

Texas Teacher

Texas Federation of Teachers

January 2006



**See who
Gov. Perry's
65% distraction
leaves out**

pages 5 and 9



Hurricane relief needed now more than ever, page 10.

It's about choices



by Linda Bridges
TFT President

I recently spoke to a group of school employees about the five failed attempts by the governor, lieutenant governor, and speaker of the House to meet the need for a fair and stable school finance system.

I started my speech with, “The state leadership has failed. They failed our students. They failed our schools; and they mostly failed you.” The group obviously had questions concerning how and why these folks had failed school kids, public schools and public school employees.

The answer to this simple question begins with looking at the state share of funding for public education. In 2005, the state’s share of funding hit a new low of 36 percent. In 1990, the state’s funding level was at 47 percent. Many of us even remember a time when it was more than 50 percent. What does this mean? The local taxpayer must foot a larger share of the growing cost of funding public schools.

This answer generated a question concerning what the legislative leadership has done to reduce the state’s share of funding. I reminded them of the 2003 cuts to educational programs. The Texas Federation of Teachers has catalogued these state cuts and cost shifts onto employees

and local taxpayers, which have evolved into \$4.35 billion of unmet needs. When you examine the inventory of unmet needs, some of the items you will find include the following:

- Reduction of the active school employee health care stipend—\$700 million
- Cuts in the advanced placement incentive program—\$5 million
- Cuts in the after-school initiative—\$25 million
- Cuts in disciplinary alternative education programs—\$26 million
- Cuts in extended year programs—\$83 million
- Delaying Foundation School Program payments—\$800 million
- Cuts in the high school initiative—\$27 million
- Cuts in the master reading & math teacher programs—\$12 million
- Cuts in matching funds for library purchases—\$2 million
- New cuts in pension benefits—\$185 million
- Ongoing cuts in pension contributions—\$587 million
- Cuts in Pre-kindergarten Grant Programs—\$15 million
- Cuts in reading, math and science initiatives—\$17 million
- Cuts in retired school employee health care—\$656 million
- Cuts in the Student Success Initiative—\$104 million
- Cuts in technology funding—\$358 million
- Cuts in textbook funding—\$396 million

The legislature in 2005 failed to deal with most of the deep cuts from 2003 and even made new cuts, including a second round of attacks on educators’ pension benefits. The state leaders and the legislature failed our schools by not addressing these unmet needs.

The school employees I spoke to

wanted to know if there was a real solution to addressing these needs. I then explained TFT’s 100% Solution, which is an aggressive campaign to fight for full funding to ensure a quality education for 100 percent of Texas students, adequate support and resources for 100 percent of our schools, and fair pay and benefits for 100 percent of school employees.

This fight is critical because our students are being asked to perform at higher levels. Additionally, teachers and paraprofessionals are being asked to perform at higher levels in the classroom, and support personnel are asked to do more with less.

After our discussion, the school

“Key legislative leaders already are readying their next attack on public school children, employees and schools.”

employees really understood that while the leaders at the capitol expect you to jump over higher hurdles, they are trying to lower their own hurdles. School employees can’t let them lower their own hurdles because the price for the future of Texas and the schoolchildren of Texas is too high.

Steve Murdock, the state demographer, has painted a stark picture of the long-term cost if we fail to provide a good education for all students, including those with specialized needs. Consider the following changes by 2040, with increases in enrollment for:

- Students with disabilities—64.7 percent
- Economically disadvantaged students—119.9 percent
- Students with limited English-language proficiency—188.1 percent

continued on page 3

continued from page 2

According to Murdock, if the current education performance trends persist, the number of adult Texans without a high-school diploma would climb from 18 percent to 30 percent by 2040. By 2040 Texas would have a less-skilled, less-educated work force earning lower wages, a 40-percent increase in the poverty rate, and a decline of \$5,000 in annual average income of Texas families. Texans' personal income overall would be a third less than it could be; state tax revenue would be nearly 25 percent less than it should be.

The Texas Federation of Teachers proposes a sound financing system that would do the following:

- Increase formula funding to districts and community colleges by \$1.2 billion a year (essential for ESL, special education, and our other high-needs students).

- Fund proven educational programs that were cut last session (such as Kindergarten and pre-K



grants and Student Success Initiative—\$800 million a year).

- Raise pay for teachers, counselors, librarians, nurses \$3,000 annually (\$900 million a year).

- Restore the full \$1,000 health-care stipend for all public school employees and reverse retiree health care cuts (\$1.67 billion a year).

- Provide stipends for mentoring, advanced certification, etc. (\$220 million a year).

- Provide two years of free college tuition (\$150 million a year).

- Provide a 20-percent residential property tax rate cut (\$3 billion a year).

The Texas Federation of Teachers believes that if we are advocating the components of a sound

funding system we must also look at the revenue side of the equation. Although we are open to exploring many options, TFT offers a proposal to raise funds by the following means:

- \$3.15 billion by overhauling the sales tax to include most services (excluding medical care and child care)

- \$3.5 billion a year with a broad-based business tax

- \$850 million with an increase in the tobacco tax

- \$500 million a year by closing business property tax loopholes

- \$200 million a year by maintaining state tax on estates over \$1.5 million

The Texas Federation of Teachers believes that funding for a sound financing system for public schools can be developed if all of the state leaders and the legislature have the will to make it happen. During the two summer 2005 special sessions,

continued on page 4

INSIDE

TAKS drilling got you down?

Read the results of TFT's survey on standardized testing to see how your peers feel about loss of instructional time and other testing issues.



Viewpoint	2
Attack on teacher pensions	4
From the Secretary-Treasurer	5
Battle for Social Security	6
TFT COPE	6
Legislative update	7-9
Disaster Relief Fund	10-11
NCLB deadlines approaching	12
News Around the State	13
Spotlight on Teaching	14
TAKS survey results	15

Texas Teacher

January 2006

Texas Teacher is the award-winning publication of the Texas Federation of Teachers, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, and is printed in January, March, May, August, and October. To be added to our mailing list, contact Rob D'Amico at (800) 222-3827 or rdamico@tft.org.

