



MCALLEN AFT NEWS

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THE MARITIME INSTITUTE

Leadership Training

This summer the American Federation of Teachers invited AFT members from all over the nation to the Leader Cadre at The Maritime Institute in Baltimore, Maryland.

We sent Veronica Guerrero (Seguin Elementary), Sandra Herrera (DeLeon Middle School), Ann Martinez (Travis Middle School), Alicia Martinez (Brown Middle School), Mary Ann Lacey (Navarro Elementary), and Sylvia Tanguma (Navarro and Escandon Elementary).

The topics covered were as follows:

1. Making decisions about education issues;
2. Building effective coalitions and partnerships from within the community;
3. Effectively communicating our message and positions to members/community;
4. Enhancing positive labor-management relations;
5. Handling devastating legislation;
6. Skillfully analyzing district budgets.

Why did our McAllen AFT Leaders Attend Maritime?

So much happened to our educational employees during the legislative session of 2015 that our heads bend with the drama. There were weeks of messages from the legislature that said we will pay our teachers starting at \$25,000 and max out salary wise at \$45,000. Then attacks on our pension fund. Then talks about retirees pensions being cut. More things happened.

McAllen AFT members sent thousands of email messages fighting for our professional life. We talked to other teaching professionals in the area. We had countless meetings at McAllen AFT to protect our future. As most of you know, we will have a new local in Edinburg ISD in May, 2016. Our strength is growing. Possibly a new local will come on board in PSJA in 2017.

We are very lucky that we have a great grass roots group of retirees. They are so helpful regarding our mailings to our members. We have work hard with Maintenance & Operations to achieve better pay and working conditions.



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Paraprofessionals Success

We are pleased to report that the budget bill signed by Gov. Abbott on June 20, 2015 will restore funding at long last for the program of tuition scholarships for educational aides who enroll in college courses to become teachers. This highly successful and effective program, whose budget was cut to zero in 2011, will receive an infusion of \$1.5 million over the 2016-2017 biennium.

Credit for getting the flow of state funding restarted for this program, strongly supported by Texas AFT since its inception in 1997, goes to Rep. Donna Howard (D-Austin), a member of the House Appropriations Committee. House and Senate budget conferees deserve some credit, too, for keeping the money in the budget as Howard proposed.

The Debt-Free Checklist and Why Debt-Free Higher Education is Crucial

One of the major unmet education needs in Texas and the whole country is in higher education, where an affordability crisis has been putting college out of reach or making student debt ever more burdensome for most families. Financial aid has not kept up with rising costs in Texas in the wake of tuition deregulation.

There is a pressing need for good policy ideas to deal with this issue, and AFT has come up with an ambitious one: aiming to make “debt-free college” a reality.

Here is how AFT explains what we are talking about:

The number of debt-free college plans beginning to circulate can be confusing, but the core message is simple: Higher education should be accessible to everyone, regardless of income and without the cost of crippling debt.

“We have to mitigate the debt that’s already due,” said AFT President Randi Weingarten at a Debt-Free Checklist briefing during the Netroots Nation 2015 conference in Phoenix. “Why would we incur additional debt? It is paradoxical, and I would argue hypocritical, to say that college is so important, but make it increasingly out of reach for all but those who are the most wealthy.”

Research shows that debt suppresses economic activity by preventing people from buying houses and cars, starting families and participating more robustly in the larger economy. It affects retirees still paying debt on early loans, midcareer loans and loans for their children. It deepens the gap between the haves and the have-nots by penalizing those who cannot afford an education without a loan. And student loan debt affects every American by preventing so many people from attending college in the first place, strangling this country’s vibrancy in the global marketplace of ideas as well as business.

Halting state disinvestment in public higher education would be a huge step toward remedying this issue, says Weingarten. At the same time, it could help address the soaring use of adjunct faculty. While students are being prevented from attending college, the college experience of those who do attend has been diminished by an increased reliance on underpaid, overworked adjuncts who are not given the resources they need to provide a high-quality education.

“More than three-quarters of American college professors are contingent workers,” Weingarten says. “That means they can automatically be fired. It means they’re cobbling together a living at four or five colleges, and that they may not have the academic freedom they need to do the work the universities require.”

Funding colleges, and making attendance debt-free, is essential to preserving the integrity of public higher education.