



# 180 Don't tell teacher unions about Colorado

## 1 Texas unions stifle reforms; hurting teachers, taxpayers, students

By Michael Quinn Sullivan

It's a good thing Texas' teacher unions don't operate in Colorado, or they'd have to go on strike . . . against their own teachers.

Teachers in Denver, Colo., voted recently to bring greater accountability to their classroom and reward excellence in their profession by endorsing merit pay and scrapping the old system that simply focused on seniority. That system was remarkably like the one being fiercely protected by unions in our state as Texans consider significant reforms to our system of education and school finance.

Indeed, the Texas Federation of Teachers is very worried. The prospect of real education reform, like paying teachers based on performance rather than seniority, has union leaders losing sleep, even as classroom teachers cheer.

Union boss John Cole recently noted in a Mar. 1 missive on the TFT website about the "bad ideas" being floated in the education reform debate. Interestingly, each of these so-called "bad ideas" will give taxpayers, students, and most significantly, our effective teachers, far better schools and higher pay.

The TFT may be hot about "incentive pay," but teachers in Denver voted to accept a contract that pays teachers based on student performance — that is, academic improvement based on that state's accountability systems.

This just moves Denver closer to the real world, though further from Texas' classroom experience.

Texans not working in public schools are paid based on our performance, and will lose our job if we don't measure up. But the teacher unions are

working in overdrive to not only keep bad teachers in the classroom, but to stop efforts to pay good teachers more.

Translation: If you are a good teacher, the union doesn't represent you.

But opposition to reform runs deeper than keeping bad teachers in the classroom.

The teacher union's Mr. Cole decries efforts to remove the outdated, racist "prevailing wage" laws rooted in the Davis-Bacon tradition that keeps many small contracting firms out of school construction projects.

Reducing the costs of construction projects by eliminating this relic of the past would mean more money gets to the classroom. Seems like a no-brainer for an organization allegedly committed to academic excellence? Right.

TFT is first and foremost true to the brotherhood of unions, not the well-being of Texas schoolchildren. Davis-Bacon and similar prevailing wage laws were designed to keep small construction companies, many operated by African-Americans and Hispanics, out of job sites.

These laws drive up costs and run down quality. And reduce the money available for actual classroom instruction.

And why would a teacher group be so concerned with prevailing wage laws?

It is increasingly clear teacher unions in Texas represent only the status quo.

This includes a status quo where only 52 percent of our Hispanic high school population and 46 percent of our African-American population graduate. This status quo finds only 50 cents of every dollar goes to the classroom. It is a status quo where many of our college bound high school graduates need remedial work

to even begin their first year of college.

But as long as more money is spent, bad teachers kept on the payroll, and accountability kept to a minimum, the unions are happy.

The unions argue against the most basic of reforms, and rely simply on political scare tactics. After all, in his website tirade, Mr. Cole offered no rationale for opposing reforms. He instead cast snide dispersions on the character of the chairman of the House committee overseeing school finance reform. The union bosses

hope to stifle debate by flexing their sizable political bank account, not engaging in academic discourse.

But that's because the research is against them. Empirical research has shown incentive pay brings out the best in everyone. Years of research prove competition and accountability, not blank checks, produce the best academic results.

Texans are demanding true reform in education, not a defense of the status quo. Texas teachers and taxpayers deserve a system of education that promotes academic excellence through efficiency, accountability and competition.

In short, everything the unions oppose, lawmakers must choose between the status quo and good public policy. Hopefully, they will fight for all Texans — instead of the status quo.

(Michael Quinn Sullivan is vice president of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a non-partisan research institution. Texas Public Policy Foundation, 411 Brazos St., Suite 99, Austin 78701, phone 512-472-2700, fax 512-472-2728)

Abernathy  
Weekly Review  
Abernathy, TX  
Circ. 804  
From Page:  
6  
3/26/2004  
91322

