



A Union of Professionals
Aldine AFT
 Local 6345 / AFL-CIO

local Voice

November 2011 / www.aldineaft.org

Events & Activities

Thanksgiving - Office Closed
 November 24 & 25
 Aldine AFT Headquarters

Safe Schools Act Workshop
 November 29
 Aldine AFT Headquarters
 5:00 p.m.

Know Your Rights Seminar
 December 7
 Aldine AFT Headquarters
 5:00 p.m.

Building Representative Meeting
 December 8
 Aldine AFT Headquarters
 5:00 p.m.

Winter Break - Office Closed
 December 19 - January 2
 Aldine AFT Headquarters

Be sure to check our "Calendar" section at our web site to learn more about our upcoming events and future activities.

More Than 290 Districts Sue the State Over Inequitable, Arbitrary Funding

The first of several anticipated legal challenges to the state's school-finance system was filed in October in Austin by a coalition of now more than nearly 300 school districts and counting, along with individual taxpayers and parents. The biggest of seven districts named as original plaintiffs against the state is San Antonio ISD.



The Equity Center, the Austin-based research and advocacy center for lower-wealth districts that is coordinating the lawsuit, put the thrust of the case in simple terms: "This lawsuit comes at a crucial time in the history of public education in Texas. School districts, taxpayers and students are being treated unfairly by our current system, and it's time to stand up and fight."

Inequity in the distribution of school funding among 1,000-plus school districts is the main target of the lawsuit. The petition filed in state district court in Travis County says the state's "funding for public education had already become an arbitrary hodge-podge of approaches rather than a coherent system" even before the deep cuts in funding and changes in the funding structure enacted this year. The result has been "huge differences in yields for similar tax effort that gave property-wealthy districts unconstitutionally greater access to educational dollars," say the plaintiffs. They add,

"This constitutional inefficiency was compounded in 2011 by SB 1 passed by the 82nd Legislature which reduced school funding formulas by \$4 billion in addition to other cuts in excess of \$1 billion." Cuts inflicted by lawmakers on the "haves" and "have-nots" alike inevitably involve harsher impacts for those disadvantaged to begin with, the plaintiffs argue.

Equity is not the only focus of the lawsuit. The districts suing the state also contend that the legislature in effect has imposed an unconstitutional statewide property tax, because districts have to tax at the maximum rate allowed by the legislature in the effort to meet basic state requirements. In effect, they say, the state-imposed cap of \$1.17 per \$100 on districts' property taxes for school operations "is both a floor and ceiling leaving the districts with no meaningful discretion."

The districts' case also alleges that the state has imposed ever higher academic standards for all Texas students but has failed to assure all districts of the resources needed to help their students meet those standards. They say the "differences in funding for districts... cannot be explained without resorting to an answer that is nothing more than 'that's the way we (the Legislature) wanted to do it.'"

A goal of the lawsuit is to get a definitive court ruling before the legislature meets again in regular session in January 2013. As of print time, Aldine ISD has not joined the lawsuit.

Elections Matter

AFT'S NEW 2012 ELECTION WEB SITE:
 Because elected officials have a direct effect on your job, your rights, and your family's and community's well-being, it is critical that you get involved in the 2012 elections. Next year, you will vote to elect the president of the United States. As we look at what is happening now across the country, that election takes on even greater significance. Every day, in state after state, public employees and the services our communities depend upon are under assault. And while we continue to push back against those assaults, the surest recourse is the ballot box. Visit www.aft.org/election2012.

Social Security Fairness: It's Up to Us—Send Your Letter Now

The 2011 edition of the Social Security Fairness Act is H.R. 1332, introduced on April 1 by Republican Rep. Howard “Buck” McKeon and Democratic Rep. Howard Berman. So far they have attracted as cosponsors an additional 121 House members of both parties, including five Texans. The Texas cosponsors are Democrats Silvestre Reyes of El Paso and Gene Green of Houston plus Republicans Ron Paul of Lake Jackson, Michael McCaul of Austin, and Michael Burgess of Flower Mound. A U.S. Senate companion version of the bill has not yet been filed.

The Social Security Fairness Act would repeal two unfair federal pension offsets that deprive Texas school retirees (and other public servants, in more than a dozen states) of duly earned Social Security retirement benefits. The two offsets are the Government Pension Offset (affecting benefits of a surviving spouse) and the Windfall Elimination Provision. The GPO can eliminate up to the full amount of the spousal Social Security benefit of a retired school employee who also draws a TRS annuity. The WEP can cut up to \$375 a month from the Social Security benefit earned by a school employee's own Social Security contributions if that employee also draws a TRS pension benefit.

Under H.R. 1332, those already retired as well as future retirees would no longer face the harsh impact of these two offsets after December 2011.

In the midst of a congressional year dominated by partisan budget disputes, including proposals to cut future Social Security benefits, the bipartisan Fairness Act has not received the attention it deserves. That needs to change, and you can help change it.

There is no excuse for delaying justice for the victims of the Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision by entangling this issue in unrelated disputes.

Help Congress see the light right now by sending a letter urging federal lawmakers to cosponsor the Fairness Act and make its passage an urgent priority. Visit www.aldineaft.org and click on our web letter link.

Take Our Survey!

The Texas Legislature cut funding to local school districts by more than \$5,000,000,000 (yes, that's \$5 BILLION!) for the coming two years. Texas AFT wants to know how these cuts are affecting the school children, teachers, parents, school district employees and neighborhood schools in your community.