3000 South IH-35, Ste. 175 • Austin, TX 78704

Phone: (800) 222-3827
(512) 448-0130

On the Web: www.tft.org

Hotline: (800) 764-1177

President: Linda Bridges

Secretary-Treasurer: John O'Sullivan

Editor: Rob D'Amico



TFT is a member of the AFT Communicators Network



continued from page 3

we saw the tide starting to turn. On July 26, 2005, Representative Scott Hochberg's (D-Houston) amendment to restore health care stipends, raise teacher pay, increase state aid for students with high needs, and restore funding for textbooks passed in the House (later defeated on a procedural move by Speaker Tom Craddick). On August 9, 2005, an amendment by Senators Ellis and Eltife that would have restored health care stipends, raised teacher pay, and paid for textbooks narrowly failed. These two votes startled the legislative leadership and proved that the pressure we have been exerting has started a

crack in the Perry, Dewhurst, and Craddick armor.

We must keep the pressure on prior to the next special session. Key legislative leaders already are readying their next attack on public school children, employees, and schools. Tom Craddick, speaker of the House, has outlined the charge for the Public Education Committee chaired by Rep. Kent Grusendorf (R-Arlington). Number one on the list: "Study the impact of successful school choice programs." One might wonder why the many unsuccessful voucher programs are being excluded from review.

Grusendorf has also been charged with exploring the struc-

ture and implementation strategies for successful performance-based pay systems for teachers. The recycled attack on teachers' contracts and state certification standards can be found in interim charge number four.

As Dumbledore said in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are...." TFT's choices are for a 100% Solution that creates a solid foundation for school funding so that 100 percent of the school employees receive fair pay and benefits, so that 100 percent of our students are assured of a quality education, and so that 100 percent of our schools have adequate support and resources. What choice will legislators make?

Attack on teacher pensions is not over

Don't be misled by articles trumpeting the supposed "news" that the Texas Teacher Retirement System pension fund is "underfunded."

Despite the headlines, the remarkable fact is that the official 2005 evaluation actually shows your pension fund made robust investment gains in the fiscal year that ended August 31, 2005. The fund grew by more than 14 percent, far above the long-term target of 8 percent per year. The market value of your pension fund increased to an all-time high of \$93.3 billion, with investment gains totaling \$12 billion in just one year.

So why the doom and gloom? The answer is twofold. First, the actuaries are allowed by law to acknowledge only 20 percent of the pension fund's investment gains per year; it will therefore take five years for this year's investment gains (and gains recorded in previous years) to be factored fully into the actuarial analysis.

By the same formula, the actuaries are just now rolling into their calculations the final 20 percent of the investment losses the fund suffered in the stock-market crash five years ago. The key point is that this year's actuarial analysis is almost certainly a retrospective look at the low point for a pension fund that since then has been rebounding strongly.

The second part of the explanation is easier. It's political. A whole passel of politicians at the capitol want to stampede the legislature into cutting pension benefits even more deeply than lawmakers already cut them in the past two sessions. They need to convince

their colleagues that the sky is falling at TRS and that the only way to fund any benefit increases for retirees in the future will be to renege on the state's solemn benefit promises to those who have not yet retired.

Here's where the plot thickens even more. Sen. Robert Duncan, the Republican from Lubbock who led the attack on pension benefits in the past two sessions, has responded to reports of the new actuarial evaluation by saying he wants the legislature to consider again his plan to raise the state contribution to your pension fund slightly, make deep new benefit cuts for future retirees, and sweeten the raw deal with a promise (but no firm guarantee) of a one-time-only extra check for those who are already retired.

TFT adamantly insists instead on a full, permanent cost-of-living increase for retirees, plus rollback of the sharp increases in retiree health-care premiums that Sen. Duncan has engineered since 2003. The fact is that the state has systematically shirked its obligation to both active and retired employees. Over the past ten years, the legislature diverted billions of dollars from your pension fund, by cutting the state's contribution rate to the minimum of 6 percent required by the Texas Constitution. Over the past two sessions the legislature has made matters worse, taking billions of dollars out of the pockets of both active and retired educators.

You can take a look at TFT's tally of unmet needs on our Web site, www.tft.org, to see exactly how much harm these take-aways have done.

The 65% solution?



by John O'Sullivan

Governor Rick Perry has proposed a 65% solution to the problems of Texas public schools. He has issued an executive order to the commissioner of education to adopt a rule that would direct local school districts to spend 65 percent of their budgets, exclusive of construction costs, on what he defines as “instruction.”

This is a bad idea, governor. Why? Let me explain. Despite sizable Republican majorities in both houses of the legislature, Perry has failed in five sessions of the legislature to pass school finance reform legislation. He knows that the public schools of Texas as a whole are underfunded. He knows that the state government has failed to uphold its share of the cost in partnership with local school districts.

He knows that the local property tax has become a de-facto statewide property tax and is therefore unconstitutional. He knows that Texas teachers trail the national average teacher salary by \$6,100 a year and fall to the basement on national benefit comparisons.

So what does the governor do?

He creates a diversion. He tries to bamboozle teachers and the March Republican primary electorate by suggesting that our problems will be solved if school districts will just ensure that 65 percent of the total spending will go toward “instruction.”

Granted, it makes a good sound bite. However, with a shrinking public education fiscal pie, made ever smaller by a swelling student enrollment, Perry suggests that “instruction” take a slightly larger slice of this smaller pie.

In fact, Perry has directed his commissioner of education to draft a rule to require school districts adopt budgets to achieve the magic 65 percent. The commissioner appears poised to adopt, as a part of her rule,

“You lay off, freeze positions, freeze salaries, and/or privatize the jobs. That is the 65 percent ‘solution.’ ”

the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) definition of what “instruction” includes and excludes.

You may be concerned to learn that under the rule, the public school team that we play on will be missing some players from the roster. You might have predicted that “instruction” would exclude the bus driver, the cafeteria worker, the security guards, and the principal. But at the same time, the rule would also exclude the librarian, the nurse, and the counselor. For reasons any good coach would defend, extracurricular activities are defined as “instructional.” (In Texas, those lights shall burn forever on a Friday night.)

