EDUCATIONAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Committee Chair: Donna Chiera, AFT New Jersey
Committee Secretary: Erin Benham, Meriden Federation of Teachers, Local 1478

1. SUPPORTING COLLECTIVE ACTION TO PROMOTE PUBLIC EDUCATION

Committee recommends concurrence.

WHEREAS, public schools are the center of communities across the nation, and every public school should be a place where families want to send their children, where students are engaged, where educators want to teach, where the curriculum is rich and inclusive, where there is joy in teaching and learning, and where all students will be prepared for college, career and citizenship; and

WHEREAS, public schools are the key opportunity agent for the nation's children and cornerstone of our democracy; public schools educate 90 percent of our children, yet they face unprecedented attacks on their very existence from a president and secretary of education who seek to destabilize and defund public schools; and

WHEREAS, politicians have chosen drastic tax cuts for the wealthy rather than adequately investing in education and essential services, and anti-union corporate interest groups are spending over $400 million to advance court cases and malicious legislation to undermine public education, break the teachers unions and undermine the rights of workers; and

WHEREAS, educators are weary of budget cuts to schools, tired of inadequate pay and rising expenses, sick of being ignored or disparaged, and alarmed by the de-professionalization of teaching through diluted licensure requirements and certification programs that shortchange preparation, undermine teaching as a career, lead to massive attrition and hurt students; and

WHEREAS, educators should be respected as professionals who value each student they serve, knowledgeable of the content they teach, and trusted to use their judgment; and

WHEREAS, educators believe in the power of collective action to bring about positive change; know that the right to bargain collectively is at the heart of a thriving democracy and effective and efficient public services; and are exercising their right to stand together for the health and safety of their students, the success of their schools and the vibrancy of their communities; and

WHEREAS, there is broad public support for America's teachers and schools, with 78 percent of the public supporting increased teacher pay and 80 percent supporting the teacher protests and walkouts taking place around the country; and
WHEREAS, despite any unfavorable court rulings, malicious legislation, and wrong-headed policies, we must hold fast to our ideal that the right to public education is the bedrock of our democracy; and

WHEREAS, educators and communities are standing up and fighting for public schools that promote children’s well-being, support powerful learning, build teacher and staff capacity, and foster cultures of collaboration, and have demonstrated their collective power through actions across the country, from Parkland, Fla., to West Virginia and beyond:

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers and our affiliates will use the momentum from these actions, member mobilization, and national support for unions and public education to collectively fight back against the president and secretary of education’s agenda to dismantle public education; and we will stand shoulder to shoulder with the students, families and communities that are rising up to fight for fully funded public education systems where schools are safe, well-maintained, and meet the academic as well as the social and emotional needs of all students; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will fight for our members’ economic well-being and against those in power who seek to weaken public services and our communities; confront the existence of prejudice (based on race, gender, religion, social class, sexual orientation and other institutional biases) in our institutions; and will advocate tirelessly for an equitable public education system that is strong and supported, not privatized or defunded; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT and our affiliates will fight attacks on our members’ professionalism and advocate for:

- Professional autonomy in their classrooms;
- Authority and voice in their profession;
- Salaries and benefits on par with other professions;
- Opportunities for leadership within the profession;
- Rigorous preparation and licensure; and
- Ongoing, teacher-led professional learning opportunities; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT and our affiliates will inform and mobilize our communities for educational and social justice, and will uplift candidates in state and local races who support public education and educators’ rights to collectively bargain, as well as initiatives, whether by ballot, legislation, or other local measures, to ensure the country has the educated citizenry on which its future depends.

☐ Adopted ☐ Adopted as Amended ☐ Defeated ☐ Tabled
☐ Precluded by_____________________________ ☐ Referred to____________________
2. DEFEATING THE DEVOS AGENDA

Committee recommends concurrence.

