Dallas school district's proposed budget cuts teacher pay while union declares "victory"

Chase Lawrence, Andy Hartman
29 May 2022

The Dallas Independent School District FY 2022-23 budget makes further attacks on teachers and staff, using inflation to cut pay while ensuring the continuation of the hated "Teacher Excellence Initiative," which ties the administration's evaluation of a teacher's performance to pay raises not years of experience. Notably absent from any announcement by the district is any mention of health care costs.

Under the budget, teachers will start at $60,000 per year, up from $57,000 per year for the FY 2021-22 school year, a mere 5 percent increase. Teachers with more experience will have even less of a wage increase; those with five years of experience will have a base pay of $63,250, up from $61,210 per year. Teachers with 10 or more years of experience will have a base salary of $65,450, up from $63,400 per year, a 3 percent increase. When factoring in inflation, which stands at 8.5 percent, these are in fact 3.5 to 5.5 percent wage cuts. This does not even cover rising gas prices which have increased 43.6 percent, according to US Inflation Calculator in 2022, in part due to the US-NATO oil sanctions on Russia.

The district, which has been bleeding qualified staff, has tacked on small "stackable," one-time hiring incentives ranging from $2,000-$5,000 in an piecemeal effort to make up for this loss.

Bus drivers will get even less: A driver with a commercial driver's license will make $25 an hour, $17.49 for an multi-purpose vehicle driver, and bus monitors only $15. The union local, Alliance AFT, has praised in particular the bus monitors' pay as a "victory," writing on Facebook, "Great work to everyone who has called, emailed and lobbied the district to increase the minimum wage to $15/hour." Below it is a graphic reading "UNION VICTORY," calling on teachers to attend the May 26 board meeting to voice their support for the new minimum.

The much hyped "$15/hour" was a poverty wage two years ago, when Alliance AFT started its phony campaign, and it is even truer now. It is an unoriginal scam, with similar exercises in deception having been pulled by the Democratic Party in 2021 and the pseudo-left DSA years earlier.

For reference, the average Walmart worker in Dallas makes $16 an hour, according to Zip Recruiter. The call by the Alliance AFT for educators to channel their efforts into groveling for poverty wages before the DISD board, which has attacked wages and working conditions for decades, is a dead end. That the AFT is shouting "victory" while staff and teachers are getting the shaft is an exposure of their false claims to represent the interests of teachers and staff.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. Also part of the pay rubric involves slight increases in pay as part of the district's "Teacher Excellence Initiative" (TEI), providing bonuses corresponding to teacher evaluations by school administrators. TEI was implemented in 2014 and is widely hated by teachers.

According to this formula, Dallas ISD teachers are evaluated in eight graduated categories which determine their supplemental pay. Teachers "normally" are only able to increase their pay once a year.

The whole structure is rigged is to shift the blame for low pay from the district onto teachers, while ensuring that the vast majority of teachers are underpaid. The National Educators Association-Dallas, in a filing with the Texas Supreme Court in 2020, alleged that those who did not receive TEI increases, a very large proportion of teachers, effectively suffered pay cuts because the cost of health insurance increased while they received no supplement.

During that year, teachers filled a Dallas school board

© World Socialist Web Site

meeting warning that TEI hits teachers at high-poverty schools worse because they, through no fault of their own, are less likely to hit performance targets and hence less likely to be awarded the supplemental pay increases. This was later vindicated by an investigation by the *Dallas Morning News* "Dallas ISD's pay-for-performance teacher model raises questions about equity," which found that TEI did in fact lead to a stratification of evaluations along class lines.

In addition, "25% of teachers rated across DISD were what the district considers high-performing or 'distinguished,' with classifications of proficient II or higher" for 2018-2019. These correspond to the five highest supplemental pay grades, meaning that as of 2018-19, 75 percent of the district's teachers are paid at the three lowest pay levels, with a supplement to base pay of no more than $7,500 a year under the proposed budget.

This is by design, as the scoring is done along a bell curve, with only 2 percent of teachers allowed to fall into the highest supplemental pay level, with the express intent to limit the number of high evaluations following worries over saving money. The *Morning News* wrote in 2021 that "the district had depleted much of its savings in recent years. To launch a new compensation system, the district had to limit how many teachers could earn top salaries."

According to Go Banking Rates, to live comfortably in Dallas as a renter one needs to make an income of $70,000, while home owners need $84,000. Notably, the three lowest pay grades for teachers leave them beneath these thresholds. They are out of reach for the vast majority of teachers, and far out of reach for bus drivers, custodial, cafeteria and other support staff.

Who is responsible for all this? The majority of the DISD board is composed of Democratic Party-connected and NEA/AFT-endorsed candidates. So those who bear much of the responsibility for the implementation of the reactionary TEI pay scheme and the attack on wages are the trade union bureaucrats and the Democratic Party.

With further hemorrhaging of staff from stressful workloads, low pay, the threat of coronavirus in schools as well as Long COVID, a debilitating disease affecting a large percentage of those who survive COVID-19 infections, it is likely that this number will increase, further depressing wages.

All of these conditions have been forced upon teachers as part of the bipartisan assault on education and on basic public health on behalf of the ruling class, with both the fascistic Republican Party and the Democratic Party working to keep schools open even as coronavirus deaths soared pass 1 million in the US. The aim is to keep workers at their jobs so the financial oligarchy can keep enriching itself off their backs. Education funds are also being diverted to fuel the expanding US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

Teachers in school districts around Texas and around the US are going through similar experiences: coronavirus infections, pay cuts, austerity, the destruction of public education, and the threat of world war. Teachers looking for a way to prosecute this fight should build and join the educators rank-and-file committees, which are independent of the unions and both parties of the ruling class. To find out more, click here.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site