

Why Teachers and School Employees Should Care About the FTAA

Public school teachers and school employees are facing many challenges on the job today: low pay and inadequate recognition, crumbling schools, crowded classrooms, historic state and local budget shortfalls and constant threats to privatize public education through vouchers.

Now there's another threat to public education, professional teachers and school employees: **the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).**

What is the FTAA?

It's been 10 years since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) began eroding workers' rights, jobs and the environment. FTAA is NAFTA all over again—but 10 times bigger. The FTAA would include almost every country in the Americas. Most people think free trade is just about trade in goods—orange juice, tennis shoes and steel, for example—but the FTAA would cover much more and affect the lives of every worker in the hemisphere, including public school teachers and school employees.

How will the FTAA affect teachers and school employees?

Government support for public schools could be challenged. When Enron took over the public water system in Buenos Aires, Argentina, rates skyrocketed, dirty water came from the taps and the water was shut off. The government took the water system back into public hands, and Enron turned to international investment rules to sue for compensation. Under the FTAA, these rules could be expanded to cover public education in the United States, allowing private companies to lock in voucher schemes and challenge public funding and protection for our schools.

State licensing and certification standards could be weakened. NAFTA eroded our ability to ensure that every truck on our highway meets U.S. safety standards. Under FTAA rules, any professional

standard that presents an obstacle to foreign education companies or teachers could be challenged, even if the standard applies equally to U.S. teachers and schools.

More guest workers would enjoy fewer rights. NAFTA allowed hospitals to hire nurses on temporary visas with few protections for the workers' rights, undercutting working conditions for all nurses. The FTAA could expand these rules to create new temporary visas for teachers as well.

Government purchasing policies could not be used to protect workers' rights and jobs. NAFTA rules only allow governments to consider cost and quality—not social, labor or environmental criteria—in their purchasing decisions. The FTAA would expand these rules to undermine living wage laws and project labor agreements, including in state contracts for school construction.

Loss of manufacturing jobs would drain away state and local tax revenues. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost because of NAFTA—and many more will be lost under the FTAA. When employers move away and jobs disappear, state and local governments face big budget shortfalls and pressure increases to cut education spending and slash pay and benefits for teachers.

What can we do to stop the FTAA?

Join your brother and sister trade unionists and allies from throughout the Americas as they say **NO** to the FTAA and **YES** to good jobs, workers' rights and immigrant rights. Be sure to sign a Vote No "ballot," which local unions and labor councils will present to the trade ministers who are considering the FTAA. You also may take online action, get more information and join the Stop FTAA campaign at www.aflcio.org/stopftaa.