

**For Immediate Release
October 17, 2023**

Contact:
Jackie Anderson
281/221-5781
janderson@hft2415.org

Survey: Houston Teachers Overwhelmingly Oppose New Takeover Policies

HOUSTON—Houston public school teachers overwhelmingly oppose new policies implemented by appointed school takeover Superintendent Mike Miles, a Houston Federation of Teachers survey released today found, with educators indicating strong support for fully funded libraries, schools and community schools with wraparound services, and strongly opposing rigid, scripted instruction and constant testing during class.

[The survey](#) was conducted in September, with 1,115 HFT teachers and school support staff responding.

“We really wanted to hear from educators. We knew they had strong feelings about the new changes implemented by Miles, but since he believes in retaliating against teachers who speak out, we had to do it with an anonymous survey tool,” said HFT President Jackie Anderson.

The survey asked educators about several of Miles’ new policies, including the requirement for teachers to use a timed, rigid district-provided script for classroom instruction with quizzes every few minutes, the pay-for-performance evaluation system, and the closing of libraries in lower-performing New Education System (NES) schools. The survey also asked respondents their thoughts about community schools with wraparound services and were asked to write open-ended comments on

what they would want implemented to improve Houston schools and student outcomes.

“Our educators are absolutely fed up with the new changes and are furious that the policies have nothing to do with helping students thrive or improving their academic achievement. We’re hearing directly from teachers that the new policies are bad for students and make it harder, not easier, for them to do their jobs. I’ve never heard of a district, much less a takeover target, that is doing everything possible to destroy schools, break teachers’ spirit and actually hurt students. It’s incredible, and we can’t let it continue,” Anderson said.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, who recently spent a day with Houston teachers, said: “Miles’ new agenda is not new at all. It’s taking a page from the failed test-and-punish era, with teachers reduced to script readers, not teachers. These teaching methods have been discarded around the country since the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. Now, new strategies and real solutions, like a focus on literacy, social-emotional learning and critical thinking, are needed more than ever. That is why this is excruciating for teachers, who want to teach their students with instructional techniques that meet their needs, not be forced into rigid, scripted, assembly-line education. Everything Miles is doing undermines the future of our kids.”

Highlights of the survey:

Scripted instruction, now required at NES and NES-A campuses:

- 83.7 percent oppose or strongly oppose scripted lesson plans provided by an outside vendor.
- 94.9 percent said teachers should have more autonomy to adapt curriculum to student needs.

Evaluations and compensation:

- 87.4 percent of respondents said they oppose or strongly oppose the pay-for-performance model of evaluation, with teacher pay based largely on standardized test scores.
- 86.4 percent said they disagree or strong disagree with the statement that a pay-for-performance evaluation system is fair to teachers and helpful for students.
- 90.1 percent said they oppose or strongly oppose the new evaluation system that assesses effectiveness based on student test scores, student surveys, spot observations and the ability of a teacher’s school to meet a “group performance metric.”

Libraries:

- 93.3 percent of respondents oppose or strongly oppose eliminating librarians at NES and NES-A campuses and turning them into detention centers for students.
- 94.7 percent said libraries provide a critical service for public school students.

Community schools:

- 67.2 percent said they support a community schools model for NES schools, with services that students and families need, instead of the current plans for those schools.

Open-door policy at NES and NES-A campuses:

- 92.7 percent said they were concerned that the requirement to keep classroom doors open makes classrooms less safe in the event of an emergency.

Comments by teachers on what they would like to see in place to improve schools and student outcomes and what they say is hindering meaningful instruction for their students:

- “Let us teach our lessons the way that we have found to be effective in helping our students, especially those that are struggling more. We don’t need to be teaching from scripted lessons that do not benefit our students.”
-
- “Teachers and staff have the right to have freedom in teaching their subject with flexibility in their curriculum without fear of being fired. Along with getting paid for the extra hours we’ve been forced to work.”
- “Get rid of the occupying government-placed superintendent and non-democratically elected board. Aides that are actually certified in the kind of support needed to help with differentiated and at-risk students. Improve and increase funding for at-risk schools to provide better resources, wraparound services, community involvement and input, foster an active learning environment by engaging students with what can be considered ‘non-standardized’ testing and evaluation. Move away from core subjects ‘teaching to the test’ and actually teaching how to learn. This will take care of the STAAR. We want intelligent and engaged individuals, not a number on a state test.”
- “More parent and teacher involvement in decisions that impact our students and community.”
- “More trust on the certified teachers rather than coming in unexpectedly every hour unannounced. If they are to come in, the very least they can do is to help out, and if they do not want to, then leave us be. They do

not teach the students or know them enough to know their individual needs. Quite frankly, if parents knew the full depth of what is occurring, they would not be too happy, as a few are already starting to figure out what atrocious acts are happening daily. Also, why have synchronized schedules? Every teacher should teach all subjects of course, but at their own rhythm so that scholar success is possible.”

- “Ask the teachers in the struggling schools what is needed to improve, what supports do they need.”
- “I think wraparound services are needed. More counseling and mental health resources for students and families.”
- “Better advocacy for (special education) students and all kids who have an (individualized education plan) or a 504 plan. In NES schools, there is no way we are in compliance with their plans in any way because of the fast pace we have to be at all times.”
- “Let teachers teach and stop testing so much.”
- “While I still believe in the mission, I also have to look out for myself, and I have too much respect for myself to work at a place where I’m regularly spied on, micromanaged, and having my salary threatened.”
- “Teachers being able to teach how they are supposed to. Teachers being able to teach based on students’ needs and not a script given. Administrators leaving us alone and stop interrupting our teaching every day. The students get scared when they walk in the room.”
- “Treating students as learners and not machines to give shallow output every four minutes for the sake of a metric that doesn’t truly measure student learning.”
- “Smaller classes, expand wraparound services, increased training on science of reading in ALL levels not just elementary, higher teacher pay for all teachers, better training for teachers in general.”
- “Teacher freedom/respect, support from administration, more counselors, actual change to help students.”

HFT also plans to survey Houston parents and community members about the state of the Houston Independent School District.

#

If you would rather not receive future communications from AFT, let us know by clicking [here](#).
AFT, 555 New Jersey Ave NW, Washington, DC 20001 United States