

# An Educator’s Bill of Rights

Texas AFT’s Agenda for the 89th Legislature

We are losing educators in droves in Texas schools, from teachers to bus drivers to classroom aides to librarians. Even in higher education, faculty and staff are heading for the exits.

Those losses have a ripple effect, making day-to-day tasks harder for the staff who remain and leaving students without the services and support they need. In a state with the world’s eighth-largest economy, we can afford public schools built to thrive.

Texas AFT and our 66,000 members across the state have developed an Educator’s Bill of Rights, and we’re bringing it to the Legislature in 2025.

## What Makes Our Educator’s Bill of Rights Different

* It was developed **by** educators and **for** educators, through in-person and virtual drafting workshops in the spring and summer of 2024.
* We mean “educator” in the fullest sense with an agenda that reflects the priorities of all our members: certified and classified, K-12 and higher education, active and retired.
* There are no one-time stipends masquerading as a pay raise here. This package of legislation calls for exactly what our members say they want, and that starts with the root issue in Texas: the lack of state funding for our neighborhood public schools.

## What’s in the Educator’s Bill of Rights

In 2025, we are bringing our Educator’s Bill of Rights to the 89th Legislature and expecting every lawmaker who touts their support of our public schools to sign on and pass legislation that ensures ...

1. **Educators have a right to reasonable working conditions** with adequate time to teach in classrooms that are not overcrowded, and with workdays that do not consistently stretch into worknights and work weekends.
2. **Educators have a right to fair wages** whether they are a classroom teacher making $9,000 less per year than their national peers, or they are a paraprofessional whose paychecks hover near federal poverty thresholds.
3. **Educators have a right to a secure retirement** that affords them dignity after a lifetime of service and does not require them to come hat in hand every legislative session to beg for a pension that matches inflation.
4. **Educators have a right to quality, affordable childcare** that allows them to stay in our schools nurturing their students without sacrificing the well-being of their own kids.
5. **Educators have a right to healthy, safe, and secure working environments** free from the constant worry of gun violence or the guessing game of whether the air-conditioning will keep pace with Texas summer heat.
6. **Educators have a right to academic freedom** and an end to book-banning and classroom censorship, as well as the attacks on tenure in higher education.
7. **Educators have a right to meaningful professional development** that compensates teachers for continued striving within their profession and opens doors to support staff and paras to grow into new roles.
8. **Educators have the right to organize** with their colleagues without fear of retaliation and with the knowledge that collective bargaining leads to better working and learning environments.
9. **Educators have a right to democratic representation** and a seat at every table making decisions about our schools. That includes the repeal of legislation that allows an appointed education commissioner to undermine the will of voters by replacing their elected school boards.
10. **Educators have a right to freedom of religion** in our schools without being forced by this state’s leaders to choose between violating their students’ constitutional rights or violating the state’s mandates to force religious instruction upon them.

**These are not items on our wish list. They are our rights as Texas educators.** And they are all predicated on the Legislature honoring its duty to support a system of free and public schools. And that support includes funding those schools appropriately

## What Our Members Are Saying

“For so many of us–teachers, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, cafeteria workers–education is a calling, but it’s also a career. We can’t give our students our best in the classroom if we’re constantly worried about making our next credit card payment or paying the electric bill. Too many educators are being priced out of the communities where we live, where we teach, and where we’ve built our lives. It’s beyond living paycheck to paycheck at this point. No one wins when qualified, certified teachers and support staff are forced out of the profession.”

* Ledda Arcelus, Northside AFT

“Because of Governor Abbott’s refusal to do his constitutional duty to support public education, this year SAISD was forced to close 13 of our deeply loved neighborhood schools. This is a crisis! It’s hard for us as teachers, and we see how it’s often even harder on our students. How do we explain to our students that they don’t get to come back to their campus next year? That they won’t see their favorite teachers in the halls? That their friends might end up at different campuses? Our district serves working class communities of color that should be invested in, not divested from.”

* Sarah Zimmerman, San Antonio Alliance

“If Governor Abbott had it his way, every school in Texas would look like Dorie Miller [in San Antonio]. That is, closed, shuttered, and forced to consolidate because the governor would rather play politics with our schools than fully fund them. The Educator’s Bill of Rights will secure funds for our schools, support our kids with the resources they need, and keep our talented educators where they belong–in the classroom with their students. It is vital this November that educators, school employees, parents, and community members vote for candidates who care as much about our public education system as we do.”

