

What Matters Most

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Public School Entrepreneurs

Last week, the American Federation of Teachers made a down payment on the future of teacher- and union-led education reform when we made the first grants from our Innovation Fund to eight teacher unions around the country for their bold, innovative and risk-taking propositions for bottom-up reform. Thanks to a strong partnership with some of the country's leading foundations, we are creating a new paradigm for entrepreneurial, teacher-driven public education reform.

Some people were surprised that these proposals come from teacher unions. But teachers and their unions have always been willing to think big, think boldly and operate outside their comfort zone in order to help kids succeed. There is nothing easy about what these unions are proposing to do.

In a speech last year at the National Press Club, I said that, with the exception of vouchers, which drain vital resources from public schools, every reform is on the table, as long as it is good for kids and fair to teachers. Fairness means engagement, respect, stake and ownership. It also means providing teachers with the tools and conditions we need to be successful.

Teachers, working through their unions, want our public schools to change for the better. Those who say otherwise are simply not listening. And these grantees demonstrate how we intend to do that.

They are:

- The ABC Federation of Teachers in Los Angeles County, which proposes to build on its successful partnership with the district, moving collaboration and decision-making to the schoolhouse for 10 high-needs schools.
- The Broward Teachers Union proposal for a teacher evaluation and compensation plan designed with teacher input that would consider student achievement measures—including standardized test score results in tested grades and subjects—as a factor in teacher compensation.
- The Illinois Federation of Teachers proposal to create a new collective bargaining model for charter schools that supports an environment based on collaboration, community partnerships, and strong interpersonal relationships among

students, faculty, staff and community members.

- The New York State United Teachers and the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers & Health Professionals plan to bring together consortia of locals to establish a multi-district approach to more rigorous teacher evaluations that will involve high teaching standards, a comprehensive teacher evaluation system, differentiated professional development and peer assistance and review.
- The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers proposal to dramatically expand a successful community school program, taking the community school model from an isolated success story to a full feeder pattern that would support students for their entire public school career, from kindergarten through 12th grade.
- The Saint Paul Federation of Teachers proposal to create CareerTeacher, a novel grow-your-own approach to teacher recruiting and preparation. What makes CareerTeacher unique—and promising—is that it combines aggressive recruiting, standards-based preparation, and multiple pathways to become a full-fledged teacher and new roles for experienced teachers.



Randi Weingarten with a student from Lexington Elementary School, St. Louis.

- The San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel proposal to turn around the decline in student enrollment. The union will work aggressively to engage partners from business, government and community organizations and join the district in launching a central housing initiative to bring more middle-income families to the school district, promote the city's best public schools and support dozens of innovative in-district charter schools that draw students from the neighborhood, from outside the school attendance zone, and even from outside the district.

These awardees are the first of what will be an ongoing program, thanks to the support of AFT members, The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Our members and our foundation partners understand that bottom-up reform, led by teachers who are in the classroom every day, and their unions, just makes sense.