How do you suppose that local school districts would comply with such a 65 percent rule? Districts could spend more money on “instruction” with a big teacher pay raise that would increase the instructional percentage. But the governor has opposed even a modest teacher pay raise from the state level, and local school districts are generally bumping up against the \$1.50 maximum maintenance and operations tax rate. So if you can’t raise teacher salaries, you lower the others. How? You lay off, freeze positions, freeze salaries, and/or privatize the jobs. That is the 65 percent “solution.”

On another level, according to the Center for Public Policy Priorities—a nonprofit research organization—data demonstrate that there is no correlation between the percentage of revenue spent on “instructional” costs thus defined and student achievement.

For example, Rhode Island has 65 percent of its expenditures allocated to instruction, yet its students ranked 36th in the nation in math and 34th in reading. In contrast, Colorado spent 57 percent on instruction and ranked 10th in math and 7th in reading.

Where does this 65 percent “solution” idea originate? Sixty-five percent is not a standard established by the No Child Left Behind Act or any other federal Department of Education initiative. It is not even a standard approved of or promoted by the NCES. The NCES just collects data in various subsets for use by others.

No, this 65 percent “solution” comes to us from the national First Class Education Campaign. If you know First Class Education as a right-wing advocacy group for private school vouchers, you go to the head of the class.

Battle for Social Security Fairness Act continues

TFT continues its battle for the repeal of two Social Security offsets that take earned benefits away from Texas school employees: the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP).

The bill to repeal these offsets is the bipartisan Social Security Fairness Act, H.R. 147, by Rep. Howard McKeon, Republican of California, and Rep. Howard Berman, Democrat of California. More than two-thirds of U.S. House members—303 as of mid-December—have signed as cosponsors.

(An identical Senate companion bill, S. 619 by Democrat Dianne Feinstein of California and Republican Susan Collins of Maine, now has 24 cosponsors. But neither of the two U.S. senators from Texas—Republicans Kay Bailey Hutchison and John



Cornyn—is among them.)

The House bill could gain more traction now that a staunch opponent, Republican Rep. Tom DeLay of Sugar Land, is preoccupied with legal problems. DeLay, who has blocked the bill from coming to the floor for a vote, was forced to step aside as majority leader after he was indicted on campaign money-laundering charges.

But grass-roots pressure for the Fairness Act needs to intensify, both to recruit still more cosponsors—especially among the 11 Texans in the U.S. House who have not signed up—and to force a House vote on the bill in 2006. From the TFT Web site at www.tft.org, you can send a letter to your House representative and both Texas senators urging them to support the Social Security Fairness Act.

Improving public education one election at a time

Are you a TFT member who wants to help change the political landscape so that it favors our schoolchildren and makes public education a priority? You can help improve public education one election at a time by contributing to the Texas Federation of Teachers Committee on Political Education (TFT COPE).

Texas law prevents the use of your Texas Federation of Teachers union dues to support candidates' campaigns for public office, but TFT COPE provides members with an opportunity to contribute voluntarily to a separate account used to support education-friendly candidates, regardless of party. Join thousands of other TFT members statewide who contribute each month to the TFT COPE Fund or to their local COPE fund to finance political contributions to candidates who are friends



of public education. It's fast, easy and you can decide which contribution level suits you.

For more information on TFT COPE, members should see www.tft.org and click on "Political Action." There you'll find an application form, as well as a list of local TFT affiliates that have set up local COPE funds. Or contact TFT COPE at 1-800-222-3827, or by e-mail at cope@tft.org.

(Note: This opportunity is advertised here for members only. TFT may not and does not solicit COPE contributions from non-members.)

Safe schools brochure update

TFT played a leading role in developing and passing the Safe Schools Act in 1995. The law empowers teachers to remove a violent or disruptive student from the classroom and mandates removal for more serious offenses. TFT has compiled the key provisions of the law

in a handy brochure. The brochure also contains sample letters for teachers to use in enforcing the law. **To receive a free copy, call the TFT at 1-800-222-3827, or download a copy at www.tft.org (click on publications).**



High court punts school funding back to legislature

Court warns of “drift toward constitutional inadequacy”

The Texas Supreme Court’s November 22 decision reversed a lower court’s broad finding that the current school-funding system is constitutionally “inadequate.” But the high court’s opinion is double-edged.

The legislature has been granted no more than a temporary reprieve—a chance to fix the system before the court has to rule again in a future case.

“Lawmakers would make a huge mistake if they conclude that the Supreme Court has let them off the hook on the issue of school-funding adequacy,” said Linda Bridges, TFT president. “The court has simply granted the legislature one more opportunity to do its duty by providing sufficiently and fairly for all students.”

The court’s opinion hinted that in the future it could well find the current system in violation of the state constitution’s adequacy requirement, if ongoing funding constraints lead as predicted to deterioration in educational performance.

“The court punted back to the legislature the challenge of halting what it called a ‘drift toward constitutional inadequacy’ with regard to inadequate funding of public education,” Bridges said.

The high court did rule that the current funding system violates the state constitution in one respect by imposing a de-facto statewide property tax.

Even though local school districts

set their tax rates, the court said, they have no meaningful discretion over the rates because they must tax to the max in order to comply with state requirements. Only Gov. Rick Perry knows when he will call the next special session of the Texas legislature to address the issue, but it’s certain that it will be before June 1, 2006—the court-imposed deadline for legislative action to fix

challenges.” The court also cited “evidence of high attrition and turnover among teachers statewide, due to increasing demands and stagnant compensation.” The court went as far as quoting former Lt. Gov. Bill Ratliff, who testified at trial that Texas public education “is reaching a situation where we’re asking people to make bricks without straw.”

“The court takes the undisputed recent successes our schools have achieved in raising standardized test scores as evidence that the system is not constitutionally inadequate—yet,” Bridges said. The court opinion stated “...an impending constitutional violation is not an existing one, and it remains to be seen whether the system’s predicted drift toward constitutional inadequacy will be avoided by legislative reaction to widespread calls for changes.”

