



***NEW!***

**THRIVE TOGETHER**

**A Vision for Texas Schools**

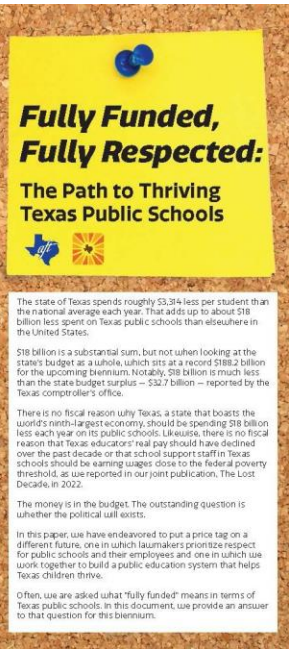
from Pre-K to Post-Doc



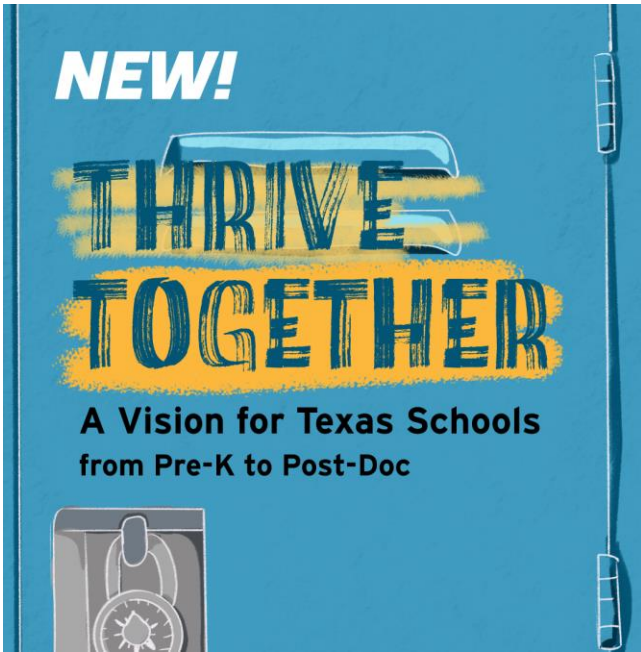
# #ThriveTogether | Texas AFT Report Series



*The Lost Decade*, April 2022  
\*Updated May 2024



*Fully Funded, Fully Respected,*  
March 2023



**NEW:** *Thrive Together*, May 2024



# #ThriveTogether | Updated '23-'24 School Funding Stats



Two years after the release of *The Lost Decade*, an updated analysis using the latest salary data available shows the situation has only worsened.

1. When adjusted for inflation, **the average Texas teacher salary has declined by over 9% since the 2009-2010 school year**, a figure significantly worse than the 4% decline in real wages between 2009-2010 and 2020-2021. In many districts, the drop has been much more severe with teachers losing nearly 20% of their earning power.
2. **Texas teachers now make approximately \$9,000 less on average than their peers nationwide**, a gap that has widened since the 2022 report.
3. Paraprofessional staff and auxiliary staff have seen modest gains in average base pay over the past 12 years, but **the average base pay for these two categories (\$24,966 and \$32,697, respectively) is less than half that of professional staff (\$66,720)**, and stagnant pay over the past few years together with inflation have eroded those gains.

