

# McAllen AFT News

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## TEXAS LEGISLATURE

### School Board Elections

McAllen AFT Cope Committee has endorsed the following candidates:

Dalinda "Dolly" Gonzalez Alcantar—Place 6

John Ball—Place 2

Sam Saldivar Jr.—Place 7



**PLEASE VOTE—ASK A FRIEND TO VOTE**

### Texas House Debates Using Rainy Day Fund for Education

This debate on the House floor was not about water versus education. There's more than enough in the Rainy Day Fund (\$11.8 billion) to provide billions of dollars apiece for both of these important forms of infrastructure—and for transportation projects, too. The battle is between those who want to restore full funding for public schools and those who would rather not admit they have been shortchanging the schoolchildren of Texas.

This is the defining battle of the budget for the 2013 legislative session, with four weeks left to go.

### No Reason to Make It Harder to Fund Education

It's hard enough as it is in the Texas legislature to secure adequate funding for education. But proposed legislation, SB 101 and SJR 10 by Sen. Dan Patrick (R-Houston), would make it even harder,

amending the state constitution to squeeze down spending growth to fit an arbitrary formula. Sen. Patrick's proposed limit based on overall population growth and inflation ignores the fact that some subgroups—schoolchildren and the elderly, for instance—are increasing in number at a faster rate than the overall population and have greater and fast-increasing needs for state services than other segments of the Texas populace as well.

### State Handover of Neighborhood Schools to Private Operators

SB 1718 by Sen. Royce West (D-Dallas) would authorize the commissioner of education to take over neighborhood schools rated low-performing and turn them over to charter operators. In the process, students, teachers, and parents would lose most of the safeguards of educational quality and fair treatment that they have under the Education Code.

The state takeover of local schools under SB 1718 would not require any inquiry into the reasons for low ratings—and no prior determination that the school targeted for takeover had received the staffing, funding, or other support needed to succeed academically.

Sen. Royce West (D-Dallas) has borrowed this idea of takeover by a state "achievement district" from next door in Louisiana—and from the well-funded Texans for Education Reform lobbying group and its private-interest backers. But the evidence from Louisiana indicates that

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## Texas Legislature Cont'd

turning schools over to privately run charter operations has been a failure as a strategy for school improvement.

The small minority of charter schools that do well practice various forms of selective admissions--weeding out unmotivated parents and students, weeding out students with a history of discipline problems, for example. They are more like magnet schools than models for turnaround of low-rated neighborhood schools. (They also tend to have lots of private funding in addition to their state funding.) Some, like KIPP, have tried and failed at turning around low-rated neighborhood schools and now admit that they are not in the turnaround business, just the business of opening up new schools.

The "achievement district" plan may have PR appeal, but it holds out a false promise to students and parents and the community. It is not a model for Texas. **Texas can do better.**

### TRS Retirement Benefits

Some minor changes have been made to two bills on TRS pensions--but the key provisions taking already-earned benefits remain.

The committee-approved versions of SB 1458 by Sen. Robert Duncan (R-Lubbock) and its companion, HB 1884 by Rep. Bill Callegari (R-Katy), would cut already-earned TRS retirement benefits for many current employees, by **raising to 62 the minimum age for retirement with full benefits. Pensions would be cut 2 percent for each year prior to age 62, even for employees who meet the rule of 80**, and only catastrophic health coverage would be provided. (For employees with less than five years of service credit by September 2014, the pension cut for pre-62 retirement would be 5 percent per year.) The change in the minimum age would take billions of dollars of earned retirement benefits out of the pockets of school employees.

**After-the-fact pension cutbacks like this are**

**illegal in the private sector**, and they are not acceptable for school employees in Texas. A grandfather clause (exempting employees who as of August 31, 2014, are age 50 or above, or have 25 years of service, or meet a rule of 70), which would spare some but leave hundreds of thousands of dedicated school employees exposed to this take-away of earned benefits, does not make the take-away legitimate.

Texas AFT is working to persuade the authors of these bills to remove the take-away of earned benefits, to improve benefits for both retired and active school employees, and to strengthen the TRS pension fund for the long haul. Meanwhile, more than 20,000 educational employees state wide have bolstered our negotiating position by sending a letter to your legislators in opposition to the committee substitutes for SB 1458 and HB 1884.

### Good Bills Advancing—Grievance Appeals, Adjunct Health Care

SB 1799 by Sen. Kirk Watson (D-Austin) would set a 240-day deadline for the commissioner of education to decide employees' grievance appeals—cases that now take an astonishing three years on average, even though the cases are decided on the basis of the written local record without any state-level hearing. SB 1799 passed the Senate today by a vote of 31-0. It now heads for the House, where an identical companion bill, HB 2952 by Rep. Justin Rodriguez (D-San Antonio) already has been passed unanimously in committee.

HB 2127 by Rep. Donna Howard (D-Austin) is a bill to make state health-plan benefits more accessible to adjunct faculty at community colleges. We are pleased to report the bill has been scheduled for House floor action.

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

