

This is the speech delivered by TSTA President Noel Candelaria to the House of Delegates meeting in El Paso on Saturday, April 9, 2016:

Good morning, Team TSTA.

I hope you've enjoyed your time here in El Paso. El Paso will always be home to me, and those of us who call El Paso home really enjoy making you feel at home here, too.

Last year, I spoke with you about our TSTA family, and like our own families, the TSTA family has a place **we** call home.

This morning, I want to take a few minutes to visit with you about some very special places -- places where we use our skills, our intellect and our hearts to make our classrooms and campuses a home.

Whether we live and work in El Paso or Port Arthur, Brownsville or Amarillo, San Antonio or Dallas, we share what makes a classroom a home.

We spend our own money to turn a classroom into a place that inspires imagination, just like we do at home.

We take time to get to know our students, and find a way to reach and teach them, just like we do at home with our own children.

We make sure our students are safe, secure, and healthy, just like we do at home.

And we find time for all these things, even when we are saddled with testing and paperwork and mandates from Austin, Washington or central administration, because we are hard-wired to address the needs of each child in our classrooms, on our buses, and in our cafeterias.

We live there every day. We know what our students need. We know what makes a great school.

But for years, we've been told that we have to let strangers who never set foot in a school move into our homes and take over. They told us how to run our classrooms, told us to teach to the test, told us we'd be evaluated by a test score.

Then, just before Christmas, we got a very special present.

After a long, hard-fought battle led by NEA and joined by hundreds of you, a bipartisan majority of Congress *actually* got something done, and No Child Left Behind was no more.

Will all of you who contacted your member of Congress please stand. Thanks to you, No Child Left Behind is gone -- because we took a stand.

And now, ESSA - the Every Student Succeeds Act - is the law of the land. By passing ESSA, we took a big first step toward ending the testing madness. Now, the federal government can no longer dictate the use of standardized tests to evaluate and punish teachers. Now, states and local districts are supposed to involve "committees of practitioners" -- that's us - in policy making.

But you and I know that no one is going to hand us the keys and let us drive the car unless we take a stand for our students, our colleagues and our public schools.

The Legislature is not going to ask us to write the school finance plan. The school district is not going to let us write the annual budget. The law may give us an opportunity, but we have to demand our place at the table.

Last year, Ovidia and I were invited to the White House Rose Garden when the President honored one of our own TSTA members, Shanna Peeples of Amarillo, as the National Teacher of the Year.

Every state Teacher of the Year was present, and we felt a great sense of pride as we watched and listened to this extraordinary group of professionals being honored.

At that time, before ESSA was passed, it occurred to me that every one there would soon leave the White House and head back home, where we'd be dealing with education policy developed -- in large part -- by people who have never taught in a public school, people who never called roll and knew their students' names, people who judge our work by using a differential equation based on a test score.

These are the people who tell us how to do our jobs.

And I thought:

Does anyone who never practiced medicine tell a doctor how to be a surgeon?

Does anyone who never studied law tell a lawyer how to try a case?

Does anyone who never looked under the hood of a car tell a mechanic how to tune your engine?

When it comes to teaching and learning, we are the professionals, and we have to lead the profession.

Under ESSA, states and local school districts will make a lot of decisions the federal government has been making. You can be sure that the reformers, the think tanks, the profiteers and the testing companies will be back knocking on the doors of state government and your school district, doing everything they can to get whatever they can get.

They are not going to give us the keys to the car, but we must take this opportunity to take the wheel, lead from our classrooms, make our voices heard.

Team TSTA has been working to do just that!

We are designing a comprehensive approach to organize around the implementation of ESSA at the local level, to make sure our voices are heard, through the site based decision making process. That's why it requires us to have strong, effective leadership at the local and campus level.

- We have been working to assist local efforts to identify, recruit, support, and sustain high quality ARs and Campus Leaders, and I have appointed a Task Force to guide this work.
- This summer, our Organizing Institute will focus on building a powerful local AR network.