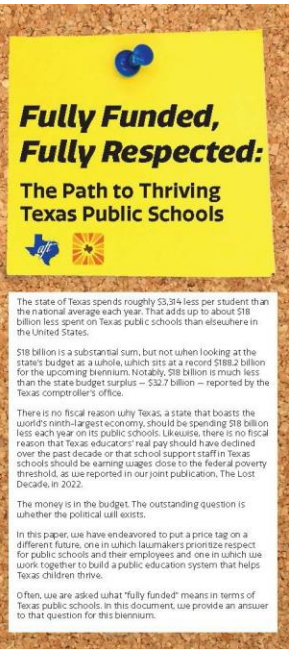




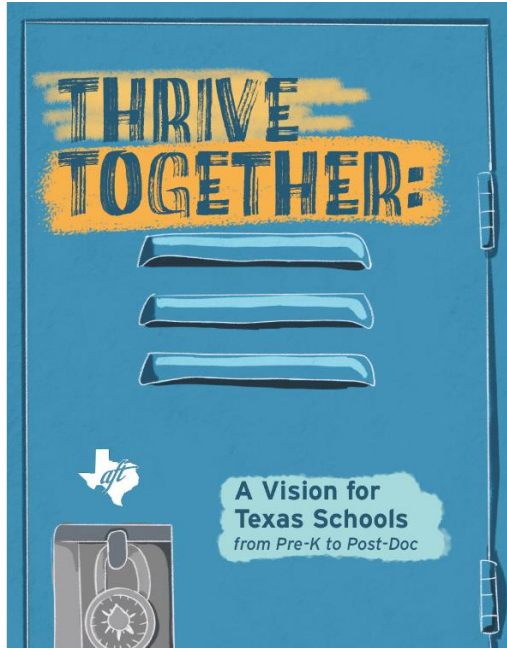
# #ThriveTogether | Texas AFT Report Series



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# Our Educator Retention Crisis

**68.9% of Texas AFT's K-12 members say they have seriously considered leaving their jobs in the past year.**

This number is down 2 percentage points from 2022 but up 2 percentage points from 2021.



**Texas teachers**  
educate more than 1 in 10  
of the nation's public school students.



Office of the Governor Greg Abbott

3 days ago

It's [#TeacherAppreciationWeek!](#)

Our Texas teachers are among the best in the entire nation.

We thank them for the work they do to educate and inspire the futur... [See more](#)



- ★ [Redacted] RELEASE FUNDING for REAL public schools!!!!!! Adopt an enrollment funding instead of ADA

2d Like Reply
- ★ [Redacted] Thank us with money.

2d Like Reply 6
- ★ [Redacted] Don't celebrate public schools and then threaten to not support candidates who aren't pro-voucher. We know you want to kill public education, so just be honest about it.

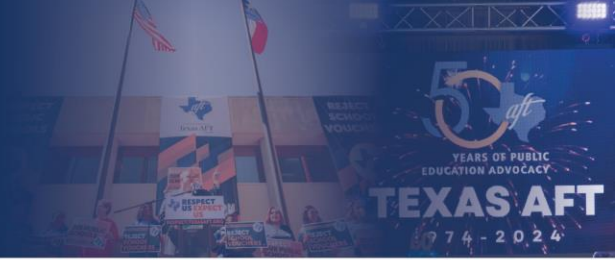
2d Like Reply 6
- ★ [Redacted] Fund public education and special education! You create so much stress and do not support Texans, teachers and students. As a Mom of a special needs child I have seen your cut backs up close. You are the worst Governor this Texan has ever had!

2d Like Reply Edited 22
- ★ [Redacted] Veteran educator here. I hardly know where to begin. At this point, this post seems like a trolling effort because actions speak far louder than words. ... [See more](#)

2d Like Reply 17
- ★ [Redacted] I don't think you really thought this through before you posted.

1d Like Reply 2
- ★ [Redacted] Texas teachers deserve better than being victims of your political games. It's time to prioritize education over your political donors. Texans overwhelmingly support our local public schools for all and not a voucher scheme for the rich. [#supportpublic...](#) [See more](#)