WHEREAS, Betsy DeVos was not qualified to be U.S. secretary of education when she was confirmed; and

WHEREAS, over the course of the 18 months that she has had the job, she has continued to display her lack of qualification by demonstrating through her actions that her goal is to hurt, not help, public education; and

WHEREAS, even though early in her term she accepted an invitation to visit a quality public school in Van Wert, Ohio, and saw the impact those teachers have on their students and community, she has demonstrated no further interest in visiting, listening to or learning about public schools and their students, educators or communities, preferring instead to visit only private schools and charter schools that fit her “choice” agenda; and

WHEREAS, while DeVos often speaks of “choice,” she never lifts up public schools as quality choices, showing that this rhetoric of choice cloaks her true education agenda, which is to defund and destabilize public education in America, from early childhood through college; and

WHEREAS, from her confirmation hearing, where she identified the threat of grizzly bears as a reason to bring guns to schools and was unable to answer basic questions about federal education law; to her testimony on the federal budget; to her most recent sparring with a state teacher of the year over DeVos’ prioritization of private schools over public ones, she has consistently demonstrated she does not have the prerequisite knowledge of the programs that she is supposed to be overseeing; and

WHEREAS, DeVos is not respected by the general public, given that polls have found DeVos’ “very unfavorable” rating is higher than any other Cabinet member included in the polls; and

WHEREAS, the DeVos agenda of privatization and disinvestment—which is the result of an intentional, decades-long campaign to protect the economic and political power of the few against the rights of the many—has taken the form of division and expresses itself as racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia and homophobia; and

WHEREAS, with the support of the Trump administration, DeVos proposed nearly $9 billion in unprecedented cuts in education programs, including eliminating class-size reduction, after-school and professional development programs; and

WHEREAS, even the Republican-led Congress has rejected the DeVos proposal for a federal voucher program and has so far
rejected her proposal to slash the federal investment in public education; and

WHEREAS, DeVos eliminated the requirements that states be required to explain to the Department of Education how they have worked with stakeholders to develop their plans to implement provisions of the Every Student Succeeds Act, indicating support for top-down education reform without regard for participation from the field; and

WHEREAS, under DeVos’ leadership, the Department of Education has favored wealthy former for-profit college executives over students and has failed to execute the department’s mission to promote student access to continued and postsecondary learning, by removing regulations designed to protect borrowers, allowing student loan servicers like Navient and Nelnet to engage in deceptive practices and defraud borrowers, leading them deeper and deeper into debt; and

WHEREAS, in conjunction with the one-year anniversary of DeVos’ tenure as education secretary, the AFT and stakeholders with an interest in promoting the success of public education collected 80,000 comments from teachers, students and parents encouraging her to do her job to strengthen and support the great work happening in public schools across the country; and

WHEREAS, the overwhelming majority of those comments indicate that DeVos is failing to listen to those who educate in, learn in and send their children to public schools—the schools that 90 percent of America’s children attend:

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers and our members call for Betsy DeVos to do her job as secretary of education by prioritizing and championing public schools and public school students, parents and educators; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue to educate and mobilize everyone in our communities who shares our values and our support for public education, and will work to defeat the DeVos agenda because of the danger her policies and agenda pose to public education and our students; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will urge federal and state lawmakers to reject the DeVos efforts to defund and destabilize public education and to instead invest in public education, including early childhood education and higher education.
3. IN SUPPORT OF DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE SEXUAL CONSENT EDUCATION IN AMERICA’S SCHOOLS

Committee recommends concurrence.

WHEREAS, the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network defines sexual consent as “an agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity”; and

WHEREAS, consent requires communication between the parties prior to sexual activity; and

WHEREAS, the skills necessary for effective communication, boundary setting and relationship building may be taught in a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate course of study, according to the Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education; and

WHEREAS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines sexual violence as a significant public health problem affecting the lives of millions of people in the United States, which can lead to long-lasting consequences in a survivor’s physical and mental health; and

WHEREAS, according to the CDC’s National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 1 in 5 women and 1 in 59 men have reported being raped at some point in their lives; and

WHEREAS, the survey also shows that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men report having been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner, while 1 in 6 women and 1 in 19 men report having been stalked during their lifetime; and

WHEREAS, sexual violence also affects students between the ages of 12 and 18 in staggering numbers; and

WHEREAS, according to the National Center for Victims of Crime, approximately one-third of all perpetrators of sexual violence are juveniles; and

WHEREAS, our students, in and out of school, are the victims of sexual violence of all types—in-person, online bullying, anti-LGBTQ harassment, unwanted touching, assault and rape; and

WHEREAS, our current political and social climate has led to increased conversation about consent as well as sexual violence; and

WHEREAS, school communities that serve as sites where all students and staff are safe from acts of sexual harassment and violence are conducive to the fulfilment of one’s professional and academic potential; and

WHEREAS, effective Jan. 1, 2017, California became the first state to require all high schools to teach at least one lesson on affirmative consent and sexual violence prevention in mandatory health classes:
RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers will encourage and support its locals to lobby state and local departments of education to require developmentally appropriate lessons on affirmative consent and sexual violence prevention; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will advocate for the implementation of research-based and developmentally appropriate lessons on consent, effective communication, healthy sexuality and positive interpersonal relationships, to be made available to our members across the country; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will push for school-based professional learning so that our members may serve as informed role models by contributing to respectful cultures in our classrooms and schools, identifying and intervening for students at risk of participating in inappropriate conduct, and successfully supporting students and colleagues who have experienced sexual violence.

