



IT'S GREAT TO BE NEW MEXICAN



Ellen Bernstein
ATF President

Once again, our allies in the New Mexico Legislature have succeeded in keeping the most nefarious elements of the culture wars out of our classrooms, and voucher schemes out of our state, preserving equity of opportunity in our public schools.

We certainly didn't get everything we wanted out of this session, and many would argue we got some things we did not want.

We can be proud of our state, however, for rejecting the malicious and damaging legislative agendas we see elsewhere. We will not allow politicians to dominate the education conversation by passing anti-gay/anti-trans legislation, stopping schools from teaching real history, banning books, and diverting public money into the voucher industrial complex.

pThose victories are not enough — we cannot be satisfied just playing defense — but they are crucial victories nonetheless.

On the most basic and fundamental level, you as a New Mexican educator have collective bargaining rights. This allows your union to negotiate an enviable contract, but also gives us the collective power to lobby and advocate for laws that keep our classrooms safe and inclusive for educators to teach and students to learn.

Compare that to Florida, where Gov. Ron DeSantis, is “clamoring for fresh restrictions on unions” (tinyurl.com/43dfes2m) that would allow for decertification even when a huge majority of teachers want to remain organized. We’ve seen this mentality before — one need only to think of Wisconsin, where Scott Walker’s attacks on unions led to a significant increase in teacher turnover and a large reduction in teacher salaries.

Really, we need not even look that far. In many other states, including our neighbors, the culture war is not only alive and well, but making divisive gains that undermine public education, students’ rights, the right to teach, and the right to organize unions. The attacks on educators and our public schools are being framed as a “parents’ rights” movement, but are, in reality, a well-funded assault financed by far-right billionaires and corporate America.

During the legislative season, our national union, the American Federation of Teachers, has tracked more than 120 bills with culture war themes. Although some legislators in our state introduced bills cloned from model legislation supplied by groups like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), these were killed in committee before they could hurt our colleagues and students. That speaks volumes about the effectiveness of our union’s political activism, as the ATF’s Committee on Political Education (COPE) vets candidates so that we endorse and work for only those who support public education and workers’ rights.

If you’re wondering how you benefit by working in the Land of Enchantment, here are some big themes in the bad bills that actually have traction in many state legislatures:

- Limiting the teaching of so-called “divisive concepts” ... like honest history and science;
- Allowing parents to opt kids out of lessons and vaccine requirements;
- Limiting types of institutions or professions that have defense from prosecution under obscenity laws in states like Indiana and Mississippi. In other words, you can be sued for the books on the shelves of your classrooms and libraries. In fact, these bills try to redefine what curriculum, books, and material are considered obscene;
- Restricting age-appropriate sex education in elementary school and discussion of LGBTQ issues. These bills mirror Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill, sadly a point of pride for DeSantis. Such legislation is now in play in Missouri and Texas. The ACLU has identified 91 education-related anti-LGBTQ bills nationwide.

These bills are not coming from the grassroots, as billionaire-funded activists like Moms for Liberty would have you believe. They are modeled, copied, and pasted from the ALEC website, and are pushed by groups like Americans for Prosperity, Charles Koch’s “think tank” for all things anti-public education and anti-worker. They use “civil rights” language to attempt to disguise the intentions of the bills. The legislation is more polished than bills we’ve seen in the past as their sponsors attempt to make them sound as “reasonable” as possible.

Other direct assaults on public schools that have become prevalent across the nation are bills seeking to establish or expand vouchers for students to attend private schools or participate in homeschooling. The voucher movement seeks to defund our public schools by taking money earmarked for public education and putting it into private hands through “scholarships” that parents can apply for.

This legislative session saw a move to introduce such legislation in our own state through SB 113, sponsored by “Democratic” Senator Gerald Ortiz y Pino. Though the bill died during the session, it was a brazen attempt to paint vouchers as offering educational choice to students in poverty. Senator Ortiz y Pino’s bill was directly copied from a model bill from the CATO Institute, a far-right “think tank” also funded by likes of Charles Koch, the Waltons (Wal-Mart heirs), Betsy DeVos, and others who are pushing to dismantle our public school system, nationwide.

Sadly, these tactics are working in some states outside New Mexico. For example:

- In Florida, DeSantis is pushing a universal voucher bill.
- Utah has passed a \$42 million expansion of that state’s voucher programs.
- Iowa has passed legislation that creates steps toward a universal voucher program.

