

PERSISTENCE OF POVERTY IN TEXAS

New Census data from the American Community Survey tell us that nearly 18 percent of Texans—more than 4.5 million of them—live in poverty. That’s down slightly from 2011 but still above the 2008 Texas rate of 16 percent prior to the Great Recession.

Researcher Frances Deviney of the Center for Public Policy Priorities drew out some of the implications of the new survey data in a statement released this week.

Here’s some of her analysis:

“The poverty rate gives us a snapshot for the overall health of Texas, and we know living in poverty negatively impacts a young child’s brain and body development that leads to poorer health and education outcomes, and worse employment outcomes as adults.

Fortunately, we can do something about it. “We know that getting a job that pays well and having the ability to move up the economic ladder is the best antidote to Texans falling into or lingering in poverty.

Unfortunately, Texas’ poverty rate is driven largely by the job opportunities available to people with little education after high school. In 2012, 69 percent of Texans age 25 and older who lived below the poverty line had a high school degree or less, the fifth highest percentage in the nation.

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“Investing in primary and adult basic education is one of our most important strategies for reducing the poverty rate and keeping Texas’ economy strong. Unfortunately, our investment in public education and high school completion programs has declined significantly in recent years.

“Texas must also invest more in adult basic education and career development for low-skilled adults.

Today, Texas invests an average of \$5.78 per adult without a high school diploma/ GED for adult basic education and literacy training, compared to \$66.20 nationally. These programs are a critical first step to moving low-income Texans into careers that pay family-supporting wages.”

RETURNING TO WORK WITH HEALTH RESTRICTIONS

When McAllen ISD employees are absent from work beyond five (5) consecutive days, district policy requires the submission of a “Return to Work” form signed by a doctor.

Often, folks are eager to return to work and have doctor clearance, but the form indicates that an employee has medical restrictions. If your doctor indicates any restriction at all, the district may reject

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your return to work. Being denied the right to return to work can use up your eligible leave, and even cut into your earnings.

Our hope is that McAllen ISD has a clear and objective policy on who is eligible for returning to work with minimal medical restrictions.

McAllen AFT recommends that employees missing more than five consecutive days call the AFT office (682-1143) for advice on returning to work before you submit the paperwork to the district. For real disability issues, the union can assist you in writing a list of accommodations that the employer must meet to assist with your medical needs at work, under the terms and conditions of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

AT&T CELL PHONE DISCOUNTS

AFT members are encouraged to take in proof of AFT membership to AT&T to receive a monthly 15% reduction on their cell phone plan.

AT&T is an AFL-CIO telecommunications company and offers AFT members this significant monthly reduction. The phone must be in the members name.

IT TAKES A TEAM—PROFILE OF SUPPORT STAFF

First-of-its-kind Study Describes "Everyday Heroes" Working In Schools These workers are critical to the success of a school and the safety of its students, but statistics about their work were scarce and scattered. AFT's report, It Takes a Team: A Profile of Support Staff in American Education, for the first

time brings together a wealth of information on salaries, benefits, hours and working conditions of school support workers - paraprofessionals, teacher assistants, secretaries, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, security officers and others.

The report tells the stories of some of the everyday heroes in our nation's schools, including:

- Patsy Arnold, a bus driver and paraprofessional in Pasco County, Fla. After driving a school bus for nine years, Arnold sought extra training so that she could work as a classroom paraprofessional during the hours she wasn't driving, providing the continuity of attention and care so crucial for special education students.
- Julia Martinez and Margaret Espinoza of New York City, paraprofessionals at a school just two blocks from the World Trade Center. On September 11, 2001, they rescued two wheelchair-bound students, even carrying them on their backs when debris and uneven terrain made it impossible to push the wheelchairs.
- Shirley Magden, a school secretary in Detroit, Mich. Magden bought alarm clocks for elementary students who were tardy because no one at home got them up on time for school.
- John Wicks, a truant officer and security guard in West Proviso, Ill. Students give Wicks and his colleagues credit for steering them away from trouble and helping to put them on the right

path. Wicks attributes his success to his background as a local police officer and a focus on rigorous training.

In addition to collecting profiles and statistics, the report includes data about AFT's school support staff and their efforts to improve working conditions and service to students. The report finds that although they have tremendous responsibilities for the safety, health and education of students, school support staff often struggle with low pay, hazardous working conditions and haphazard training programs.

Among the statistics the report documents:

Approximately 3.5 million workers, nearly 40 percent of school employees, have support staff jobs in K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions. They include approximately 1.2 million teacher assistants; 1.1 million office and administrative service personnel; 460,000 school bus drivers; 440,000 custodial workers; and 190,000 cooks and cafeteria workers.

Wages range widely - from childcare workers who earn an average of \$7.18 an hour to boiler operators at colleges and universities who average nearly three times that amount.

Many work part time. In K-12 schools, 37 percent are part-timers; in postsecondary institutions, 21 percent are part-timers.