* Wanda Longoria, secretary-treasurer of Texas AFT

“Our schools are struggling, and Governor Abbott doesn’t care. I love my job, I care deeply about my students, and I want to keep doing this work for years to come. It’s just not sustainable for our leaders to starve our schools, demonize hardworking educators and support staff, and shortchange our students.”

* Adam Bull, Texas AFT United

“Alliance/AFT members care so deeply for our students, and we work hard day in and day out to prepare them for a bright future. It’s hard to do our jobs–jobs we love so much–when your district is forced into budget cuts and you know this could be the year your school gets closed or your job gets axed. It doesn’t have to be that way. Our Educator Bill of Rights gets us one step closer to the thriving, hopeful vision of public schools that every educator in this state deserves and believes in.”

* Rena Honea, president of Alliance/AFT

“When our neighborhood schools close, our whole community loses. When a teacher quits the profession because they can’t take any more respect, our community loses. When we lay off bus drivers and cafeteria workers and paraprofessionals who know our schools and our kids inside out, our community loses. I’m done losing. Between now and the election, Texas AFT will spend every single day talking to our neighbors and making sure they know what’s on the line–and who is to blame. Every school shuttered and every beloved educator laid off rests squarely on the governor’s shoulders. Welcome to Abbott’s Elementary.”

* Zeph Capo, president of Texas AFT

## Media Coverage of the Educator’s Bill of Rights

### Statewide

* [**TX educators prepare for upcoming legislative session**](https://www.publicnewsservice.org/2024-09-06/education/tx-educators-prepare-for-upcoming-legislative-session/a92249-1)(Texas News Service, 9/6)
* [**Daily Dispatch 9/4/24: Bexar County Defies Paxton's Threats Over Voter Outreach, and More**](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/daily-dispatch-9-4-24-bexar-county-defies-paxtons-threats/id1552998795?i=1000668342591) (Progress Texas, 9/4)

### Austin

* [**Texas teachers union pushes lawmakers to pass educator bill of rights**](https://youtu.be/d4Kb82yDYDs?si=kT1cgyGaC3OeX9Xm) (KVUE, 9/4)
* [**'Educator Bill of Rights' seeks to address teacher pay, safety in upcoming Texas session**](https://cbsaustin.com/news/local/educator-bill-of-rights-seeks-to-address-teacher-pay-safety-in-upcoming-texas-session) (CBS Austin, 9/3)

### DFW

* [**Texas teachers union pushing for new "Educator's Bill of Rights"**](https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/education/texas-teachers-union-pushing-stronger-public-school-protections/287-6eb18a34-5697-499d-97b2-e50ce6ddfa69)(WFAA, 9/3)
* [**Texas teachers demand better pay, working conditions in ‘Educator’s Bill of Rights’**](https://www.keranews.org/education/2024-09-04/texas-teachers-demand-better-pay-and-working-conditions-in-educators-bill-of-rights) (KERA, 9/4)
* [**Texas AFT calls for Education Bill of Rights amid debate over school choice and funding**](https://www.cbsnews.com/texas/news/texas-aft-calls-for-education-bill-of-rights-amid-debate-over-school-choice-and-funding/) (CBS News Texas, 9/3)
* [**Four things Texas teachers want from lawmakers**](https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2024/09/03/four-things-texas-teachers-want-from-lawmakers/) (Dallas Morning News, 9/3)

### El Paso

* [**El Paso's AFT president highlights teacher stress, demands change**](https://kfoxtv.com/news/local/el-pasos-aft-president-highlights-teacher-stress-demands-change-texas-tx-educators)(Fox 14, 9/9)

### Houston

* [**Texas teachers union unveils Bill of Rights in push for reasonable working conditions, no more takeovers**](https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/education/article/educators-bill-of-rights-texas-aft-19741949.php) (Houston Chronicle, 9/4)

### San Antonio

* [**San Antonio school union leaders warn of widespread closures without state funding increase**](https://sanantonioreport.org/san-antonio-school-union-leaders-warn-of-widespread-closures-without-state-funding-increase/) (San Antonio Report, 9/4)