- I've had the opportunity to join many of you for local board training, and we will continue to schedule those trainings as requests come in.

As ESSA implementation plans are developed at the state and local levels, elections will have very real consequences.

- Since the TSTA Board authorized the use of PAC funds for school board elections in 2011, TSTA has invested well over \$100,000 in local school board elections, and in at least 14 locals, winning elections has changed the board for the better.
- We also scored some huge wins in the recent March primaries – wins that should maintain the House leadership majority that has helped us stop vouchers and other threats to public education.
- And, in both the Democratic and Republican primaries, we defeated candidates backed by hundreds of thousands of dollars spent by Texans for Education Reform.

Most importantly, local issue organizing remains our primary focus, and I want to take a moment to highlight just a few winning campaigns and others that are underway.

- In Southside in San Antonio, we succeeded in getting a handbook for custodians that specifies employee rights.
- In San Marcos, we won a hard cap on the 22-1 class size limit, without exceptions or waivers.
- In Lubbock, we won a fight to establish a fair pay scale by eliminating inequities.
- In Del Valle, we won a due process campaign for ESPs.

- In Ysleta, we organized issue campaigns and won school board and bond elections, resulting in improved campus security and working conditions.
- NEA-Dallas fought against the unfair policies of Superintendent Mike Miles and ran him out of town.
- And in Brownsville and El Paso, we have slowed the adoption of District of Innovation plans to get commitments from the districts that we will not have to deal with “pay for test scores.”

I am proud of each and every one of you and the work Team TSTA is doing across the state. Organizing does make a difference.

Now, are we ready to lead from our classrooms?

Here in Texas, state law gives us a way to do just that and make our voices heard.

Texas law provides for a site based decision making process, especially when it comes to teacher evaluation, local planning and, now, Districts of Innovation. But site based decision making committees will only work for us when we take a stand on every campus and in every district to make it possible to lead from our classrooms.

Will we take a stand...or not? Consider the consequences.

Will we let politicians and testing company lobbyists judge our teaching skills based on standardized test scores and “value added models”?

Or will we take a stand and work together to master real teaching and learning?

Will we let the lieutenant governor and private school operators line their pockets with our school tax dollars?

Or will we take a stand for providing the resources we need to help our students do their best?

Will we let legislators hand over our retirement fund to hedge fund managers, so they can gamble it all way?

Or will we take a stand to make sure every educational employee has the right to the retirement dollars they earned during their career?

We know what's at stake. We have marched and chanted, "Kids, not cuts." We have marched and chanted, "Invest, not test." Now, we as educators, parents and community members have an opportunity to work together to make our schools work for our kids and our communities again.

No Child Left Behind is gone. We can - and we must - lead from our classrooms. We can - and we must - build an AR network that can make that happen, one campus at a time. We can - and we must - lead and win, local by local

And the time for action is NOW!

We have developed a sample resolution for you to take to your local school board for their consideration and approval. The resolution calls on the school board to recognize and follow the ESSA requirement that stakeholders -- that's you and me -- will be involved in policy making, through site based committees.

This demand is simple and straightforward: honor the provisions of state and federal law that recognize the fact that we are the experts.

You can find the resolution online, and we will send it to each local. Passing this resolution is an important first step and serves notice that we intend to have a voice in decisions that affect us and our students.

Make no mistake. The reformers will keep coming, armed with money and schemes branded with clever titles, like parent trigger, taxpayer savings accounts, and value added models.

Some may try to disregard us, manage us or even run over us. But when we take a stand, our voices will be heard because we have experience and knowledge that a test score can't explain.

We see and work with the parents in our communities. We vote in local elections. Our classrooms are our turf, and it's time to take a stand.

Will we take a stand, and ENGAGE?

Will we take a stand, and ORGANIZE?

Will we take stand, and LEAD?

We're Team TSTA.

We must.

We can.

And, we will!