All of this is happening while the research on vouchers is clear:

- Vouchers divert money from public schools, and most of the funds go to families whose children were never attending public schools.
- Recent studies of student achievement in Ohio, Indiana, Louisiana, and Washington, D.C. show vouchers harm student achievement.
- Vouchers use public dollars to encourage discrimination through lack of legal protection for educators and students, the use of problematic curricular materials (think cavemen and dinosaurs intermingling), preferential admissions practices, and an all-out assault on educators and our unions.

Further, this is all coming to pass as voters overwhelmingly continue voicing their belief in public schools.

- In a recent Hart Poll, 65% of voters said they believe that “the teachers in our public schools generally stick to teaching appropriate academic content and skills” while only 27% said “the teachers in our public schools often go too far in promoting a ‘woke’ political agenda in the classroom.”
- Likewise, 82% of voters said “teachers need to teach history and current events to prepare students to be informed citizens in a democracy” while only 18% said “teachers should avoid politically sensitive topics in the classroom because they can offend some families.”
- 80% of parents and voters agreed that we should prioritize improving public schools instead of draining them with voucher programs.

We have a fight on our hands — but New Mexicans know what to do and how to win.

In New Mexico, we know that we can improve our public schools by continuing to address students’ needs through culturally relevant pedagogy and expanding opportunities for our students who are most at-risk. We are continuing to fund our Community Schools. We are facilitating students’ entrance into the world of work through Career and Technical Education. We are addressing staffing shortages by offering great pay and preserving educators’ voices through collective bargaining. All these initiatives are foundational positions of your union, and we will continue to fight for the great teaching and learning climate our students and educators need. That’s because our working conditions are students’ learning conditions.

TAKEAWAYS FROM THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The 2023 Regular Legislative Session is history now. We are beginning to get an idea of what the outcomes will be. Many of the bills that are set to become laws were either directly suggested by or drew heavily from our local union, the Albuquerque Teachers Federation, and/or your state union, AFT New Mexico. We have written about how some of these initiatives would improve public education in publications like the ATF’s Post-Pandemic Public Education: Equity & Excellence, and AFT NM’s A Pathway Toward Educational Well-Being in New Mexico.

The bills that are now law include a 6% average raise — up from 5% to supplement expected health insurance premium increases. The word “average” is important here. When the Legislature includes that language, your union has more leeway to negotiate wages based on needs of educators and perhaps address some of the compaction issues created by raising the minimums.

We are very happy that legislators are giving all school employees an equal average percentage raise. In the past they have provided a particular percentage for “teachers” and another for “all other educators.” This is progress. Your union has worked for years to ensure all public school employees are treated equally. This addition to our raises passed the full Senate and is on Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham’s desk.

Raising minimum EA salaries to \$25,000 is a step in the right direction for adequately paying our classified colleagues. We are hopeful that this will help attract and retain EAs across the state — an annual goal of your local and state unions. We will continue to advocate for increases to all classified staff minimums. This bill is awaiting the signature of the Governor.

Progress on legislation can take some time. When it comes to lobbying and advocating for the best interests of our educators and students, your union is tenacious. Since former AFT NM President Christine Trujillo was first elected to the House in 2013, she has worked to expand the definition of “National Board Certified Teacher” to include counselors, administrators, and other educators who hold NBCT certification. In recent years, Representatives Debra Sariñana and Joanne Ferrary — and others — have joined in this quest. Much like the EA raise, we hope that counselors’ and administrators’ ability to receive this hard-earned stipend for their commitment to professional excellence will further enhance our state’s efforts to attract and retain these critical workers. The ATF will continue to advocate for getting educators paid adequately for your advanced credentials.



HB 126 changes high school graduation requirements. Your union has long advocated for Career and Technical Education credits to count toward graduation requirements. The inclusion of CTE in graduation credits will help reduce the drop-out rate and give many students a head start on their careers. The ATF has written about and advocated for modernizing our high school graduation procedures. We would like to thank ATF member Representative G. Andrés Romero for his work on this bill.

We know it is imperative that students have their basic needs met before they can be ready to learn to their full potential. The ATF applauds Senators Michael Padilla and Leo Jaramillo for their bill to provide “healthy universal school meals” to all students in New Mexico. This bill is on the Governor’s desk.

The Omnibus Tax Bill (HB 547) provides financial help to New Mexico’s working families. It includes expanding the Child Tax Credit and a tax rebate for low-income workers. There are also some increases in taxes on capital gains and alcohol and tobacco that will help to diversify our state’s revenue sources. However, this bill maintains the current tax rates of the wealthiest New Mexicans and large corporations. We will continue to work to ensure these groups pay their fair share.

