



MCALLEN AFT NEWS



McAllen AFT, 1500 Dove, McAllen, TX

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Elections and more!

Vote Early!

Voting early allows you to vote on your own schedule. You can vote at any location outside your precinct avoiding the election day lines. We urge you to get out and VOTE!

When Union Members Vote, Public Employees Win

When union members and their families turn out on Election Day, candidates who are with us on important issues usually win. But when turnout is low among union members and households, the results can be devastating. If you care about issues like high-quality public services, effective professional development, respect on the job, adequate healthcare and strong public education, be sure to inform yourself about the elections in your area, and vote on November 4, 2014.

You Owe it to Yourself, Your Family, Your Students—Take the Pledge and Vote for Public Education

We, the people, do not get to decide directly the laws and rules that guide state government's actions. But once every couple of years comes a moment when the tables are turned and we are the direct decision-makers. That moment is Election Day, when those of us who vote get to decide, by majority rule, which candidates will represent us as state lawmakers in Austin.

We owe it to ourselves, our students, and our families to make the most of this special moment when we, for a change, have the power of decision. **Take the Texas AFT pledge now to seize the moment and vote in this year's general election!**

What's at stake?

When lawmakers return to Austin in January of 2015, we must ensure that we have elected candidates who truly support public education on issues such as:

- **Funding:** Lawmakers will decide how to restore funding and invest more in our schoolchildren; a state Supreme Court ruling may be issued in time to force legislative action. Additionally, previous cuts to community college funding threaten to make tuition unaffordable and have strained the ability of colleges to fund adequate pay and health care for employees.
- **Overtesting and misuse of testing:** Efforts to reduce the number of standardized tests and change how those tests are used will be at the forefront of legislative debate. Lawmakers also will determine whether or not to make student test scores a significant part of teachers' evaluations.
- **Health insurance:** Health-care costs are rising as benefits are decreasing. Lawmakers will have to make critical decisions on whether and how to provide affordable health-care options for both active and retired school employees.
- **Privatization:** We must continue to work to protect our public schools from privatization schemes in the form of vouchers, tuition tax credits, and "charterization" of neighborhood schools.

Early voting in this general election begins October 20 and runs through October 31. On Election Day, November 4, the polls will be open



McAllen AFT
1500 Dove Avenue
McAllen, TX 78504



from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. So take the pledge now and get ready to vote! - *Texas AFT Hotline - Oct, 10, 2014.*

TRS-Care and TRS-Active-Care

Take action with an online letter to state officials!

The history of TRS-Care and TRS-ActiveCare makes clear that the current situation of these two programs poses not just “a significant money issue” but also a significant moral issue. The state years ago took on a moral obligation to retired and active school employees to provide access to affordable health care. The state did so as part of a compensation strategy that said, in effect, you will not be paid as much in salary as you could get in comparable jobs elsewhere, but we can offer you the inducement of access to affordable health benefits for your active and retired years.

The many options laid out in preliminary form by TRS officials on October 17 include some that would continue the shift of costs onto retirees and employees themselves as well as onto school districts. Some would drastically curtail benefits for those who retire before becoming Medicare-eligible. The options also include some that would have the state do more to increase its share.

Texas AFT legislative spokesman Ted Melina Raab testified before the TRS board on the message that we will be sharing with lawmakers as all these options are weighed after a final health-benefit report is issued by TRS next month:

Texas AFT can only support options that, at a minimum, maintain the basic benefit structure of current plans offering good-quality, comprehensive health care.

For retirees, those plans must be available at premiums that are affordable to those earning modest pension benefits, which have rarely increased regardless of medical or overall cost-of-living inflation. Clearly, pre-funding retiree health care is the most responsible

option for the long term.

For active employees, relative affordability and benefits must at least be returned to levels approximating those at the inception of TRS-ActiveCare in 2002.

Over many years, active and retired educators have borne the burden of increasing medical and other costs of living with limited salary and annuity raises. Some school districts have assisted active employees by increasing district shares of premiums or through salary increases. The state, however, has kept its share of ongoing health-care funding fixed in the case of retiree health. In the case of active employees, the state’s share has declined precipitously. It is past time for a major increase in ongoing state spending for these programs.

There should be no doubt that the state has sufficient resources to meet these needs both in the short term and far into the future—without shortchanging other critical needs in public education and throughout the state budget. To meet immediate needs for the upcoming biennium, the state will have many billions of dollars in rainy day funds, higher than projected state revenues, and increasing local property tax valuations. To meet long-term needs, long-needed sales and business tax modernizations would yield billions of dollars in higher state revenues each year.

The state can and must use its resources to ensure that active and retired educators have access to affordable, good-quality health-care benefits now and in the future. Texas AFT will use the information that TRS is providing in the Health Benefits Studies Update toward that end.

You can help the legislature get the message by **sending your own letter to state lawmakers via e-mail from the Texas AFT Web site.** By sending your letter now you will be helping to define in a positive way the parameters of the coming debate over the future of TRS-Care and TRS-ActiveCare in the 2015 legislative session. *Texas AFT Hotline - Oct, 17, 2014*

McAllen AFT

1500 Dove McAllen, TX 78504—956-682-1143 —mcallenaft2@yahoo.com— <http://tx.aft.org/mcallen>