□ Adopted □ Adopted as Amended □ Defeated □ Tabled □ Precluded by______________ □ Referred to______________

4. TO PROMOTE THE PUBLIC GOOD IN PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Committee recommends concurrence as amended below:

WHEREAS, the American Federation of Teachers in 2017 passed a resolution titled “Reclaiming the Promise of Public Charter Schools through Rigorous Authorizer Reform”; and

WHEREAS, per the 2017 AFT resolution, members working in charter schools developed a rubric by which state charter school laws could be evaluated; and

WHEREAS, the charter rubric identifies the need for charter and district schools to cooperate by:

- Developing a coordinated, multiyear citywide plan that discloses the financial and demographic impact of school openings and closings;
- Requiring public posting and public input on citywide plans;
- Identifying minimum academic, social and educational services that all public schools must provide; and
- Providing collaborative professional development between district and charter schools with regular channels of communication to provide a free exchange of best practices; and
WHEREAS, the charter rubric identifies the need for representative and transparent school governance by:

- Requiring at least 50 percent of the charter board be composed of teachers who work at the school and parents of current students;
- Requiring non-parent or non-teacher members of the board to reside in the community served by the school;
- Requiring financial disclosure and conflict of interest statements be completed by all board members;
- Requiring open public board meetings with online access to board minutes and agendas;
- Requiring the charter agreement to be publicly available online;
- Requiring a pledge of neutrality and non-interference with employees’ right to unionize and bargain collectively; and
- Creating escalating, corrective consequences for charter schools that violate state laws; and

WHEREAS, the charter rubric identifies the need for strong oversight and accountability of management organizations and vendors by:

- Prohibiting board members with a financial stake in a management or vendor from serving on the board of a client school;
- Requiring that vendor and management contracts in excess of $25,000 follow procurement and bidding laws and be made public;
- Requiring third-party management organizations to publicly disclose donations, debt service, bond issuance, administrative costs, marketing costs and student recruitment expenses;
- Maintaining legal and accounting capacity independent of the school administration or third-party management organizations; and
- Requiring financial disclosure reports be posted publicly online; and

WHEREAS, the charter rubric identifies the need for equitable student enrollment and retention practices by:

- Requiring uniform enrollment and retention practices monitored by the district that ban discriminatory or overly burdensome enrollment requirements;
- Ensuring a fair lottery process conducted by a neutral party;
- Requiring public disclosure of all enrollment and admissions requirements;
- Developing a fair, neutral and universal appeals process; and
- Requiring uniform enrollment and withdrawal data retention and sharing; and

WHEREAS, the charter rubric identifies the need for fair and transparent discipline policies by:

- Requiring the charter agreement to include a school’s discipline
policy, and requiring that policy to be publically available on the school's website;

- Ensuring state law provides a fair and uniform discipline policy to which all public schools, including charters, must adhere;
- Requiring explicit and clear due process and appeal rights for students and parents;
- Requiring annual reports on all significant disciplinary actions and withdrawals; and
- Requiring authorizers to develop intervention strategies and escalating, corrective consequences for charter schools that have not followed the uniform discipline policy; and

WHEREAS, the charter rubric identifies the need for cooperative planning for charter facilities and co-locations by:

- Requiring meaningful public input on co-location and/or facilities planning;
- Developing uniform standards for the use of public school locations;
- Creating fair guidelines on the use of shared spaces in co-located campuses; and
- Requiring stakeholder input on yearly impact reports for co-located facilities; and

WHEREAS, the charter rubric identifies the need for clear monitoring and oversight regulations of charter schools by:

- Empowering the state department of education to oversee authorizers;
- Ensuring no conflict of interest exists between the authorizer and the schools it monitors;
- Providing local public control of charter authorizing;
- Providing basic whistleblower protections;
- Requiring public disclosure of real estate transactions between charter schools and non-public entities; and
- Requiring revenues, expenditures and audits of charter schools and management companies hired to run charter schools be posted publicly and in the same format as traditional public schools; and