We are heartened by the Legislature’s commitment to making our streets and our schools safer by passing Representative Pamela Herndon’s HB 9 to hold parents responsible for minors’ access to firearms. Hopefully, this bill will encourage firearms owners to safely store weapons, so they don’t end up in the hands of our students.

As we all know, democracy is built on compromise and none of us get everything we want. Although your union has made it abundantly clear that we believe the state should consider other spending priorities, like increased staffing, instead of simply increasing the school year, the Legislature passed an amended version of HB 130. This bill increases elementary schools to 1,140 hours of instructional time with 60 hours of professional time embedded. The amended version of this bill increases instructional time for middle and high schools to 1,140 hours with 30 of those hours being devoted to professional duties. It adds 30 more hours of professional time to the 1,140. This, of course, means 1,170 hours is the minimum work time for secondary educators in New Mexico.

MORE GOOD THINGS THAT PASSED IN NM

Beyond the bills above, we should also celebrate:

HB 7, Reproductive & Gender-Affirming Health Care (Reps. Serrato, Little, Ortez, Szczepanski, Anyanonu), protects access to reproductive and gender-affirming health care; providing for enforcement; imposing penalties; prescribing relief.

HB 134, Menstrual Products in School Bathrooms, sponsored by (Reps. Trujillo*, Ortez, Garratt*, Lujan and Serrato), appropriates \$3 million to provide menstrual products for students.

HB 199, Increase At-Risk Funding (Reps. Baca, G.A. Romero*, Garratt*, Mirabal Moya and Harper), increases the At-Risk funding index.

HB 207, Expand Human Rights Act Scope (Reps. Ortez, A. Romero, Hamblen, Serrato and Sen. Wirth) extends the scope of the Human Rights Act, particularly for members of the LGBTQ community.

HM 4, “Labor History Month” (Rep. Trujillo*) designates the month of September as Labor History Month and encourages educators across New Mexico to teach about the contributions of labor in New Mexico History.

HM 51, Study Public School Funding Formula (Reps. Herrera, Sariñana*, Garratt*, Trujillo*, G.A. Romero*), would request the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC), together with the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC), the Public Education Department (PED), and the Public School Capital Outlay Council to complete a comprehensive analysis of the public school funding formula.

*Current / former member of ATF



2, 4, 6, 8: NOW WE GO NEGOTIATE

With the Legislative session over and the budget settled, APS and ATF will soon start negotiations. Some things are obvious topics: Salary increases that incorporate the average 6% and the four added days of work in addition to how time is used on the modified Wednesday for elementary and middle schools.

School districts are still coping with decades of divestment in their schools, and unfortunately this year we didn't make much progress in getting the discretionary money we need and deserve. One of our goals during this session and many past sessions is to lobby for an increase in the State Equalization Formula (SEG). Sufficient funding of the SEG allows us to negotiate with APS about local programs and priorities.

As we have explained many times, one of our long-term priorities has been salary differentials. Most if not all differentials are significantly outdated and inadequate for the crucial work educators do engaging and connecting with students. Band directors, coaches, speech and debate team leaders, department chairs, head special education teachers, orchestra teachers, and many more co-curricular and extra-curricular roles are essential in our schools.

Schooling is more than teaching. Schooling is made up of many enriching experiences designed for students. Additionally, teaching is not all that teachers do in school. We have many leadership roles, and you take on a multitude of responsibilities that keep our schools running smoothly and our students engaged. Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities build relationships and engage students. Participation in extra-curricular activities in high school can benefit low-status, disadvantaged students — those less well served by traditional educational programs — as much as or more than their more advantaged peers.

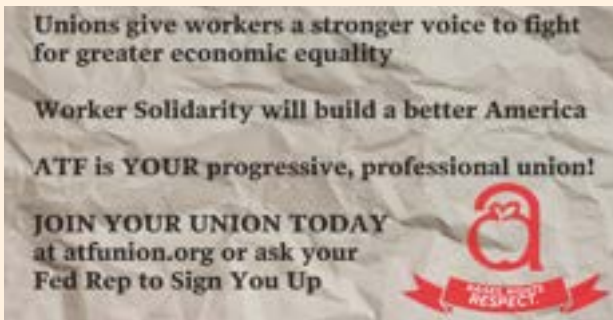
We'll send a negotiation survey out to all members soon. The survey will focus on, but not be limited to, issues of retention and workload. Membership is power.

Not yet a member? Ask your Fed Rep to sign you up!