Legislative battle lines form

The betting is that Gov. Perry won’t call legislators back until after the March 2006 primary elections, in which Perry may face significant opposition from Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn of Austin for the Republican nomination.

Many lawmakers with their own re-election battles to fight also must surely be hoping the special session will not be called until after the primaries.

Some school superintendents have voiced anxiety about the court’s June 1 deadline, because their budget



Governor Rick Perry announces his executive order touting his 65% proposal with Texas Commissioner of Education Shirley Neeley (right).

the current school-finance system.

With regard to the adequacy of funding, the court noted “much evidence” that already “many schools and districts are struggling to teach an increasingly demanding curriculum to a population with a growing number of disadvantaged students, yet without additional funding needed to meet these

continued on page 8

“Lawmakers would make a huge mistake if they conclude that the Supreme Court has let them off the hook on the issue of school-funding adequacy.” — Linda Bridges, TFT president

continued from page 7

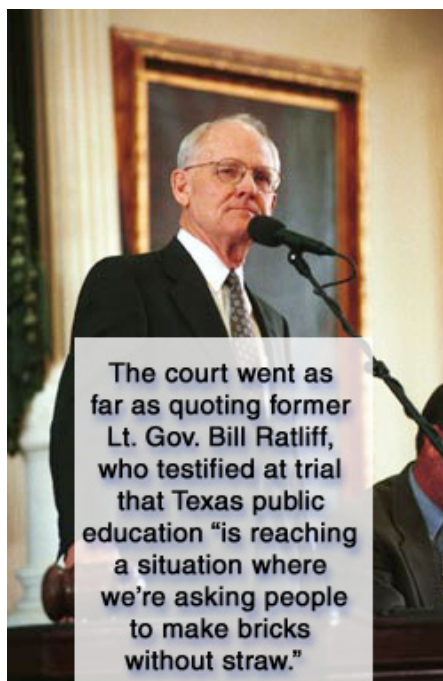
planning for the 2006-2007 school year will be well advanced by that date. They say they could have to redo their budgets at the last minute or hold off important decisions until after the legislature has spoken in the spring.

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst announced after the court ruled that he would appoint a Senate Select Committee on Education Excellence and Public School Finance Reform. His press release made it sound as if he intends for this committee to recycle the legislative proposals he pushed unsuccessfully last year in the regular session and two special sessions, tying increased funding for the public schools to dubious “reforms” including plans to link teacher pay to students’ test scores and privatization of campuses rated low-performing.

House Speaker Tom Craddick, Republican of Midland, hinted he might take a narrower view. He responded to the court decision only with a two-sentence statement vowing to work with Perry and Dewhurst on “a fair, equitable, and constitutional alternative to the current school finance system.” Notably missing from Craddick’s remarks was any mention of forming a House select committee to work with Dewhurst’s select panel on a joint approach. Sure enough, the speaker confirmed later that he wanted no joint legislative committee with the Senate.

One moderate House Republican spoke out against any new attempt by legislative leaders to link reform of the school tax structure with so-called “reforms” in education policies. Rep. Charlie Geren, Republican of Fort Worth, said the attempt to tie those two controversial agenda items together in the past several sessions had compounded the difficulty of

passing either one. Geren suggested that fixing school taxes is all the legislature needs on its plate for the upcoming special session. Nonetheless, lawmakers like Rep. Kent Grusendorf, the Arlington Republican who chairs the House Public Education Committee, can be expected to resist any attempt to postpone



action on their agenda of privatizing public schools, tying teacher pay to test scores, and taking away educators’ due-process rights. The interests of Texas schoolchildren are in danger of being lost from sight as the state leadership focuses anew on merely swapping some taxes for others or pursuing their pet educational theories, without putting the new resources into our schools to help students succeed.

Governor’s game plan is “Business as Usual”

Rather than explore new ways to meet the needs of schoolchildren, Gov. Perry has launched a

diversion to distract attention from his repeated legislative failures, by issuing an executive order that 65 percent of existing funding be spent on direct classroom “instruction.” (See sidebar, page 9.)

Perry, before the court ruled, also sought to fend off pressure for immediate action by appointing a commission to study the tax issue. The governor appointed 24 members to the commission, chaired by former State Comptroller John Sharp, on November 4 and said the group’s charge is to “develop proposals to modernize the state tax system and provide long-term property tax relief as well as sound financing for public schools.” The commission kicked off a series of statewide hearings in Victoria and Corpus Christi in December.

The overwhelming majority of commissioners appointed by Perry represents big business and industry and includes major Perry campaign contributors. “While representation from big business has a place in any tax restructuring, the minimal representation of small business owners and total lack of representation from public interest groups and educators is disturbing,” Bridges said.

“Predictably, talk out of the commission so far has been mostly about how to devise business taxes that business taxpayers would consider fair—not how to ensure sound financing to help public schools produce an educated work force capable of generating prosperity for generations to come,” she said.

Previous proposals from Perry and legislative leadership in multiple sessions offered merely a tax swap that reduced property taxes but actually raised taxes overall for everyone making less than \$100,000 a year.

“These failed proposals from

continued on page 9

continued from page 8

three legislative sessions included an interesting sliding scale: the less money you made, the more you got taxed,” Bridges said.

Bridges concluded, “As it stands now, we don’t see much opportunity for a serious attempt at sound financing for public education in the governor’s tax commission. But we’re not going to remain silent in this process, and we urge the public to question the commissioners on how their efforts will help our schoolchildren.”

TFT testified at the Victoria public hearing and issued a “List of Questions” for the governor’s tax commission. (For a full list of questions and to send a letter to Gov. Perry and his commission, see the TFT Web site at www.tft.org.)

“We have a few good questions for the public to ask the governor’s tax commissioners in order to focus the debate where it belongs,” Bridges

said. “First, the focus should be on making up for \$4.35 billion in unmet needs from previous legislative cuts to our school programs and personnel; then the focus should be on addressing the new funding needed to meet rising state requirements. We know it’s possible, since the Texas Federation of Teachers has a longstanding plan called the 100% Solution that shows how to reduce property taxes while increasing funding for our schoolchildren.”

