



**THE  
EDUCATOR  
WITH  
THE  
DECIDING  
VOTE  
IS YOU**

**THE RESULTS OF ATPE'S  
GUBERNATORIAL  
CANDIDATE SURVEY**

## FALL'S BIGGEST THRILLER IS AT THE POLLS

This fall, you won't find the biggest thriller in Texas at the top of the best-seller list or at the box office—you'll find spellbinding suspense at the polls. The outcomes of the edge-of-your-seat election taking place Nov. 2 will affect public education for years to come.

The characters in this gripping scenario include the longest-serving governor in Texas' history and a Houston hero known for his leadership during Hurricane Katrina, as well as a host of State Board of Education (SBOE) members notorious for providing late-night comedians with fertile fodder. But the character who holds the key to the action is you—the voter.

Although ATPE does not endorse candidates, the association is committed to providing members with information they can use to determine which candidates will best represent educators' interests at the State Capitol and on the State Board of Education. To that end, ATPE is surveying general election candidates to learn their stances on important public education and ATPE-priority issues.

ATPE sent a questionnaire to the major party candidates running for governor in 2010: incumbent Republican Gov. Rick Perry and Democratic challenger Bill White. Despite an extended deadline and numerous attempts by ATPE staff members to contact his campaign, Perry did not respond to ATPE's survey. White did. Read on for his responses, and then visit [www.atpe.org/advocacy](http://www.atpe.org/advocacy) to check out ATPE's election resources for members. (Later this fall, survey results from legislative and SBOE candidates will be posted at [atpe.org](http://atpe.org).)

Please contact ATPE Governmental Relations at [government@atpe.org](mailto:government@atpe.org) or (800) 777-ATPE if you have questions about the survey.



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# THE GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES



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## BILL WHITE’S RESPONSES TO ATPE’S CANDIDATE SURVEY GOV. RICK PERRY DID NOT RESPOND TO ATPE’S REPEATED REQUESTS

**ATPE:** The pension and health care systems for retired educators are in need of significant amounts of new funding to remain solvent, and retired educators have not been granted a cost-of-living adjustment since 2001. What will you do as governor to address these problems?

**WHITE:** The state’s pension systems are underfunded and do not have the assets to meet the obligations already promised to the beneficiaries. This is a significant problem for the millions of current and retired employees who are depending on the funds for their retirement. I faced a similar problem when I took office as mayor of Houston and worked with the municipal and police pension

systems to close the gap. That solution required net changes in both the assets and liabilities of the systems. I expect to address this problem quickly at the state level so that the funds can live up to their commitments. I will work hard to address these problems fully and fairly, recognizing that the pension plans are trust funds that belong to current and retired public employees. Retired public employees should be able to live with security and dignity.

**ATPE:** Texas uses statewide standardized tests to measure the progress of students and to impose sanctions on low-performing schools based on their students’ scores. Critics argue the

assessment system places too much pressure on students and reduces classroom instruction to little more than test preparation. Do you agree or disagree?

**WHITE:** I am very concerned [that] high-stakes testing has diverted too much classroom time away from the kind of teaching that parents and educators agree that students need. I believe the primary purpose of testing should be diagnostic of student achievement, strengths and weaknesses, and instructive to teachers and parents about how to help the student grow. I do not support requirements or incentives for teachers to spend important instructional time “teaching to the test” where the test is the only measure of support.

**ATPE:** As a follow-up, how can Texas find and implement improved methods of measuring the success of students and schools?

**WHITE:** Students' and a school's success depend on a number of factors. I will work with educators, parents, education professionals and school board members to ensure measurements are predictable, transparent and fair. Again, while student testing is a factor that should be taken into account, too much reliance on any single factor, especially high-stakes testing, does not benefit the students or the educational system as a whole.

**ATPE:** Student performance on statewide standardized tests has also been used as a factor in determining compensation amounts for educators. Should teachers' salaries or eligibility for bonus pay be tied to their students' performance on the state tests, and, if so, to what extent?

**WHITE:** I think test scores should be a part of the criteria for review of teachers but not the sole basis of the performance review.

**ATPE:** As a follow-up, should personnel decisions such as firing or transferring educators be based on their students' test scores, and, if so, to what extent?

**WHITE:** Same answer as the previous.

**ATPE:** Should Texas use public tax dollars to fund vouchers or tax credits for students to attend private or religious schools?

**WHITE:** I do not support diversion of tax dollars away from public education.

**ATPE:** Past Legislatures have provided pay raises for classroom teachers, nurses, librarians and counselors while offering no new compensation for paraprofessionals and other school support staff. What will you do to provide a state-funded pay raise for these education employees?

**WHITE:** Texas will face a record deficit in the next biennium, and I will work hard to ensure that we can continue to provide services to Texans without disruption and avoid across-the-board layoffs. I will consider pay raises as part of that process.

**ATPE:** What will you do as governor to make educators' salaries more competitive with those of other professions that require similar levels of training and education?

**WHITE:** As the son of two teachers, I think there is no higher calling than that of an educator. We must attract and retain quality teachers and put more emphasis on making teaching a career. I look forward to working with those stakeholders on creating an environment to make that happen.

**ATPE:** The 79th Legislature mandated that property tax rates be compressed to \$1 and that revenue generated by new taxes be dedicated to property tax relief. Given these budget constraints and the structural deficit that has resulted from those changes, how do you propose funding the state's future education needs?

**WHITE:** As governor, I will look at the budget in its totality and start by prioritizing the state's needs. In these tight budget times, we must focus [our] efforts on the important functions of state government. I believe funding and focusing on the education of our children and young adults is the most important priority of state government. The future of Texas depends on us making this a budget priority. However, I will also look for efficiencies within the public education and higher education budget. Top-down management and unfunded management of education must stop, and I will work toward that end.

**ATPE:** Considering the ample research showing that smaller classes improve

the learning of younger students, will you work to preserve the 22:1 class-size limit that the Legislature has imposed in elementary grades?

**WHITE:** Smaller classes do help improve the comprehension and learning of younger students, and I will work to ensure that elementary classrooms remain subject to strict class-size limits.

**ATPE:** Some contend that the public school system in Texas has too many ineffective teachers and that it has become too difficult for school districts to fire bad teachers. How do you respond to these claims, and what can be done to generate more respect for the teaching profession and the cachet to attract more high-achieving college students into the profession?

**WHITE:** As the son of two teachers, I can think of no more noble profession than that of teaching. It takes leadership and a governor who cares passionately about the issue, along with the citizens of this state, to bring more respect for the teaching profession.

**ATPE:** Candidates and officeholders often speak of the need for public education reform. What reforms would you like to see enacted, and why?

**WHITE:** I have made education the cornerstone of my campaign. Public education is the most important business of state government because investments we make in students now will determine the economic future of our state. With new leadership we can improve student achievement, increase high school graduation rates and reduce the barrier to higher education. We have a number of specific initiatives and programs on the website [www.billwhitefortexas.com](http://www.billwhitefortexas.com) (issues page). 🗳️