

Why Students Should Care About the FTAA

Students in the United States are facing many challenges on their campuses: cuts in funding for higher education, increasing education costs and challenges to affirmative action policies.

Now there's another threat to students: **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 workers and students throughout the hemisphere.

How will the FTAA affect students? Government support for public schools and universities 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.

Purchasing policies could not be used to protect workers' rights and jobs. NAFTA rules only allow governments and public institutions 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 anti-sweatshop rules in the employment and licensing contracts of public universities.

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

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 financial aid to students.

It could destroy jobs and degrade working conditions. NAFTA led to the loss of hundreds of thousands of good jobs in the United States, and employers use NAFTA to threaten to move jobs to Mexico to undermine union organizing drives. NAFTA has created jobs in Mexico, but real wages in Mexico have fallen under NAFTA and poverty has risen. And NAFTA's protections for basic workers' rights have proven unenforceable. The FTAA, based on NAFTA, will lead to the loss of more high-quality jobs, lowering the number and quality of jobs available to students entering the job market.

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.