TFT has a plan

Evidence amassed in the Texas Supreme Court school-finance ruling reflects a remarkable consensus outside the legislature on the need for more funding to meet state requirements for all students and even on the amount required.

TFT has called for more than \$4 billion a year in new funding; business leaders like Mike Boone of Dallas and newspapers like the Dallas Morning News have come to

a similar conclusion independently; and evidence gathered in court on the unmet needs of schoolchildren in hundreds of school districts backs up this assessment.

The TFT school finance plan—the 100% Solution—is designed to meet key legislative goals of increasing aid for education, reducing property taxes, and creating a fairer tax structure. The plan would restore the \$4.35 billion in unmet needs, provide new funding for education initiatives, and cut property taxes by 20 percent, for a total of \$8.2 billion a year. Options to generate revenue for the proposal are also offered.

(For more information on the plan, see page 2, and the TFT Web site at www.tft.org.) “The Supreme Court has now ruled,” Bridges said. “It is time for the legislature to deliver for the schoolchildren of Texas, and the Texas Federation of Teachers will work with lawmakers of both parties who want to get the job done.”

Who gets squeezed out with 65 percent?

Gov. Rick Perry in August issued an executive order that 65 percent of each school district’s revenue must be spent for “instructional purposes as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics.”

Commissioner of Education Shirley Neeley convened a task force to figure out how to implement that idea, which the governor, despite his executive decree, has no power to put into effect on his own.

In October, at the first meeting of Neeley’s task force, TFT Secretary-Treasurer John O’Sullivan spoke forcefully against the proposal, which he termed an unnecessary diversion from the real issue—how to fund a quality education for 100 percent of our students.

O’Sullivan noted that the state share of school funding has fallen to 36 percent and suggested that, if state leaders want to talk about percentage targets, they ought to take aim at bringing that state share up to at least 50 percent.

Subsequent comments from both educator and citizen members of Neeley’s task force indicated

consensus on the need for more spending in the classroom, but no consensus at all on the use of 65 percent as a magic number or on the definition of what should count as instructional proposed by Perry.

The federal definition, for example, counts as instructional every dollar spent on athletics, but does not include any funds spent on counseling, health care, libraries, and the many services provided by classified personnel that support the success of classroom instruction.

Even using Perry’s questionable federal definition, school districts already are averaging 63.8 percent “instructional” spending, according to data reported by the commissioner.

Nonetheless, Rep. Kent Grusendorf, the Republican from Arlington who chairs the House Public Education Committee, was on hand to declare that adopting the 65-percent magic number is a “no-brainer.” TFT’s testimony, in contrast, pegged the idea as one with no research support and a distraction from the real problem of inadequate funding to meet student needs and state requirements.

aft **HURRICANE**
DISASTER RELIEF FUND

AFT affiliates and members can help by making contributions to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund, which provides direct assistance to AFT members who are victims of natural disasters.

Visit www.aft.org/katrina to make a donation.

Help needed for hurricane fund now more than ever

The American Federation of Teachers, TFT's national affiliate, is using contributions to the Disaster Relief Fund to directly assist members impacted by Katrina, Rita and Wilma. Below is the story of just one AFT member helped by the cause.

A Shattered Career, the Search for a New Start

By Mike Rose, AFT

Judy Ogle, now in Texas, and her four siblings—all employees of the New Orleans Public Schools—face an uncertain future.

Did this really happen? It was a question that would haunt New Orleans teacher and AFT member Judy Ogle each waking morning in early fall.

Day after day, the details would have to sink in yet again—the events that had driven her from her now uninhabitable Eighth Ward house in the Crescent City and rewarding career in the city's public schools to unemployment and an indefinite stay in a relative's bedroom in Stafford, Texas.

There was the hurried evacuation of her family two days before Katrina hit. There was the short hitch in a few Texas motels before Ogle and four other brothers and sisters—all educators from New Orleans and AFT members—would settle in to begin their lives again at the home of their youngest brother. There was the hope and heartbreak of media announcements about New Orleans schools: first that they would be reopened as quickly as possible, then that they would be closed indefinitely as the extent of destruction became known.

Tragic details, events that Ogle would have to collect and reassemble “each morning, when you would wake up and not know where you are.”

Ogle, a school psychologist, was navigating an October job hunt in

“We’re staying positive.... We just don’t give up.”

— Judy Ogle, former New Orleans teacher, now Texas resident



Photo by Donna Carson

Texas like so many other displaced AFT members. Even though there was red tape to cut through (“You give them the references they always want, but you really don’t know where these people are anymore”), October still had the markings of a promising new beginning. Two of Ogle’s siblings had just landed teaching positions in nearby school systems. Ogle believed it was only a matter of days before the same would happen to her.

Unfortunately, her race to get

continued on page 11

continued from page 10

back on her feet had also turned into a race against time. A few days earlier, one of her sisters got word that the mortgage company was only giving them until Dec. 1 to get caught up on payments for a house that had been destroyed in the storm. They all had lost houses and watched the mail each day to see if similar letters would come for them.

Despite the extreme challenges, "We're staying positive," Ogle says. "It can be frustrating at times, but we pray together and that gets us through and keeps us positive and confident. We don't just give up."

The AFT and its members can play a big role in helping her and other displaced colleagues, Ogle says. What started as "just another storm" has now become a non-stop battle to reclaim their lives. It's a fight that goes on every day, every waking moment.

Where to get more information or help

The **American Federation of Teachers Web site** at www.aft.org has a host of resources for those affected by the hurricane, including: a member-to-member locator for staff from New Orleans schools, hotlines and Web sites for displaced staff from the entire affected region, and the latest news on efforts to manage the crisis. Members may also call AFT toll-free at: 1-800-238-1133.

The **Texas Education Agency** opened a hotline to help collect resources and answer questions related to hurricane relief operations. The hotline at 1-800-957-5109 is taking general Hurricane Katrina-related calls. And it provides information for school employees who want to help students and schools in affected areas or work in those areas.

Or visit TEA's Web site at www.tea.state.tx.us.