1d Like Reply 7



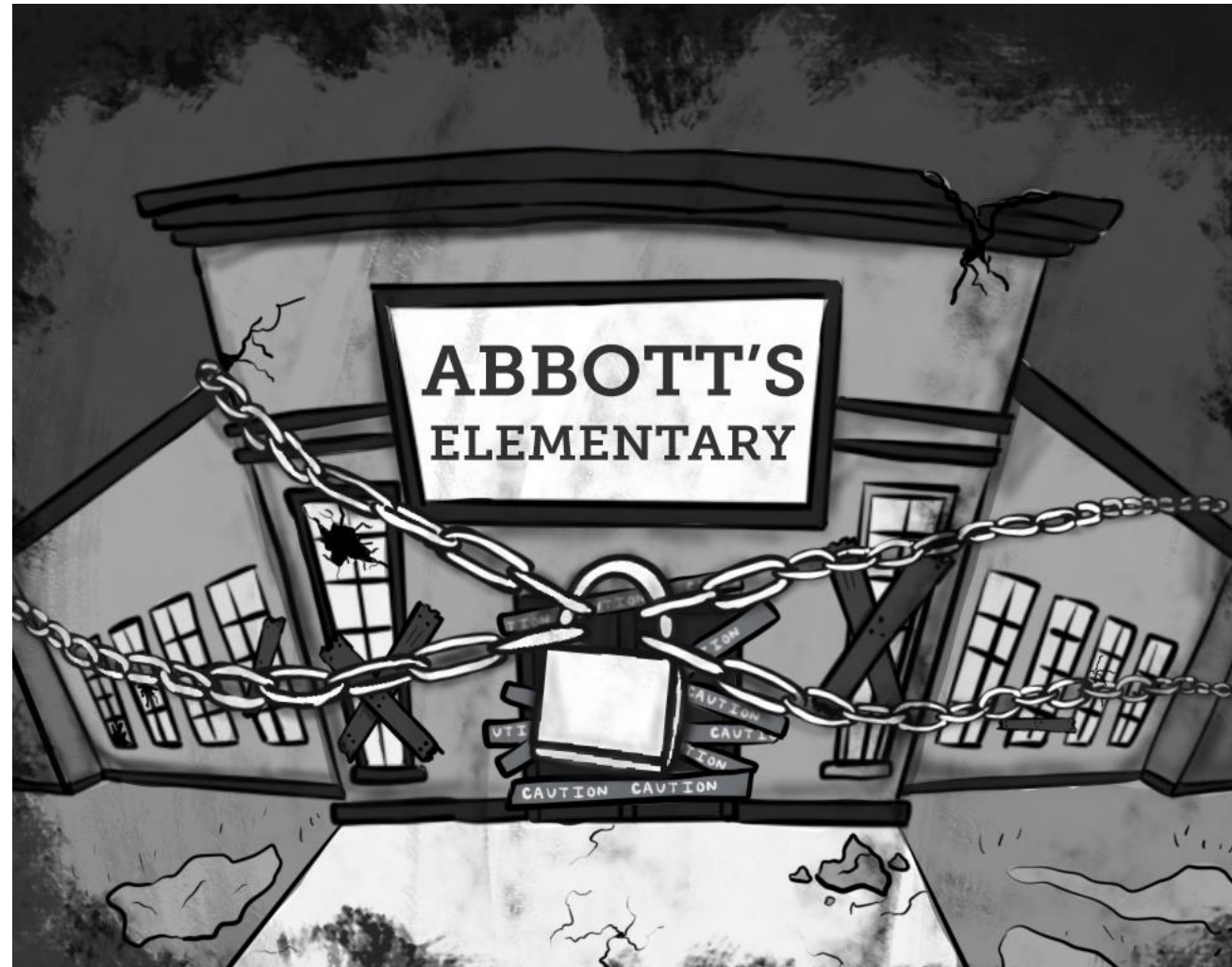




**ABBOTT'S  
ELEMENTARY**

# The State of Texas Education

- **Our schools are underfunded:** Over 91% of Texas K-12 students attend public school districts that are inadequately funded. ([source](#))
- **Our schools are understaffed:** At no point since 2013 did any Texas school district have the professionally recommended student-to-provider ratios in all four major mental health positions (school counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists). ([source](#))
- **Our schools are under attack:** In 2023, 49 attempts were made to restrict access to books in Texas, resulting in challenges to 1,470 titles. Texas was surpassed only by Florida in the number of unique titles challenged. ([source](#))





# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions

## Universal Pre-K

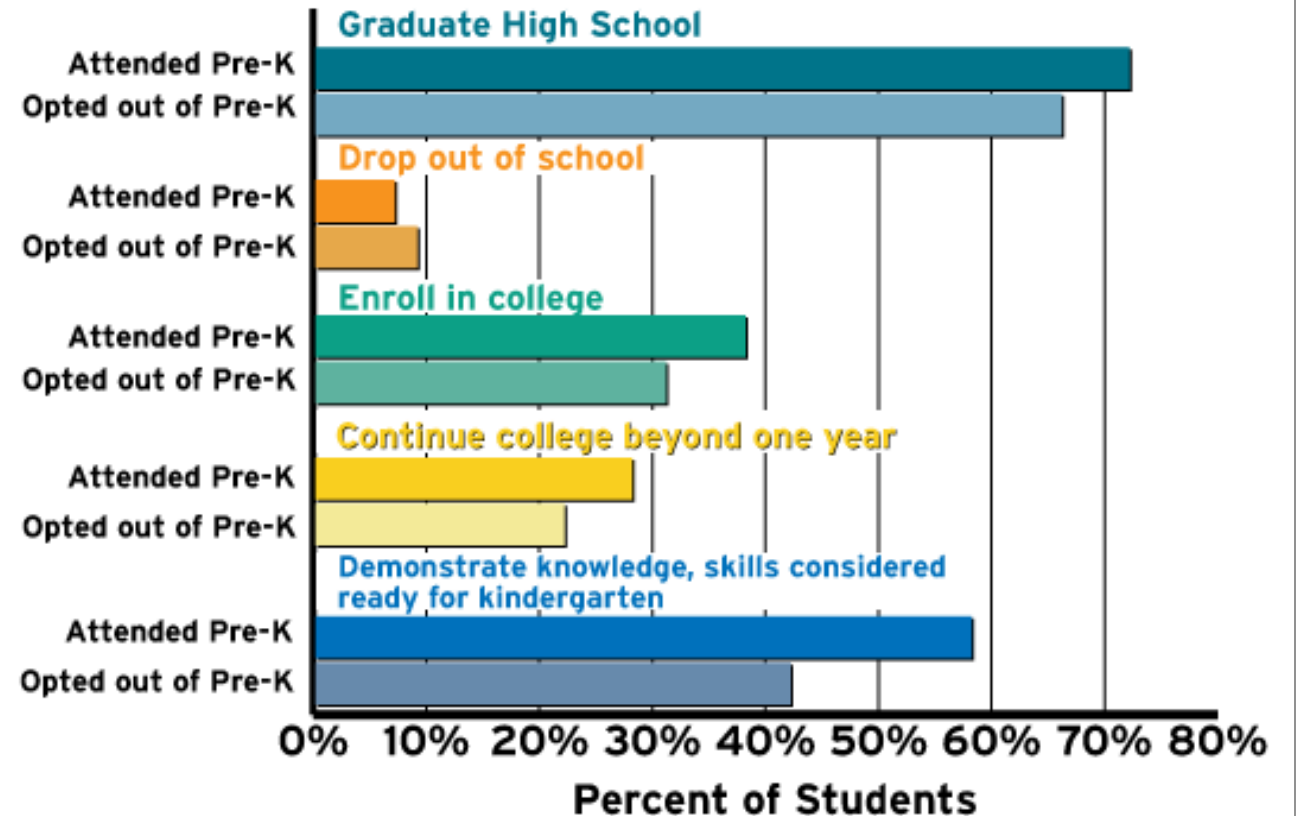
Access to pre-K helps level the playing field for children from low-income household, reducing the achievement gap before it widens.

Currently in Texas, free pre-kindergarten programs are only available for a very small percentage of Texas children. Less than half of 4-year-olds & 9% of 3-year-olds in Texas are enrolled.

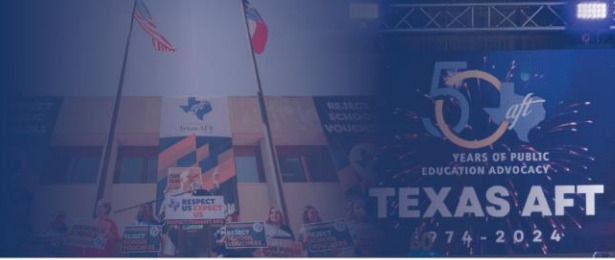
Two bills were filed in the 88th Legislature to address this. Neither received a public hearing:

- **HB 342** by Rep. John Bucy would have expanded eligibility to all 4-year-olds & would require district-run pre-K to be offered on a full-day basis.
- **SB 89** by Sen. Nathan Johnson would have expanded tuition-free pre-K eligibility to the children of teachers.

