

# McAllen AFT News

McAllen AFT, 1500 Dove, McAllen, TX

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## Our Kids, Our Future Change Starts with You



### Legislative Agenda

Our legislative agenda makes clear we will be working on many other important issues, such as defending our pension and retiree health benefits and upholding the authority of teachers (and bus drivers) to deal with disruptive students. Winning on these issues, and winning our fights on school funding, vouchers, and testing will take a ton of work, but together we can do it.

As education employees, we have a rare advantage. We live, work, and vote in legislative districts spread all across this state. In every one of the 150 state House districts and 31 state Senate districts, educators can be a significant factor politically. We have enormous potential political influence—if we develop and use it.



### 2013 Legislature

Now the 2013 legislative session has started, and there's a flood of new state revenue coming in to the state treasury, giving us a chance to end the cuts, restore school funding, and undo the damage done in 2011. This is not an overstatement. The money is there.

While state leaders like Governor Rick Perry and Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst are talking tough about continuing the cuts, they don't get to dictate what will happen. We have a say in this, too, and if we make the effort, speaking together with one voice to legislators, we can have an impact on the actual legislative outcome that state leaders are not expecting.

### Restoring School Funding

The rebound in state revenue gives lawmakers more than enough money to restore the \$5.4 billion they cut in 2011. Here are the official numbers from the state comptroller:

The state will start the new budget cycle with \$8.8 billion left unspent from the old budget period. That alone would be more than enough to undo the 2011 cuts.

The state also will have at least \$11.8 billion in its ready-reserve fund, the so-called Rainy Day Fund. This fund was created to fill the gap and prevent needless cuts in core public services like education when state revenue takes a temporary dip because of an economic downturn. The Rainy Day Fund alone would provide more than enough to undo the 2011 cuts.

The state comptroller also officially estimates \$92.6 billion in available new revenue for 2014-2015 as the economy continues to grow. Add up all three pots of money--\$8.8 billion plus \$92.6 billion plus \$11.8 billion—and you've got more than \$113 billion.

That's enough to undo not only all the cuts in preK-12 education but also the cuts in other core public services, like health care and higher education. This amount would restore spending to pre-recession levels. ***The legislature has the money, if it has the will.***

Instead of working to restore school funding, Lt. Gov. Dewhurst and Senate Education Committee Chairman Dan Patrick want to divert public taxpayer dollars to pay for private schools,

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#### Lobby Day Tips:

1. Wear comfortable shoes
2. Bring a jacket (Lobby Day 2011 it was cold)
3. Blanket/pillow for the bus
4. Any medication you may need for that day.

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## GET ON THE BUS!

including religious schools—in effect cutting funding for public schools even more than they did in 2011. They are talking about various ways to do it, including giving businesses a tax break for donating to pay private-school fees for students who leave the public schools.

Draining taxpayer dollars out of the public schools, whether this way or any other way, is a terrible policy idea that will undermine neighborhood schools and communities. We need to work with our allies in parent, community, and education groups to defeat this idea again in 2013, as we have done for 20 years in the Texas legislature.

### Testing

"The goal of education is not to teach children how to pass a test, but to prepare them for life."

The good news is that parents and educators are rebelling against the whole test-crazed accountability system. They see that the system focuses on preparing students to pass a standardized test instead of preparing them for a lifetime of learning and thinking for themselves.

More good news: Key legislators, especially in the Texas House, sound as if they want to put testing back in its proper place, as one tool for diagnosing and meeting students' academic needs instead of a be-all, end-all that determines whether students graduate, educators get fired, and schools get closed. This will be a big fight in the 2013 legislature, but it's one we have a chance of winning.

The change we need in Austin starts with you - with us all working together towards our common goals.

### Let's get to work!

- Join thousands of school employees on the first day of Spring Break for the Texas AFT Lobby Day!
- Help educate the lawmakers about our priorities.

- We have made appointments with local legislative offices.
- We will attend a rally on the Capitol steps, and observe hearings in session.

Call us today — 956-682-1143 and **RESERVE YOUR SEAT ON THE BUS!** You don't have to be a member to get on the bus. Kids, family, friends and community members are invited. We provide **FREE** transportation, meals, snacks and a lobby day t-shirt. This is your chance to tell our Legislators to get back on track!



### Scholarships

#### **Robert G. Porter Scholarships (AFT) Deadline: March 31, 2013**

- Four, four-year \$8,000 scholarships for high school children of AFT members
- Eight \$1,000 one-time grants to active AFT members for courses in their field

Online: <http://www.aft.org/benefits/scholarships/eligibility.cfm> or <http://www.aft.org/benefits/scholarships.cfm>

Or write: Porter Scholars Program  
 555 New Jersey Ave., NW  
 Washington, DC 20001-2079

#### **McAllen AFT Scholarships : Deadline April 15, 2013**

- **McAllen AFT Member Scholarship** application (McAllen AFT members may apply for our annual scholarship for continuing education) the member must have been a member for at least one year.
- **Student Scholarship** application (this scholarship is for graduating seniors of McAllen AFT members). The parent must have been a member for at least one year.

<http://mcallen.tx.aft.org/member-benefits/scholarship-opportunities-1>