Disaster Relief Fund Q&A

Q. I have already contributed to Hurricane Katrina charities. Why should I now contribute to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund?

A. Nearly 15,000 AFT members were evacuated from their homes as a result of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Several thousand members remain homeless and unsure if they will ever be employed again in the underpopulated school systems along the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Mississippi.

Now that media attention has faded, our members in the region are counting on their fellow union members to help them in their time of need. In the first month after the hurricanes, AFT members and affiliates generously contributed nearly \$300,000 to the fund. However, we estimate that between 5,000 and 6,000 members will now apply for a grant from the fund. If the fund only contributed \$500 for each qualified applicant, we would need between \$2.5 million and \$3 million to meet the obligation to our members in need.

Q. Right after Hurricane Katrina struck, the AFT also asked that members contribute to the AFL-CIO's Union Community Fund. Do you still want contributions to that?

A. We joined with the AFL-CIO to ask members to contribute to the fund that helped finance the work of unions in the hurricane-affected areas to help all union members and working families. Worker centers were opened in Atlanta, Ga., Baton Rouge, La., Jackson, Miss., Mobile, Ala., and in several places in Texas. We are proud that AFT members contributed nearly 10 percent of the \$500,000 raised from union members. However, we are now focusing our efforts on providing our own members with direct help to buy food, clothing and other basic necessities.

Q. How will the money donated to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund be used?

A. All monies donated to the fund will be used directly to assist AFT members. No money will be used for administrative expenses.

Q. Are contributions to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund tax deductible?

A. The fund is undergoing approval from the IRS for tax-exempt status. The process will soon be completed and all donations made from the date of the hurricane (Aug. 28) and during the approval process will be eligible for tax deductibility to the extent permitted by law.

Q. Where should I send my contribution?

A. Contributions can be made payable to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund and given to your local or state affiliate to forward to AFT headquarters. You may also mail your check directly to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund, Attn: Connie Cordovilla, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20001. **Be sure to indicate your local affiliate or TFT so that your donation will be credited toward TFT's fundraising goal.**

The clock is ticking...

Deadlines are approaching for No Child Left Behind Act requirements

The No Child Left Behind Act requires all teachers of core academic subjects to demonstrate that they are highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.

You are a highly qualified teacher if you:

- Hold a bachelor's degree;
- Are certified or licensed in your state;
- Do not have certification or licensure requirements

waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis; and

- Have demonstrated subject matter competence.

Subject matter competence is defined differently for elementary and secondary teachers.

Elementary: Pass a rigorous state test of the basic elementary school curriculum, including reading, writing, math and other subject areas; or

- Complete your state's high objective uniform state standard of evaluation (HOUSSE) for elementary teachers.

Secondary: Demonstrate subject matter competence in each core academic subject you teach by:

- Passing a rigorous state test in that subject;
- Completing an academic major, a graduate degree, coursework equivalent to an undergraduate major, or advanced certification or credentialing in that subject; or
- Complete your state's HOUSSE in that subject.

To double check that you are highly qualified or to make sure that you are on track to meet the above requirements, you can:

- Call your local TFT office and ask about these requirements, or call toll free to 1-888-222-3827 and ask

to speak to Brian Baker, professional issues director.

- Ask your principal about the requirements for teachers in your state.
- Call your district's human resources department.
- Visit the Texas Education Agency Web site at www.tea.state.tx.us or visit www.aft.org/topics/nclb/states.htm and click on Texas.

Notes:

1. There are exceptions to the above rules for teachers in certain rural areas and special education teachers. Teachers in rural areas can check www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/040331.html to see if they qualify for the exceptions, and special education teachers can check www.aft.org/topics/nclb/downloads/hqtforspecial.pdf. These teachers should contact the above local resources for more specific information.

2. Beginning on the first day of the 2002-03 school year, schools were only allowed to hire highly qualified teachers to teach in Title I programs. Therefore, if you were hired after this date and teach in a Title I-supported program, you should already have met the requirements. You may want to double check to be sure.

3. Core academic subjects include English, reading, language arts, mathematics, science, foreign language, civics, government, economics, arts, history and geography.

Note for paraprofessionals: you also have until the end of the 2005-2006 school year to meet NCLB requirements. For details, visit www.aft.org/topics/nclb/paras.htm.

TFT's national affiliate presses for NCLB changes

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), TFT's national affiliate, launched a national education and advocacy campaign in May aimed at improving the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal education law. The campaign includes extensive radio and print advertising and a coordinated mobilization of AFT members at the national and grass-roots level.

"The problems with NCLB go far beyond its deplorable underfunding, and we are serious about getting NCLB right," said AFT President Edward J. McElroy. AFT has long been a leader in standards-based reform as a means of closing the achievement gap.

Most AFT members polled last year favor fixing NCLB rather than eliminating the federal law. However, AFT members have expressed consider-

able frustration with NCLB—particularly the law's adequate yearly progress (AYP) provision.

Under AYP, a growing number of schools that have shown encouraging academic progress are being incorrectly labeled as "failing" and are facing sanctions at the very time they could benefit most from additional support. The "**NCLB—Let's Get It Right**" section of AFT's Web site, www.aft.org/topics/nclb/, links to numerous research reports on NCLB and provides concrete information within four separate areas of the law: AYP, staff quality, school improvement and funding.

As a longstanding supporter of greater accountability, higher standards of learning and the underlying goals of NCLB, the AFT plans to work with Congress and other elected officials in pursuit of improvements to the law.

Member appointed to special-education advisory committee

Drusilla Knight-Villarreal, a Corpus Christi AFT member, was recently appointed to the Texas Special Education Continuing Advisory Committee. The committee makes recommendations to the Texas Education Agency on special education curriculum and requirements and evaluates the needs of special education students.



Drusilla Knight-Villarreal

Knight-Villarreal has taught special education for 27 years and has represented her peers for 15 years on the Corpus Christi Independent School District's Planning and Decision-Making Team.

A former Corpus Christi AFT vice president, she has served on numerous state and local committees and boards, including the Texas Teachers' Professional Practices Commission from 1988-1992.