## THE IMPACT ON STUDENTS WHO UTILIZE FREE PRE-K PROGRAMS IN TEXAS



# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions



## Free School Lunch

In Texas, over 3 million students receive free or reduced-price lunches each school year. For participating students, the program has been shown to:

- alleviate food insecurity and poverty
- improve academic performance
- reduce absences
- improve physical & mental health outcomes

For many Texas children, school meals may be the only meal(s) they have that day. However, many eligible students do not participate due to stigma or administrative barriers.

The state of Texas recently rejected nearly half a billion dollars in federal aid for a summer meals program to provide low-income families a grocery benefit of \$40 per month per school-aged child when school is out of session.





# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions

## Joyful 'Extras'

Discussions of student outcomes too often neglect this: Kids need a reason to enjoy going to school. Happy kids are happy learners.

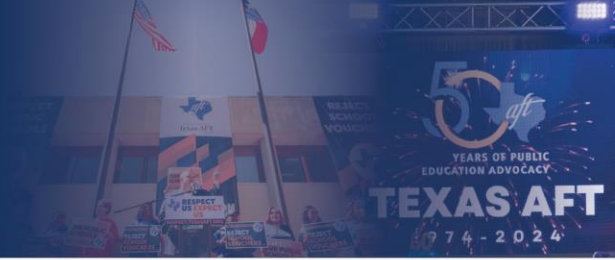
Libraries, extracurricular activities, fine arts programs, and even sports are often the first things on the budget-cut chopping block — to our detriment:

- Texas has the fourth-lowest literacy rate in the nation at 81%, with 19% of Texas adults lacking basic prose literacy skills. Not coincidentally, Texas has the fourth-lowest number of libraries: 3.2 per 100,000 residents.
- Texas high school students enrolled in more arts courses had better attendance, higher pass rates on standardized tests, and were more likely to attend college than their peers taking only the minimum arts requirement.





# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions



## Community Schools

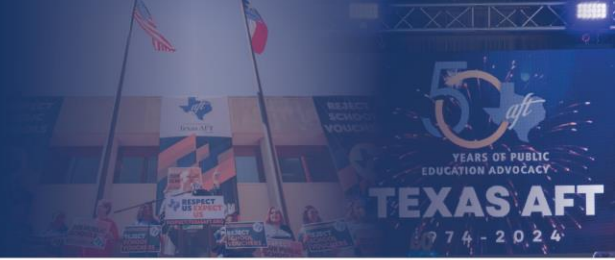
State takeovers of struggling and underfunded schools do not solve problems within local school districts.

Community schools and community involvement are what is needed from the start to:

- improve access to health care and reduce the loss of student instructional time
- decrease student mobility rates
- help parents support the work that teachers are doing in the classroom
- reduce the rates of chronic absenteeism



# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions



## Special Education Underfunding

Texas primarily allocates special education funding through the Foundation School Program (FSP) with a set formula.

This approach fails to consider the varying needs of different student populations. For example, a student with dyslexia may require a lower student-to-teacher ratio and specialized training for educators compared to a student with autism.

The current FSP formula is a one-size-fits-all approach that doesn't account for these nuances.

## Bilingual Education Underfunding

The FSP includes allotments that provide weighted funding for services provided to certain student groups.

When the first bilingual allotment was set in 1984, it was set at a weight of only 0.1, even though the research-based recommendation at the time was a 0.4 weight.

Today, Texas still has just a 0.1 bilingual weight although 19% of our 5.4 million students are emergent bilingual students (English learners).





# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions

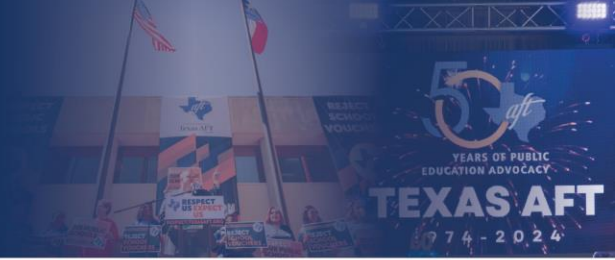
## Gun Violence

We know the solutions to prevent gun violence on our campuses, and they are broadly supported by [educators](#) and [Texans at large](#):

- Enact and enforce safe firearm storage laws that reduce potential access to firearms in students' homes
- Enact extreme risk or “red flag” warning laws that keep firearms out of the hands of people experiencing profound emotional or mental distress
- Raise the age to purchase semiautomatic weapons to 21 years old
- Require background checks on all firearm purchases, closing loopholes we know have caused multiple Texas school shootings
- Fully fund mental health services and supports in Texas public schools, which are understaffed in critical positions







## Mental Health

**We have a student mental health crisis that has been exacerbated by chronically underfunded, school-based mental health resources, pervasive social media and bullying, and the COVID-19 pandemic.**

An increasing number of students are struggling with anxiety, depression, and trauma that manifests in behavioral challenges, while schools remain ill-equipped to provide necessary support.

The state must invest in:

1. expanding school-based mental health resources
2. ensuring adequate staffing of counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other professionals to provide counseling services, crisis intervention, and wraparound support



## Likes vs. Learning

### The Real Cost of Social Media for Schools

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Educators, Parents, Students & Child Advocates Demand Platform Changes

# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions



## Environmental Issues

A recent report found that 71% of Texas schools tested had lead in their water at one or more taps. Texas earned an "F" grade on a 2023 study looking at states' efforts to eliminate lead contamination in schools' drinking water.

Air quality is also a significant concern for Texas educators, as poor air quality can lead to respiratory problems, increased absenteeism, and decreased academic performance. In fact, asthma is the most common chronic condition among children and the leading cause of absenteeism in schools.

CLEAN WATER

DECEMBER 8, 2023



## Every San Antonio ISD school tested positive for lead in drinking water

The district should install filters on every tap



Source: <https://environmentamerica.org/texas/articles/every-san-antonio-isd-school-tested-positive-for-lead-in-drinking-water/>





# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions

## Universal Childcare

More than 5,000 childcare centers and licensed family homes closed in Texas between March 2020 and January 2023, resulting in a 27% overall loss of childcare facilities and creating childcare deserts in more than half of Texas' 254 counties.

In our most recent survey, 45% Texas AFT members reported they have had trouble finding and affording childcare options. Lack of quality childcare options in their communities may be one of the many reasons that teachers are leaving the classroom.

Parents who cannot access or afford appropriate childcare may be forced to remove themselves from the workforce.





# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions

## Certification & Mentorship

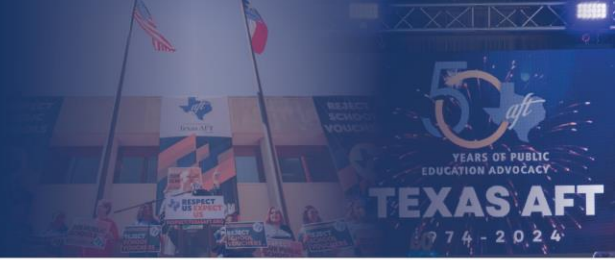
Districts are hiring more uncertified teachers every year, sometimes using a state waiver but more often under the banner of a District of Innovation, statute that allows a district to exempt itself from certain provisions of law.

**There are 981 Districts of Innovation in Texas, and the exemption from teacher certification is the second-most used exemption.**

Greater effort must be focused on providing a pathway to certification for those uncertified teachers already in Texas classrooms.



# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions

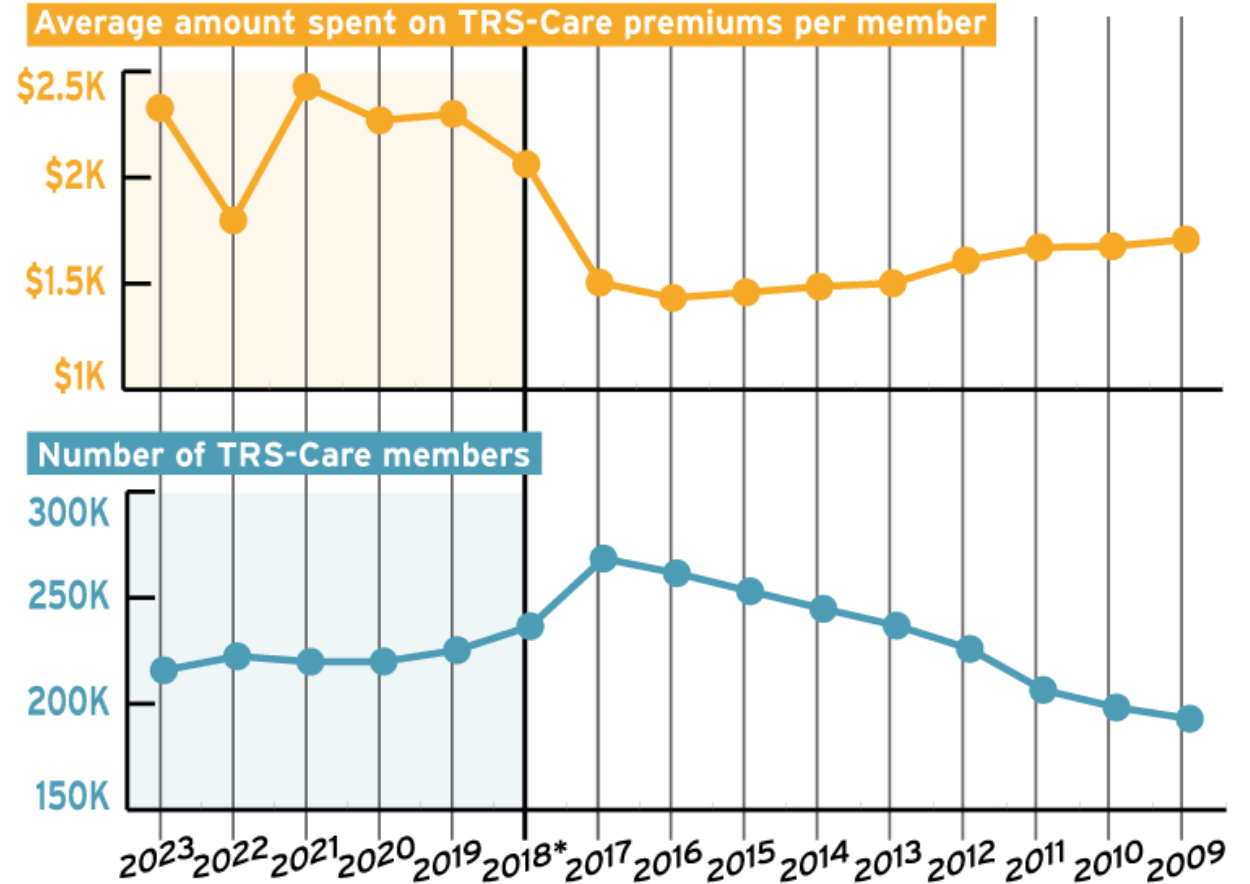


## Retirement Security

In Texas, the average retired educator receives just \$2,199 per month from their Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) pension. \$2,199 a month is not enough to retire with dignity.

Texas is one of a minority of states across the U.S. in which retired educators cannot expect an automatic cost-of-living adjustment to their pension annuities as inflation rises.

The state has long argued that, while schools don't provide educators with salaries competitive with the private sector, they do provide more competitive benefits. In Texas, that is no longer the case, which is making it more difficult to recruit and retain educators.

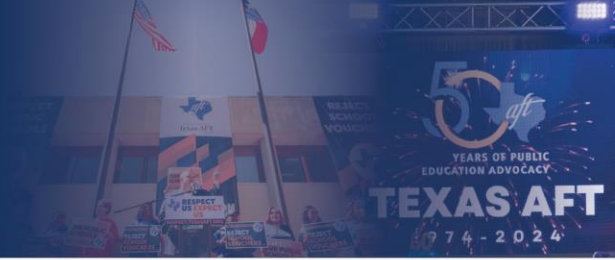


\*Note: Before the 2018 changes to TRS-Care, TRS offered 3 different standard plans for Medicare eligible retirees with varying degrees of coverage. They have since been consolidated into a single standard plan which is most similar in coverage to the TRS-Care 3 plan.





# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions



## Collective Bargaining

All of what we've talked about so far are problems and solutions highlighted by educators for years. But they've been largely ignored by policymakers.

It's time we listen to educators, the experts on turnover, workforce challenges, and the state of our children's public schools. That means giving them the right to collectively bargain their contracts.

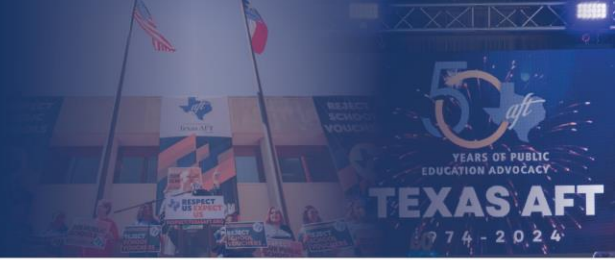
According to the Economic Policy Institute, states that have restricted collective bargaining experienced a decline in teacher compensation. Predictably, lower teacher compensation leads to higher teacher turnover and overall instability in schools.

Sec. 174.002. POLICY. (a) The policy of this state is that a political subdivision shall provide its fire fighters and police officers with compensation and other conditions of employment that are substantially the same as compensation and conditions of employment prevailing in comparable private sector employment.

(b) The policy of this state is that fire fighters and police officers, like employees in the private sector, should have the right to organize for collective bargaining, as collective bargaining is a fair and practical method for determining compensation and other conditions of employment. Denying fire fighters and police officers the right to organize and bargain collectively would lead to strife and unrest,



# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions



## Career & Technical Education

**Strong, well-funded career and technical education in our K-12 schools is a vital pathway for students to enter high-wage, in-demand, and high-skill occupations.**

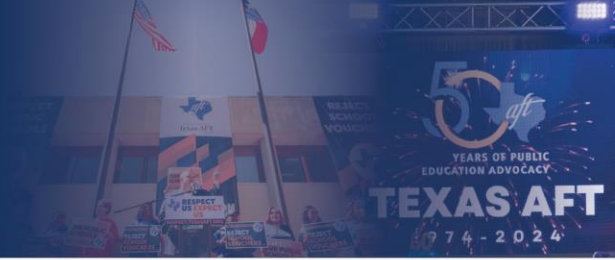
According to the Association for Career and Technical Education, youth and adult learners in Texas with a CTE focus are more engaged and graduate high school at higher rates. In 2021-2022 school year, 1.8 million students participated in secondary CTE programs.

CTE programs are popular among students and are growing rapidly in Texas, but more investment is needed to scale CTE programs across Texas to ensure that all learners have access to high-quality CTE programs





# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions



## Community Colleges

Last session, the Texas Legislature made historic investments in Texas community colleges with House Bill 8, which increased state funding across the board by 30% compared to the previous biennium. The bill sent \$683 billion to Texas community colleges.

**That said, the state's share of community college funding has shrunk significantly since 1980 when the state covered an average of 68% of community college costs, and more must be done to improve community college quality and access.**

State funds now make up just 26% of all the funds that go to community colleges. The rest of their funding comes primarily from tuition (29%) and local property taxes (44%).

## high school graduates

**Lily Kepner** Austin American-Statesman

Published 3:45 p.m. CT April 2, 2024 | Updated 4:52 p.m. CT April 2, 2024



# #ThriveTogether Policy Solutions



## Academic Freedom

**To learn, students must feel welcome and safe to share their perspectives.**

Some recent laws in Texas, like Senate Bill 17 and Senate Bill 18, threaten the integrity of education environments on Texas college campuses and endanger the inclusive, supportive environment necessary for students to thrive academically.

Unfortunately, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick's recently released interim charges for the Texas Senate indicate he plans to double-down on these counterproductive attacks on Texas higher education.

**“It has caused me mental distress this last week, not just because I've been gainfully employed with the university for 10+ years and am an alumni, but also because I have received texts and calls from the students I was working with who are deeply upset about my absence. This makes me feel even worse.”**

