



*A Union of Professionals*

## **AFT Priorities for ESEA Reauthorization January 2015**

### **Context**

We have seen the devastating impact of high-stakes testing that began with the No Child Left Behind Act, and continued with Race to the Top and waivers. The high stakes attached to tests have made the system a test-and-punish one, not the support-and-improve system that we need for students, teachers and schools.

Students are taking an increasing number of tests, the curriculum is being narrowed, and the joy and creativity of teaching and learning have been removed from classrooms. None of these tests has helped us improve schools. The tests have further destabilized poor and black and brown communities, by enabling mass school closings and unfettered and poorly regulated charter school expansion. We now have all of these tests, and we still have big achievement gaps.

No group that understands systems involving value-added measures and testing supports their use in a high-stakes way that forces school closings, prevents students from graduating, or affects teachers' livelihoods. Tests should be *one* important data point in a low-stakes environment

Overwhelming research shows that two-thirds of the achievement gap is explained by out-of-school factors. To return to the original purpose of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the law must ensure equitable funding and resources. Community schools and wraparound services can also help combat inequity. In addition, schools that are struggling need tailored plans to improve—plans that help individual students succeed. Individual students who are struggling also need tailored, individualized plans to help them succeed.

### **Reauthorization Priorities**

One thing about the No Child Left Behind Act that worked was that the law's requirements to disaggregate data shined a spotlight on the achievement gap. We must ensure a federal role in education that does not walk away from casting a strong light on subgroup performance, that provides parents and communities with real evidence of how their children are learning, and that holds the system accountable for the kids we know the system is not serving well:

- Tests should inform parents and communities as to whether students are on grade level or are struggling.
  - Performance assessments like those done in the New York Performance Standards Consortium work. Consortium schools have more students attending college and a higher college persistence rate than comparable schools.
  - Testing in the fall also does this because if it's done properly, the results can inform instruction throughout the year.
- Schools and districts should be held accountable for access to advanced courses and well-rounded curriculum, programs that support social and emotional learning, and measures of student learning that are not limited to traditional standardized tests.
- Struggling schools need help, in the form of community schools and wraparound services, and also in strategic interventions based on an individual school's needs. This could be extended time, or it could be real professional development for staff who are dealing with an influx of immigrants.
- There must be equity in resources to help teachers, including incentives to attract and retain teachers in high-poverty schools, supports for teachers, equitable working conditions, and equitable facilities and technology.

- There should be opposition to vouchers and portability, and there should be support for funding that is targeted to poor children.

### **Additional Ideas**

- Address the fact that two-thirds of the achievement gap is attributable to out-of-school factors by creating a new ESEA title to provide grants to districts for the creation of community schools and wraparound services.
- Support over-age and under-credited students by creating individual plans for these students so that they are on a path to success in life, college and career.
- Likewise, provide for individual plans with necessary supports for children who are not reading on grade level by third grade.
- Require project-based learning in middle school and service learning in high school so that kids develop skills like teamwork.