



MEDIA ADVISORY

Texas American Federation of Teachers and
Texas State Teachers Association

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#FundOurFuture, #RedforEd #InItTogether

Thousands of teachers and public education supporters rally at Capitol as Red-for-Ed movement comes to Texas

Today, thousands of educators and public education supporters descended on the state Capitol as the Red for Ed movement came to Texas.

The March to the Capitol, co-sponsored by Texas AFT and the Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA), is a continuation of the #RedForEd movement that has been sweeping the country, generating more funding and other improvements for public schools in a growing number of states.

State leaders have made public school finance the priority of this legislative session in Texas, and educators are making it clear that real school finance reform begins with a significant increase in public education funding. At present, the state pays for only 38 percent of the Foundation School Program, the basic school finance plan, while local property taxpayers pay 62 percent, the Legislative Budget Board has determined.

Adjusted for inflation, per-pupil spending in Texas has dropped by 20 percent since 2008, the largest drop of any state during that period, according to a [study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#).

“Everything is bigger in Texas, including the number of kids in our public schools, and the number of students who are disadvantaged and need extra support, so we need a big, bold investment in our future,” said Texas AFT President Louis Malfaro. “And we’re also asking legislators to recognize that what’s good for educators is good for the students they teach, so that means making sure our school employees can earn a dignified living and can afford to be healthy and ready to inspire our kids to achieve.”

“After decades of neglect, now is the time to increase state funding for all students, for all educators and for all retired educators,” TSTA President Noel Candelaria said. “Now is the time, and the money is there. Legislative budget writers have an extra \$9 billion in general revenue and a record \$15 billion sitting in the Rainy Day Fund. The Rainy Day Fund is reserved for emergencies, and education funding in Texas is an emergency!”

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Also speaking at the rally were the heads of the nation's two largest teachers' unions--Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (which this week launched a national campaign calling for states to "Fund Our Future"), and Lily Eskelsen García, president of the National Education Association and an active participant throughout the country in the #RedForEd movement.

"Millions of the country's public schools kids are educated in Texas, and by next year, this state is expected to have \$15 billion in rainy day funds available to invest in public schools," Weingarten said. "Ask any educator or any parents what \$15 billion could mean for kids, for teachers, and for schools and they'll tell you: it means safe, welcoming, high quality public schools for every kid in Texas, not just some. It means holding charter schools accountable when they don't meet the needs of kids. It means art, music and language programs, school counselors and nurses, new textbooks and salaries for educators that mean they don't have to work two and three jobs. Here in my Texas and everywhere around the country, we want our public schools to be at the center of our communities; we want our teachers to be able to teach; we want our elected leaders to fund our future, and to mean it when they say they want to invest in our kids. And we're going to hold them to it."

"What we are witnessing across the country is not a moment, but a movement of and by educators who are fighting for the public schools our students deserve," Eskelsen Garcia said. "Although the issues vary greatly from place to place, there are some issues they all share: the concern that public education has been chronically underfunded in state and local budgets for decades, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, tattered textbooks and broken computers, too few nurses and counselors. That's why educators in Texas and all over this country are #RedForEd. We're raising our voices together for our students, for our schools and for ourselves as educators."

Two Texas teachers and a cafeteria worker also shared their personal stories and why more education funding was so important to them, their students and their families.

Harlandale ISD bilingual teacher Aissa A. Velazquez said lack of state support has made her school health insurance unaffordable. "My health insurance plan was so expensive and coverage was very little, to the point where we dropped it," she said. "Even with insurance, our family always faced bills in the mail because of the high deductible. Our premium kept rising, year after year, and the higher it went, the less our policy covered. Our family was facing a monthly premium of \$1,400 and a \$5,000 deductible. We were being robbed. Now, we are saving that \$1,400 a month in our own family health savings account, and we are hopeful in the Lord that all will continue to go well for us."

Austin ISD Kindergarten teacher Traci Dunlap reminded legislators that there's another issue destroying the teaching profession and the ability of our kids to think critically and creatively--the misuse of standardized testing. "I'm not even teaching a grade tested by STAAR, yet I'm spending the majority of my time assessing students with tests and even prepping them for the standardized tests to come," she said. "My colleagues and I also face the prospect of being paid according to how well our students perform on the STAAR test, which isn't designed to evaluate teachers. We need a real pay raise, not merit pay."

Houston ISD food service worker Sibyl Hunter said that some legislators also are ignoring the important role played by all school employees. "It takes a team to educate our kids," she said. "So, to promote pay raises just for teachers doesn't recognize the hard work of bus drivers, counselors, nurses, teacher aides and all the other folks that are critical in making sure our students succeed. My co-workers and I struggle with wages that are nowhere near what it takes to survive in Houston, and yet we don't ever get the support and recognition we need to keep giving it our all every day in schools."