WHEREAS, the charter rubric identifies the need for either a prohibition of online schools or strict guidelines for their implementation; and

WHEREAS, AFT members believe every school that receives public resources should be open, transparent and accountable to the public; and

WHEREAS, weak charter school legislation in many states has encouraged waste, fraud, abuse and a lack of public transparency in charter schools; and

WHEREAS, AFT members in unionized charter schools have effectuated greater transparency and accountability through the collective bargaining process; and
WHEREAS, public charter schools are funded by the public, serve the public and are staffed by public servants, and charter holders and operators must not be allowed to prioritize their private interests over the public interest; and

WHEREAS, the legislative rubric developed by AFT educators working in charter schools demonstrates that every state’s charter school law is lacking in multiple measures of accountability; and

WHEREAS, charter school laws that lack accountability need to be strengthened in order to protect the public good and promote the public interest in every school serving the public:

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers will make public the charter school legislative rubric and analysis of state legislation in a format that the public can easily understand; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will lobby for changes to existing state charter school laws that do not align with the best practices identified in the charter legislative rubric; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will call for a moratorium on charter school expansion in cities or states that have weak charter school laws as defined by the legislative rubric; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue to support new member organizing in charter schools across the country.

RESOLVED, that the AFT supports and endorses the NAACP’s call for a national moratorium on new charter authorizations until the AFT rubric is adopted nationally.

☐ Adopted   ☐ Adopted as Amended   ☐ Defeated   ☐ Tabled
☐ Precluded by____________________   ☐ Referred to_____________

5. SUPPORTING SCIENCE AND SCIENCE EDUCATORS

Committee recommends concurrence.

WHEREAS, the pursuit of knowledge in the arts, humanities and sciences is an undeniable public good; and

WHEREAS, current political actors aim to specifically inhibit scientific study and communication; and

WHEREAS, science education teaches children and adults to think critically, ask questions and evaluate truth based on the weight of evidence; and

WHEREAS, many members of AFT locals are employed as scientists and/or science educators; and

WHEREAS, the greater public benefits from living improvements brought about through scientific study; and
WHEREAS, proposed budget cuts for national science agencies—including the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Energy and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration—would reduce the volume and quality of scientific research in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the aforementioned budget cuts to national science agencies are being proposed in a political culture of science denial—particularly denial of human-created climate change—in which national science agencies have been ordered not to discuss climate change in their public outreach and on their websites; and

WHEREAS, tax dollars support scientific research, and withholding scientific results limits the public’s ability to learn from important developments and discoveries; and

WHEREAS, new policies threaten to further restrict scientists’ ability to research, and teachers’ ability to communicate scientific findings; and

WHEREAS, U.S. congressional bill HR 899 has been introduced to the 115th Congress to terminate the Department of Education on Dec. 31, 2018; and

WHEREAS, U.S. congressional bill HR 861 has been introduced to the 115th Congress to terminate the Environmental Protection Agency on Dec. 31, 2018:

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers will advocate for funding in support of science research, scientific hiring, science educators and agency application of science to management; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will oppose HR 861, HR 899 and any similar bill that seeks to diminish or eliminate programs or agencies that support scientific research or communication; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will advocate for increased funding to agencies that support scientific research or communication; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will advocate for legislation that will protect scientists and science educators against retaliation; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT opposes attempts to dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency, freeze federal grant funding or otherwise obstruct researchers, scientists and other experts from performing their duties at public universities; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT supports the March for Science and other actions to raise awareness and initiate resistance against anti-science policies.
6. SUPPORT EXPANSION OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION COURSES

Committee recommends concurrence as amended below:

WHEREAS, the American Society of Civil Engineers has estimated that the United States will need to invest more than $3.6 trillion in infrastructure to rebuild, rehabilitate and repair our nation’s schools, public parks, roads, bridges, dams, transit systems, drinking water systems and other basic foundations of this nation’s prosperity and health by the year 2020; and

WHEREAS, there is an obvious need to rebuild, rehabilitate and repair entire communities that are blighted with dilapidated, unsafe, unused and outdated structures; and

WHEREAS, as the American workforce ages out, there is currently a resurgence in manufacturing, cuisine, transportation, healthcare, advanced computer technology and other fields, and a need to train replacements; and