Visit us online at:

www.texasaft.org

AFT Members Win a Fight for Fairness at State Certification Board

You spoke, and they listened. In response to numerous comments submitted by Texas AFT members, the State Board for Educator Certification on October 7 rewrote two new proposed rules on professional discipline for educators.



The rules as originally proposed would have tilted the disciplinary process unfairly against educators. One would have treated a deferred adjudication as the equivalent of a criminal conviction. The other would have authorized “warning letters” to be added to an educator's certification record based on unsubstantiated allegations, without opportunity for rebuttal.

Texas AFT legislative counsel Patty Quinzi welcomed the SBEC revisions adopted and offered testimony recapping the key arguments Texas AFT members raised during the public-comment period on the proposed rules. Quinzi said:

“We would like to commend the SBEC staff for presenting revised recommendations for amendments to Chapter 249 in response to our members' concerns expressed in public comments about the rules affecting their profession.

“These new staff recommendations for amendments to Chapter 249 address our members' substantial concerns regarding Section 249.3 (14) and (15), the proposed rule on the handling of deferred adjudications, by reaffirming that a deferred adjudication is not a conviction, and by deleting an assertion that a deferred adjudication by itself would suffice to prove alleged misconduct....

“In addition, we welcome the deletion of proposed rule language that would have allowed for a ‘warning letter’ to be added to someone's certification record, without opportunity for appeal or rebuttal, based on allegations of misconduct that had not been substantiated or did not rise to a level requiring official SBEC action. This change in the recommendation addresses concerns raised by SBEC board members as well as our own members in public comment. Adding such a ‘warning letter’ to someone's certification record, without opportunity for appeal or rebuttal, would be exceptionally problematic, tainting a professional educator's certification record and professional reputation with unsubstantiated claims that could affect the educator's entire career.”

If SBEC staff had not developed these revised recommendations responsive to the changes sought by our members, Texas AFT was prepared to press ahead and insist on a mandatory public hearing to address these two issues—an option we had preserved by making a timely request on September 16 for such a hearing under the Administrative Procedure Act, Section 2001.029(b).

Congratulations to all the members of Texas AFT who answered the call and used the tools provided via the *Hotline* and the Texas AFT web site to file public comments on the proposed rules over the past month. You have achieved a real gain in fairness for all professional educators in Texas thanks to your willingness to speak up.

Morera Joins Aldine AFT Staff

Aldine AFT is pleased to welcome Vilma Morera to our team. Morera will serve as a full-time local organizer for the federation and her focus will be to assist campus leaders with recruiting new members throughout the district.



Vilma Morera, Aldine AFT Organizer

Morera is a former organizer for the Houston Educational Support Personnel (HESP-AFT) Local 6315, and has been a part of the labor movement for more than 11-years with AFT. While at HESP-AFT, she utilized her bilingual skills to mobilize members for numerous political and issue advocacy causes.

Prior to joining the union as a transportation worker in HISD, Morera served as a campus leader and as an active voice for her co-workers.

“I am very pleased to be a member of this team,” said Morera. “I am passionate about the issues affecting our public school employees, and I want to do everything I can to empower individuals to take action to have an effective role in improving our schools.”

Members are encouraged to contact Morera to schedule an appointment to learn more about their member benefits, and to assist our union with planning social opportunities for their campus including our regular AFTer school cafe events. Contact Vilma Morera by calling our office at 281/847-3050 or email her at vmorera@aldineaft.org.



Union Hosts Safety Forum

National School Bus Safety Week was held October 17-21. Aldine AFT members attended a special safety forum at the local union office to discuss how Aldine ISD bus drivers may better assist students with disabilities and how to confront current safety concerns.

“Bus drivers play an important role in educating our children,” said Linda Billnoski-Donnan, driver and AFT member. “Safety is our top priority, and our union is here to help.”

A top issue discussed with drivers is the sharing of information between teachers and drivers where it pertains to a student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) and a student’s behavior modification(s). Drivers said that they too need information on how to address a student’s individualized needs.

Pictured above are drivers Diane Gonzalez, Amanda Logan, Linda Billnoski-Donnan, and organizer Vilma Morera.

Seminar Emphasizes Educator Rights

Aldine AFT recently held two Know Your Rights seminars to educate professionals about their rights under law and how to better enforce these rights. The workshop’s materials have been revamped to highlight how a teacher’s contractual rights will change in the next school year (2012-13) which includes notification of renewal and non-renewal procedures.

The theme, “Know, Enforce, and Share,” was expressed throughout the presentation. Tanner Williams, Texas AFT state representative conducted the workshop. Williams stated that many people may know a little about their basic rights under Texas Education Code, but they just don’t feel confident enough to enforce these rights.

“If educators continue to neglect enforcing their rights, then these rights may one day be dissolved and the teacher’s authority will be eroded,” said Williams.

Williams used the example that it took nearly 10-years for educators to win the right to have a 30-minute duty-free lunch. Many educators complain that they don’t receive their full allotted time, but do not file any sort of complaint. Without enforcement, this time will continue to be taken away little by little.

AFT also encouraged attendees to share what they had learned with co-workers and to encourage others to join the union.

“Together, we have the power of a collective voice,” said Williams. “Together, we have the power to support each other. That is just one of the benefits of our union.”

Know Your Rights

- Duty-free lunch
- Planning time
- Right to join a union
- Paperwork Reduction Act
- Removal of a student
- PDAS and appraisals
- How to document properly
- Contract rights (SB 8)
- How to file a complaint

Download our presentation and learn more about your rights. Visit us at www.aldineaft.org and click on “Know Your Rights.”



We invite you to "Like" us on Facebook and be entered to win \$50. Visit **Facebook.com/AldineAFT**.

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