Or you can scan this QR code:



THE MYTH



Soon after the four new members of the board of education were elected, they decided to hire Attuned Education Partners (attunedpartners.com) to conduct an audit of APS's instructional program leading up to the creation of a district strategic plan. The discussion draft Attuned presented to the Board in January includes these statements:

- What the audit described as district-adopted High Quality Instructional Materials were not being used in over 70% of observed classrooms.
- Overall, the audit claimed, students were provided with opportunities to respond authentically to grade-level tasks in only 38% of observations.

Interestingly, a five-year-old report from an "educational" organization called TNTP (formerly known as The New Teacher Project), had made these exact claims of all public schools.

TNTP was founded by Michelle Ree, a former chancellor of Washington, D.C. schools from 2007 to 2010, who made a name for herself by firing teachers based on student test scores. She began her career by teaching as a Teach for America corps member for three years in an elementary school in Baltimore, then founded and ran The New Teacher Project.

You can find the document from TNTP, The Opportunity Myth, at opportunitymyth.tntp.org. Search for the phrase "grade level" and you'll see language identical to that in the Attuned report.

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TNTP claims, “Students spend most of their time in school without access to four key resources: grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers who hold high expectations.”

This reads like the overgeneralized teacher-bashing, billionaire-funded propaganda published by the charter-promoting, destroy-public-education fear mongers.

More alarming, "The Opportunity Myth" is being used as legitimate background information in the K-8 Language Arts textbook adoption process and is required reading in the MLSS micro-credentialing class mandated by the PED to advance from Level 1 to Level 2.

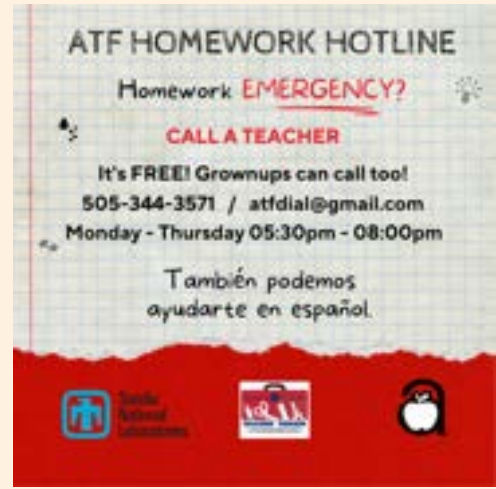
We’ll be publishing more food for thought about this topic soon and we’ll be asking you to weigh in.

LETRS “FLEXIBILITY”

Elementary educators have been asking questions about the LETRS training – primarily about what happens if they don’t finish.

Both APS and the PED had the same answer: If an educator cannot complete the LETRS coursework in the two years before their license expires, then the district would have them sign a contract (kind of like a recommitment) and then APS would pay for a one-year license extension.

There are no consequences for an educator not scoring well; they just may not be eligible to meet the Reading Endorsement requirements, but they would still receive credit for completion.



MENTORS NEEDED

The Mentor Program is looking for general and special education mentor applicants in all grade levels and subject areas. Applicants must be Level 2 or Level 3 teachers with at least three years in APS. The role of the mentor is to offer support and practical advice to first-year teachers based on observation and discussion of the first-year teacher's professional experiences.

For more information: email mentorprogram@aps.edu

Mentor Benefits: Support beginning teachers; Remain a classroom teacher; Gain professional renewal; Receive monthly professional development and leave time; Earn evidence of professionalism for Domain 4; Receive a differential.

ATF EVENT CALENDAR

Date	Event	Time	Cost
Wed., 3/29	Restorative Justice Is Racial Justice	4:30-5:30pm	Free
Thurs., 3/30	Special Education Meeting	4:30-6:00pm	ATF Membership
Thurs., 4/6	Breathe for Change	4:30-5:30pm	\$5 members; \$10 nonmembers
Fri., 4/7	Vernal Holiday	All Day	3-Day Weekend!
Wed., 4/12	Substance Abuse in the Classroom	4:30-5:30pm	Free
Thurs., 4/13	ATF Labor Chorus	4:30-6:00pm	Sing for Solidarity
Sat., 4/15	Component 1 Boot Camp	8:30am-12:00	\$75 members; \$100 nonmembers
Thurs., 4/20	Breathe for Change	4:30-5:30pm	\$5 members; \$10 nonmembers
Thurs., 4/20	Relational Classroom Management	4:30-6:00pm	\$10 members; \$25 nonmembers
Thurs., 4/27	ATF Labor Chorus	4:30-6:00pm	Sing for Solidarity