In addition to her years of public service, she is known at the Corpus Christi AFT for the cakes she baked and decorated for union events.

TFT members honored at Teacher of the Year event

Five TFT members were among the final 40 teachers honored on



October 29 when the Texas Education Agency hosted the annual Texas Teacher of the Year awards luncheon. Members included: Kathy Hoelscher, Calhoun County ISD, Region 3 Elementary Teacher of the Year; Bill Horewitsch, Cleveland ISD, Region 4 Elementary Teacher of the Year; Erik Charles Hedstrom, Spring ISD, Region 4 Secondary Teacher of the Year; Gena Waitman, Burkburnett ISD, Region 9 Elementary Teacher of the Year; and Joy Killough, Round Rock ISD, Region 13 Secondary Teacher of the Year. Killough advanced to the final round of six state finalists.

The winning two Texas Teachers of the Year were Karen Shepherd (secondary), who teaches biology and research science at Plano Senior High School in Plano ISD, and Cynthia Lewis (elementary), a Pre-kindergarten bilingual teacher at Whittier Elementary School in Amarillo ISD.

Shepherd and Lewis will each receive a cash prize of \$5,000, a laptop computer, and a SMART Board technology package worth \$17,000. In addition, the 38 other elementary and secondary Regional Teachers of the Year from school

districts throughout Texas will each receive a commemorative award and a \$500 check from the SBC corporation.

TFT receives Rollie Hopgood Award

The American Federation of Teachers has recognized TFT with the 2005 Rollie Hopgood Award. The award honors state affiliates that face "particularly serious challenges" and use those challenges to "build the union's long-term capacity to advocate for its members."

The award highlighted TFT's efforts to advocate for public school employees in a "tough political climate," as well as promoting campaigns for beneficial legislation, such as the Safe Schools Act.

Dallas recognizes Teacher Assistant of the Year

Alliance/AFT, TFT's local affiliate in Dallas, initiated a Teacher Assistant of the Year award as part of its consultation process with Dallas ISD.

The first-ever winner was Maria Del Carmen Arellano, who was honored at a November 17 reception with an award presented by Superintendent Michael Hinojosa. Arellano, a bilingual teacher assistant at Jill Stone Elementary School at Vickery Meadow, has served at that school for the past seven years, since she started her career in education. She is currently working toward earning a bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies and teaching certification.

Looking to improve your leadership skills?

Start the new year with a bang! Save your personal or professional leave days and make your plans to come to the Texas Federation of Teachers Winter Leadership Conference, February 17-19 in Austin.

The conference is jam-packed with new ideas and ways to develop skills to build your local union's programs.

Whether you want to learn how to advocate for

WINTER
LEADERSHIP
CONFERENCE
2006



school funding or a local pay raise, build a Committee on Political Education, or serve as a grievance representative, this conference has the answers for you.

See www.tft.org for more information and talk to your local president or organizing committee chair about attending.

Registration must be complete by January 19, 2006.

Spotlight on Teaching: Chuck Brickman

By Autumn Rhea Carpenter
Special to the Texas Teacher

For Chuck Brickman, a TFT member and Travis Elementary special education teacher in Corpus Christi, China was the ideal place to learn how to incorporate concepts and theories in his everyday teaching curriculum, and the country helped him gain a different perspective on his profession.

Brickman, a retired utilities safety and OSHA compliance technician, began his second career as a public school teacher in 2000. "When I worked in the utilities industry I was a consultant and often trained employees," Brickman said. "I also volunteered with special education kids and found it gratifying and taught part-time at a college in Illinois. Teaching was a natural evolution for me."

Brickman teaches math and language arts to fourth and fifth grade special education students (functioning on a third grade level) and is vigilant about showing them better ways to deal with life's challenges. "My students face physical and emotional disturbances, and it's most fulfilling when I see the light bulb switch on in their minds and I know that they understand what I'm explaining," Brickman said. "I try to access their knowledge through multiple intelligences, since every pupil learns differently."

When Brickman began working at Travis Elementary in 2003, he thought that the math curriculum was not suited for his students' needs. He read an article in "Education Leadership" magazine about high math achievement using different teaching objectives in China. "I contacted our State Department, which contacted China's state department, and eventually they asked if I was interested in spending

the month of July teaching elementary, middle school, high school, and college students in their country," Brickman said. "In addition to the classroom experience, we would be sharing teaching ideas."

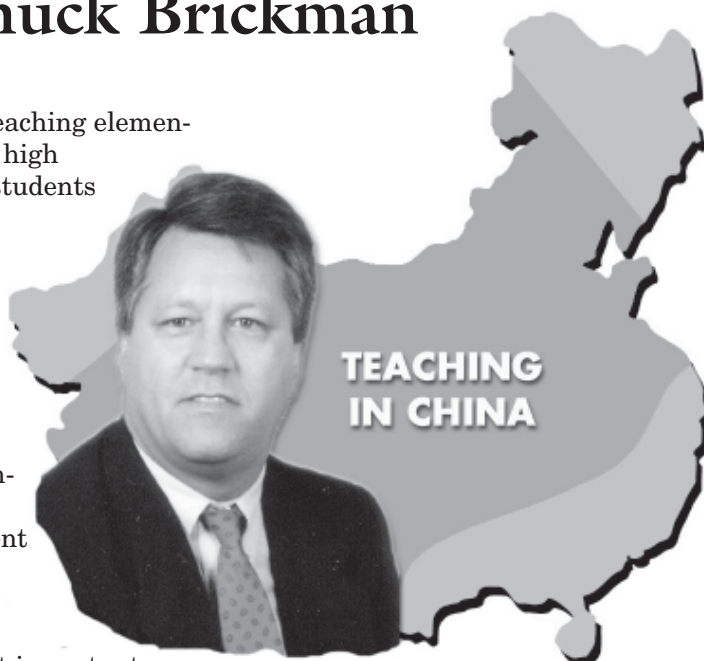
In China, he learned that explaining the reasons behind an assignment helps students to understand the "big picture."