WHEREAS, career and technical education, which includes the STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts/design and math) fields, not only prepares our students for today’s and tomorrow’s workforce but is an essential determinant in the economic development in our cities, states and nation; and

WHEREAS, career and technical education provides Americans with a school-to-careers connection and is the backbone of a strong, well-educated workforce, which fosters productivity in business and industry and contributes to America’s leadership in the international marketplace; and

WHEREAS, career and technical education gives high school students experience in practical, meaningful applications of skills such as reading, writing and mathematics, thus improving the quality of their education, motivating potential dropouts and giving all students leadership opportunities in their fields and in their communities, and CTE offers individuals lifelong opportunities to learn new skills that will provide them with career choices and potential satisfaction; and

WHEREAS, a large percentage of students do not have the desire to attend college but are better served by a postsecondary education that prepares them for a productive and satisfying career without a traditional college education:

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers, including its locals and affiliated organizations, support and will advocate for the development, implementation and restoration of elementary school, middle school and high school exploration programs linked to career and technical education programs of
study in school districts across the United States, including creating pre-apprenticeship programs in our schools in partnership with our local union apprenticeship programs and union leaders; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT and its locals will support the expansion of CTE programs across the country to reflect and keep pace with the changing job market and future career demands.

☐ Adopted ☐ Adopted as Amended ☐ Defeated ☐ Tabled
☐ Precluded by_________________________ ☐ Referred to_____________

7. ENSURING THAT STUDENTS MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION REGARDING MILITARY SERVICE AND ROTC

Committee recommends concurrence.

WHEREAS, as educators, we commit daily to the flourishing of our students and work to ensure that they reach their full potential; and

WHEREAS, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandates that all high schools receiving federal funds must provide student contact information to military recruiters upon request, and must allow recruiters to have the same access to students that colleges and employers have; and

WHEREAS, the 1996 Solomon Amendment mandates that colleges will lose federal aid if they do not allow access to military recruiters; and

WHEREAS, more than 310,000 high school students are enrolled in the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) and nearly 53,000 college students are enrolled in ROTC and are receiving military training; and

WHEREAS, according to congressional hearings, between 30 and 50 percent of graduating JROTC students go on to join the military; and

WHEREAS, ROTC graduates have a contractual obligation to serve in the military; and

WHEREAS, at a period when public services like healthcare and education budgets are facing serious cutbacks, the U.S. military spends billions of dollars on marketing to children through TV shows, infomercials, movies, musical videos, toys and video games; and

WHEREAS, while primarily targeting students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, military recruiters focus on the benefits and avoid mentioning the dangers of military service or criticisms of U.S. militarism; and
WHEREAS, ROTC instruction is written by the Pentagon and is standardized across high school and college campuses, and does not address the perils of military service or alternatives to wars; and

WHEREAS, the dangers of military service are well documented and include death, permanent injury, exposure to environmental toxins such as Agent Orange, witnessing or participating in war crimes, post-traumatic stress disorder, sexual harassment and assault, higher rates of suicide and other problems;¹ and

WHEREAS, in the same way educators expose students to diverse perspectives on any issue, they should ensure that high school and college students are able to give informed consent when making decisions about military service, and therefore students need to be exposed to contending positions on whether to join the military:

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers calls on school districts, colleges and universities to offer their students diverse views about military service and the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps, balancing arguments for military service and ROTC training with the arguments of critics of military service, including its health risks; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will develop a curriculum guide with resources for teachers from the perspective of those who advocate for military service and those who oppose it (such as those provided by speakers from Veterans for Peace and counter-recruitment literature);² and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will advocate that ROTC classes offered at institutes of higher education must be subject to the normal, faculty-governed course approval procedure like any other course at the institution prior to being offered for academic credit at colleges and universities.

☐ Adopted  ☐ Adopted as Amended  ☐ Defeated  ☐ Tabled
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¹ According to a Rand study, of the nearly 2.7 million Americans who served in Afghanistan and Iraq, at least 20 percent have PTSD and/or depression (http://www.veteransandptsd.com/PTSD-statistics.html); the Academy Award-nominated documentary The Invisible War portrays an epidemic of sexual assault and harassment of women and men in the military (http://invisiblewarmovie.com).

² Scott Harding and Seth Kershner, Counter-Recruitment and the Campaign to Demilitarize Public Schools, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; Veterans for Peace website: https://www.veteransforpeace.org; and counter-recruitment resources from American Friends Service Committee: https://www.afsc.org/resource/counter-recruitment.