



# MCALLEN AFT NEWS



McAllen AFT, 1500 Dove, McAllen, TX

December 2013

Volume 21 Issue 5

## DETAILS

### RUNNING FOR GOVERNOR

Attorney General Greg Abbott is seeking the nomination for governor, but for months he has had little to say about education. Now Abbott has started talking about it some, but he is being coy about his views on some fundamental issues.

On school funding, he is the prime defender of the state’s deep education cuts in the ongoing school-finance lawsuit brought by hundreds of Texas school districts. He claims he can’t really tell you what he thinks about those budget cuts because he is duty-bound to defend those cuts in court.

On the issue of private-school vouchers, which would drain funds out of public education to fund private schools, Abbott this week wouldn’t answer reporters’ questions, except to say his “focus” is not on vouchers but that he is a big fan of “competition.” Notably, these remarks came just a day after his campaign featured an online discussion with a policy adviser who proposes to de-fund public schools and institute a voucher system.

Abbott currently is on a multi-city tour touting his interest in

education, but so far his interest apparently is confined to distance-learning programs—which he seems to regard as a way to cut costs—and select charter schools, which function like magnet schools, recruiting and retaining higher-performing, highly motivated students. We still have heard nothing much from him about the neighborhood public schools that have suffered greatly from the recent budget cuts yet continue to serve all comers.

Abbott’s campaign contends that he is collecting ideas at this point and will lay out an education platform next year. That’s when the attorney general also will be back in court defending the state school-funding scheme that already has been ruled inadequate and inequitable by a state district judge.

A team of McAllen AFT members Ruth Skow, Wally Kostenko, Chiqui Guerra, and Becky McMillan visited Abbott’s IDEA event in Weslaco. Terry Canales Texas House Rep. for District 41 and all of us are very concerned about Abbott’s lack of interest in Texas public schools. Terry said, “He’s been hiding behind his office, and I think it’s telling of what he’ll do as a governor.”

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McAllen AFT

1500 Dove

McAllen, TX 78504

956-682-1143

[mcallenaft@yahoo.com](mailto:mcallenaft@yahoo.com)

<http://tx.aft.org/mcallen>



**McAllen AFT**  
**1500 Dove Avenue**  
**McAllen, TX 78504**

## **FIRST BOOK HITS A \$1 MILLION BOOKS DONATED**

The AFT and First Book announced on Dec. 4 that they have distributed 1 million new, free children's books to public schools and to community and educational groups nationwide serving children in low-income families. The announcement was made at a First Book event in Baltimore, where more than 400,000 books will be distributed. About 60 percent of the books will be shipped to 538 communities across the nation, and the remainder—about 160,000 books—will stay in the Baltimore area. Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake was instrumental in making the public warehouse available for book storage and distribution. "We know that the sky's the limit when children fall in love with books," says AFT President Randi Weingarten. "We're so happy to help encourage a love of reading, which is the reason for the AFT's partnership with First Book. It's just one way we are reclaiming the promise of public education and helping to ensure children are prepared for school, college, career and life." The AFT-First Book partnership has grown from its first book donation to

students at West Side Elementary School in Charleston, W.Va., to the massive distribution of 400,000 books. "We're proud to work with the AFT," says Chandler Arnold, First Book's chief operating officer. "Working together, we've put 1 million new books into the hands of kids in need and permanently connected thousands of teachers to First Book's resources." AFT-First Book projects have included creating a library at St. Mary's Orphanage in Mobile, Ala.; distributing thousands of anti-bullying books at Cleveland public school assemblies; giving out bilingual and Spanish books to students and families at COPA soccer tournaments in Dallas and Houston; and providing more than 50,000 books to New Orleans students in 19 schools.

The Baltimore book distribution, which AFT Secretary-Treasurer Lorretta Johnson and Executive Vice President Francine Lawrence also helped out with, is a huge endeavor. Educators, public schools, community groups and other educational programs serving children in need have registered for the free or low-cost new books. Volunteers from the AFT, AFT-Maryland, the Baltimore Teachers Union, Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Local 1, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the Operating Engineers have sorted the books. Baltimore-area groups will be picking up their books at the warehouse this week. Mayor Rawlings-Blake is the first mayor to partner with First Book to secure book storage space. "The partnership with the Baltimore Teachers Union, the American Federation of Teachers, First Book and my office is a great effort to promote literacy," she said. "Grade-level reading proficiency is so important that we need to muster up all the resources we can, as a community, to ensure that our students have the reading skills they need to succeed in life. If children don't have access to high-quality books at home, they're more likely to read below proficiency levels." AFT and more than 80 local affiliates in 20 states have worked with First Book to distribute books.

### **REGISTER FOR FIRST BOOK**



**[www.firstbook.org/AFT](http://www.firstbook.org/AFT)**

**FB Nation Book Bank: Free books**

**Distributed several times a year**

**FB Marketplace: More than 3,000**

**Titles for children ages 0-18**

**Ranging from bilingual books to SAT guides to African-American literature**

**First Book is free and is open**

**any Title 1 eligible school or program or schools or programs where at least 70% of the students come from low-income families**