"One of the most important applications I learned was how to present a block of instructions and to emphasize the meaning behind the assignment," Brickman said. "The Chinese spend more time explaining the concepts and theories, instead of only focusing on the

"The Chinese spend more time explaining the concepts and theories, instead of only focusing on the end result."

end result. Now when I'm teaching the multiplication tables, single digit, symmetry, congruency, place value, number sentencing, and probability, I explain the reasons behind the questions and things flow more easily. The result is that my students have a greater understanding of how mathematics builds on each lesson and also how it is used in the everyday world."

The Chinese rely on the lecture system, which does not work well for Brickman's students, he said. "My students miss much of the information if I stand at a podium and regurgitate information. I must employ interactive strategies in order to reach my kids. The Chinese



teachers were equally interested in Western teaching methods and our use of active teaching methods and multiple intelligences. The Chinese do maintain smaller classrooms and that is the same situation with my special education students. It's important to spend more time with my students in order to ensure that I am giving them the proper amount of specialized instruction."

While in China, Brickman exchanged teaching methods with many teachers and administrators and was offered the opportunity to visit several schools. "When I arrived it was under the premise that I would be assigned one school and that I would teach a specific classroom," he said. "Instead, I was able to travel with different groups, so I gained a broader perspective of the teaching community," he said. "I visited 15 schools and taught at four of them." The cost of the entire trip was financed through the Chinese State Department of Education Committee and supporting Chinese schools. Brickman also received a stipend for teaching duties.

Brickman reflected on the cultural aspects of the trip to communist China. "Life has changed

continued on page 15

continued from page 14

dramatically in the People's Republic of China," he said. "Western civilization was evident everywhere, especially in fashion. Of course, there were military members on every street corner, so the state-run government feeling was very apparent. The citizens are such diligent workers, making very low wages. It reminds me

of the United States' work ethic 50 years ago."

Brickman's world travels and TFT membership have provided valuable insight into the teaching profession. "The union keeps me informed on issues that teachers face and also better prepares me for my students' needs." Since the special education teacher is on his second career, he views the profession from

a different perspective. "I spent 20 years in the utilities industry," he said. "Now, this is my chance to influence young lives. It is important for teachers to be positive about their subjects because kids pick up negative energy. Students model what they see and if you transmit excitement, they will pick it up."

Autumn Rhea Carpenter is a Georgetown-based freelance writer.

Teaching the test?

TFT in 2005 conducted a non-scientific, online survey of members to gauge their opinions on the effect of TAKS testing, benchmarking and drilling on the quality of education and instruction time. The survey yielded 2,817 responses. Highlights of the survey are included below, but you can find all of the questions and results online at www.tft.org.

Questions:

In your school or worksite, are teachers required to give "practice" tests, "benchmark" tests, or other standardized tests that are designed to prepare students to take the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)?

Yes	97.4%
No	2.6%

If you answered yes in the previous question, please note the requirements.

once every semester	23.7%
once every six weeks	41.1%
once every month	7.6%
once every week	6.4%
other	21.1%

Please give an estimate of the percent of your class time that is devoted to preparation for the TAKS.

0%	4.3%
10% or more	13.1%
20% or more	12.9%
30% or more	12.9%
40% or more	6.9%
50% or more	14.8%
60% or more	5.5%
70% or more	8.8%
80% or more	7.1%
90% or more	13.8%

In your opinion, has the testing program, including test preparation and drill and practice for the



TAKS, resulted in a significant loss of instructional time?

Yes	86.7%
No	6.4%
Not sure/no opinion	6.9%

In your opinion, has the quality of education in areas not covered by the TAKS been adversely affected by the emphasis on TAKS scores?

Yes	93.2%
No	2.8%
Not sure/no opinion	4%

If the decision were yours to make, what would you do with the program of standardized testing for students in Texas?

- Do nothing. The program works just fine. 0.3%
- Fix a few problem areas and keep the program in place. 5.6%
- I would overhaul the program, but we need some statewide standards, so I would keep the concept of statewide tests of students' basic skills. 51.1%
- I would throw out the state-testing program and let each school district adopt whatever program each desires to have. 26.1%
- Not sure/no opinion 2.5%
- Other 4.4%

Texas Federation of Teachers
3000 South IH-35, Suite 175
Austin, Texas 78704

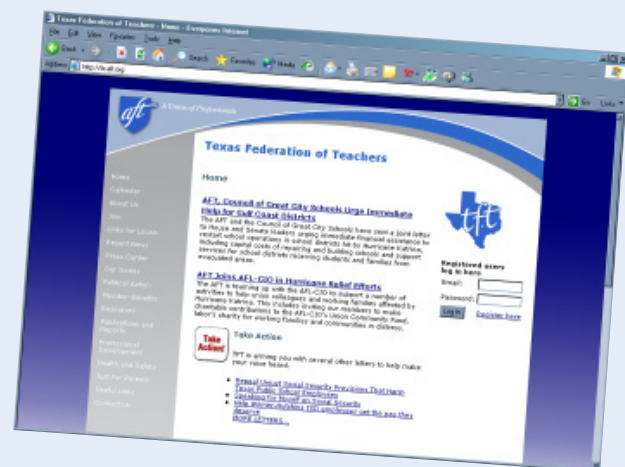
NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTIN, TEXAS
PERMIT NO.2917

The TFT Web site...another reason to join!

Visit www.tft.org to read the latest news on education, or take action on legislative fronts. While you're there, consider joining us!

From Amarillo to Brownsville, El Paso to Houston and beyond, local service is the heart of the Texas Federation of Teachers. With more than 60 experienced staff representatives in 25 offices across the state, TFT is there for you where you need it most—in your district. Our staff is ready to answer when you call!

TFT represents all non-administrative certified and classified public school employees in traditional public schools and some charter schools. We represent the interests of teachers, counselors, librarians, diagnosticians, custodians, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, nurses, teaching assistants, clerical employees, and the other men and women who



work so hard to make our schools successful. We also represent employees in universities, colleges and community and junior colleges.

Visit us online at www.tft.org—or call toll free at 800-222-3827—to explore the rewards of membership, including professional liability insurance, legal defense, low-rate insurance plans, and a host of other benefits.