

TPEA's Future...As You See It



There is no question that we are entering a new year presenting significant challenges to all state employees, retirees, and the public at large. Sounds like a gloomy opening to my first message of the year. But as the saying goes, with challenge comes opportunity, and the opportunities have never been better than they are today for TPEA.

Last November we sent a survey to approximately 90,000 state workers with the purpose of gathering important information we can share with legislators and agency management to better educate them on the candid motivations and concerns of state employees, and secondly, to help TPEA focus its advocacy and organizational efforts to better represent both TPEA members and the general state employee work force.

More than 20 percent of those receiving the survey responded. That is an incredible response by anyone's standards. It is obvious we struck a chord with the questions asked, and the wealth of information we received will play a valuable role in the future of this organization. We are deeply appreciative of the high participation from those who took the survey, as well as the state agencies that cooperated in the survey's distribution. In the end it makes us even more aware of the larger constituency that extends beyond our membership.

Make a point to read Andy Homer's recap of the survey and State Auditor's Office report on page 6. In addition, you will find detailed information about the survey on our website, www.tpea.org.

I think it is important to acknowledge that the challenges facing the state workforce and retirees are reflective of our state population as a whole. The state's workforce is aging (7.5 percent are over 60) and this factor will continue to put pressure on the need to find new and younger talent that will want to work for the State.

An even bigger issue that needs to be addressed is the increasing turnover rate among state agencies. We are at risk at losing our most talented and experienced people due to inadequate and non-competitive salaries. According to the annual report released by the State Auditor's Office in December, the turnover rate rose almost two percent from 2006 to 17.4 percent. There are a number of large state agencies that had turnover rates of over 20 percent. This is an alarming statistic that must be addressed.

The SAO report states that 75 percent of the overall turnover for the State's regular full and part-time employees was voluntary. Our survey reflects the SAO report in many areas, but with more detailed information that depicts a more accurate picture of the current environment in state employment. Some of the information is ominous in nature. According to the survey active employees are content with the retirement and health benefits they currently receive, but salary remains the number one issue people consider when leaving State employment. This is a chronic problem that is not going away.

It has been argued that there is a correlation between low unemployment (4.4 percent in 2007) and high turnover rates. The theory being that low unemployment allows people to "shop around" for a better job. That does not diminish the adverse effect of high turnover at any time, in any environment. The cost to hire and train new employees is significant. Lost productivity while waiting to fill positions is another costly side effect of high turnover. In the end it negatively impacts the general public's perception of state employees.

The good news is the information brought to us via the survey. It provides TPEA with a report card on how we are doing today, and what we can do better in our advocacy role in the future. Nearly half of those responding find TPEA an informative resource for them. We were rated more than twice as high as the next closest group. We were also rated more than twice as effective as any other group representing state employees in the legislative process. This is good news, but also leaves a lot of room for improvement.

The SAO report coupled with the more in-depth results from our survey further strengthen the argument that the Legislature needs to take action in order to continue to field a qualified work force.

The responses from the survey were so informative and revealing that TPEA's Board of Directors is dedicated to continue this exchange between state employees and TPEA. We will use these survey results to help guide our direction as we develop TPEA's Legislative Agenda for the 81st Texas Legislature, which, by the way, is less than a year away. There is no doubt in my mind that pay raises, maintaining health insurance benefits for active and retired employees, as well as a 13th check for retirees, will be our primary focus. The competition for those dollars will be fierce, but we will be prepared to be there as your advocate. Join us, today!

Gary W. Anderson
TPEA Executive Director