AND AUTO CLUB PROGRAM

Shop around and get the best rates and discounts from five major rental car companies.

Want to feel safe and secure in your own car? Whether the problem is a flat tire, dead battery, being locked out of your car, or your car just won't start, the AFT + auto club program will be there to help you with vehicle-related problems, anywhere in the country, with emergency roadside assistance 24/7/365.

- Covers you in any vehicle you are driving or riding in.
- Covers road service up to \$125 per occurrence.
- Costs less than many other national auto clubs. 🇺🇸

TEXAS AFT CONVENTION CONTINUED

Resolutions

1. Should be received in the Texas AFT state office no later than May 27, 2011, so that copies may be shared with delegates.
2. Should be introduced by locals of Texas AFT, the Texas AFT Executive Council or Texas AFT president.
3. Should be approved for submission by the executive board or membership of the local, and signed by the president of the local.
4. Should bear a title.
5. Should be submitted in typed form to: Resolutions, Texas AFT, 3000 S. IH-35, Suite 175, Austin, Texas 78704.

CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS AMENDMENTS

Texas AFT locals may submit amendments to the Texas AFT Constitution and By-Laws to the Convention as provided in Article VIII of the Texas AFT Constitution. All proposed amendments should state the article and section to be amended and should include both the current wording and proposed change. The proposed change must be signed by the president of the local certifying that it has been approved by the executive board or membership meeting of the local and transmitted to the secretary-treasurer of Texas AFT. The Executive Council of Texas AFT may also submit changes to the Convention.

AMENDMENTS MUST REACH THE TEXAS AFT STATE OFFICE BY MAY 6, 2011.

A two-thirds vote is necessary for the amendments to the Constitution to be adopted at the Convention. A majority vote is necessary for the By-Laws amendments to be adopted at the Convention.

LOCALS & MEMBERS IN ACTION continued from page 5

planned a massive rally on April 6 to protest service cuts.

Members also were out in full force for the Save Texas Schools Rally on March 12, which drew more than 11,000 people. On April 1, members rallied again with coalition partners and held a vigil with the message, “Don’t Wreck Texas,” at the Capitol to protest the devastating cuts in the House budget bill. Texas AFT also is a member of the Coalition for Public Schools, working on class size issues, and a coalition opposing private-school vouchers.

Locals in Action

Our local affiliates around the state have been busy as well. Local unions have held rallies, press conferences, town hall meetings and local letter and phone campaigns to directly address budget decisions in their districts. Not sure if there is a local union in your area? Go to www.texasaft.org and click on “Links to Locals.”

CONVENTION COMMITTEES AND DELEGATE FORMS

Local unions will receive delegate forms in U.S. mail from Texas AFT. Elected delegates will indicate their choice of committee assignment on the committee form. All credentials and forms are to be returned to the Texas AFT office no later than May 27, 2011.


CONVENTION FEES AND REGISTRATION

The cost for the convention (including the professional issues day) is \$65. An “early bird” registration fee of \$50 is available through May 27, 2011. Delegates must register through their local union.

Individuals attending ONLY the “Moving Forward” professional issues day may get registration materials from their local union or a staff representative. The registration fee for the professional issues day is the same as the convention: \$65 (or \$50 if paid by May 27, 2011).

HOTEL RESERVATIONS


The room rate at the Corpus Christi Omni Bayfront Hotel is \$120 per night, single or double, plus hotel taxes (15 percent) for a total of \$138 per night.

Delegates and attendees may register with the hotel online via a link provided on our convention page at www.texasaft.org or call the hotel directly at 1-888-444-OMNI (6664) and ask for the special Texas AFT convention rate. 

Texas AFT also is organizing members to meet directly with their legislators or staff in their district offices on an ongoing basis. If you are interested in joining a team to meet with lawmakers, contact Tanya Tarr at ttarr@texasaft.org.

What should I do right now?

If you want to be part of the movement to save our state’s future, the first thing to do is join the conversation and keep in the loop. Go to www.txcandobetter.org and sign the petition. We’ll send you periodic updates and action alerts by email. From there you can join other conversations as you wish, such as “Liking” our Facebook campaigns or even following us on Twitter.


Want a daily e-mail digest of news from the Legislature and how new bills could impact you? Be sure to subscribe to the Texas AFT Legislative Hotline at www.texasaftblog.com/hotline. 

NEW SOCIAL SECURITY 'FAIRNESS' BILL FILED IN U.S. HOUSE

A new version of the bill to repeal two unfair Social Security offsets that hurt Texas school retirees and other public employees was filed on April 1 in the U.S. House of Representatives. H.R. 1332 by Rep. Howard McKeon, Republican of California, had 49 initial cosponsors.

The bill would eliminate the costly and unfair impact of the Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision on the earned Social Security benefits of hundreds of thousands of Texas school retirees and more than a million public employees nationwide. Four Texans so far have signed up as co-sponsors: Democrats Gene Green of Houston and Silvestre Reyes of El Paso and Republicans Michael McCaul of Austin and Ron Paul of Surfside.

A letter you can e-mail to those who represent you in the U.S. House and Senate in support of this legislation will soon be available on the Texas AFT Web site at www.texasaft.org. Watch

the Legislative Hotline daily e-mail newsletter for further updates on this bill as the 2011-12 congressional session delves deeper into Social Security issues. Texas AFT will be working with allies in and outside of Congress to move this longstanding issue of Social Security fairness higher on the agenda. 




TEXAS TEACHERS SPEND AVERAGE OF \$27 A MONTH ON FOOD FOR CLASSROOMS

Two-thirds of teachers across the United States say they have children in their classrooms who regularly come to school too hungry to learn because they are not getting enough to eat at home, according to a new national survey released in February. More than 60 percent of the teachers surveyed for "Hunger in Our Schools: Share Our Strength's Teachers Report" say that the problem has increased in the past year, and many find that breakfast programs are a key link to students' ability to succeed academically.

The survey, conducted by Lake Research Partners, contains highlights of a public opinion survey of 638 kindergarten through eighth-grade public school teachers in urban, suburban and rural communities nationwide. The study reveals that 65 percent of teachers report that most or a lot of their students rely on school meals as their primary source of nutrition. This reliance is widespread geographically, but particularly strong in urban and rural areas.

More than 40 percent of teachers say they believe it is a serious problem that children are coming to school hungry because they have not had enough to eat at home. In fact, 61 percent of teachers purchase food for their classrooms out of their own pockets, spending an average of \$25 a month, with the sample of respondents from Texas spending about \$27 a month.

AFT has partnered with Share Our Strength, a nonprofit organization working to end childhood hunger in America by 2015 through its No Kid Hungry Campaign. The organization will be supporting innovative breakfast initiatives in 2011 by awarding \$525,000 in grants. To learn more about how you can help, visit www.nokidhungry.org. 



Texas AFT

3000 South IH 35, Suite 175

Austin, Texas 78704

**Our Kids
Our Future**
Texas Can Do Better



**Want to fight for public education
and the future of our state?**

Take action at: TXCanDoBetter.org