

“We envision an AFT that is recognized by members and the public at large as a union dedicated both to the well-being of its members and to the people they serve. We envision a membership empowered to improve the quality of their own working lives as well as the effectiveness of their service to the public.”

AFT Futures I Report, 1992

“A professional union takes as its mission enhancing both the profession and the practice of its members. ... We must commit to making professional development integral to union work.”

AFT Union-sponsored
Professional Development
Task Force Report, 2001



A Union of Professionals

AFT ER&D

A Professional Development Program

The AFT Educational Research and Dissemination Program



2007

***Learn about the AFT's
Educational Research and Dissemination
Program and what it can do for your local union.***

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HOW DOES A LOCAL GET STARTED?

Local presidents who are interested in having their locals become ER&D sites should contact their state federation president and AFT regional director to request a recommendation for participation. The first step in the orientation process is required attendance at an AFT-sponsored Local Leaders Conference to learn about the program. Presidents who choose to continue proceed by building local understanding and support, completing an ER&D Program application, and selecting a Local Site Coordinator to attend Summer Institute.

For more information about the ER&D Program,
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HOW CAN ER&D BE USED TO BUILD THE LOCAL UNION?

Over the years it has become clear that the ER&D Program provides many benefits to local unions. Some of these benefits serve the local directly, while others support the work of local members. Through ER&D, locals are able to:

- organize and attract **new members**;
- expand the **active involvement** of members in union activities;
- provide a **new union service** in response to members' increased requests for help and support with their professional practice;
- **collaborate** with district administration around an issue of mutual interest—professional development;
- provide high-quality **professional development opportunities** for all members—new and experienced teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school-related personnel;
- develop a cadre of **union leaders** who can provide professional development for the local, district, and at conferences, such as state or local QuESTs;
- develop the **expertise in professional issues** of union members who serve on committees and who influence school site and, perhaps, district decision-making;
- build a **positive image** of the local union with district administrators, parents, and the community.

WHAT IS ER&D?

The American Federation of Teachers Educational Research and Dissemination (ER&D) Program is a union-sponsored, research-based professional development program. It is designed to help local unions build the capacity to deliver high-quality professional development services, either on their own or in collaboration with their school districts.

The AFT has long recognized that a research-grounded knowledge base is essential to professional practice. The ER&D Program was created in 1981 to encourage classroom educators to improve their practice and their students' performance by becoming users of research. The American Educational Research Association awarded ER&D its highest honor as an exemplary program that “bridges the gap between research and practice.” Beginning with a single course delivered to teachers in three pilot sites, the program has now expanded to include 12 strands that are available to all union constituents—teachers, paraprofessionals, and school-related personnel—in more than 200 locals across the country.

The ER&D Program meets the criteria for “high quality professional development” as defined in the **No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**. ER&D delivers scientifically based research in a focused, sustained framework that promotes the application of research-validated concepts and strategies.

WHAT CAN ER&D ACCOMPLISH?

The AFT recognizes that the union’s responsibilities go beyond the traditional “bread and butter” issues. By also addressing the professional needs of its members, thereby helping them perform their job responsibilities more effectively, both the union and the institutions in which members work are strengthened. Many locals use ER&D for *external organizing*—to attract new members, both those who are entering the profession and those who have been reluctant to join the union. Other locals primarily focus on using ER&D for *internal organizing*—increasing the union’s influence and the participation of previously uninvolved members.

ER&D Program Goals

The ER&D Program shall:

- Increase staff effectiveness in order to improve student performance
- Grow the union, both internally and externally, through the power of professional issues

The ER&D Program represents one of the union’s major efforts to improve student achievement by making a difference in practitioners’ performance and professional growth. Through its commitment to provide educators with the tools to change practice and promote student achievement, ER&D enhances the union’s organizing efforts and is the source of a new kind of union activism.

WHAT IS THE ER&D TRAINING PROCESS?

ER&D training prepares individuals to deliver high-quality professional development in their locals. The multistage training process involves initial coursework, ongoing communication and support, and a follow-up training experience.

Summer Institute. At a rigorous, intensive AFT-sponsored Summer Institute, participants take an ER&D course, focusing on both the content and effective presentation strategies. They also learn how to establish and manage a local ER&D Program.

Application of Research. When school begins, participants implement the research concepts and strategies in their classrooms or work settings. They reflect on their experiences by completing a series of *Research Application Plans* that are submitted online to course coordinators. They also work with the local’s leadership to develop a Local Action Plan outlining the dissemination model that will be implemented.

Winter Institute. In January, participants complete their training at the AFT-sponsored Winter Institute. There they focus on delivering effective professional development, attending sessions led by experts in the field and giving practice presentations to small groups of their peers. In addition, they present their Local Action Plans and receive feedback from AFT staff and national ER&D trainers.

HOW DOES THE ER&D PROGRAM WORK?

The ER&D Program is designed to be a capacity-building, training-of-trainers model. The local president selects one or two persons to attend national ER&D training. These individuals, in turn, train others to facilitate sessions at the local level in a pyramiding effect designed to reach larger numbers of participants. Selecting the right people for leadership roles is crucial to the success of a training-of-trainers model. All ER&D leaders should be union members in good standing and regarded as highly effective practitioners.

Local Site Coordinator. The Local Site Coordinator (LSC) is the person designated by the local president to be responsible for the overall management of the ER&D Program. The LSC initially takes *Foundations of Effective Teaching I*, the core ER&D course; leads local training classes; plans for program expansion; and is the ER&D spokesperson with union leaders, members, and sometimes with district administrators.

Individual Strand Coordinators. As the local program expands, additional ER&D strands are added. For each course, Individual Strand Coordinators (ISCs) are selected and attend a national training institute. They are then responsible for training locally and overseeing the implementation of their strands.

Research Dissemination Coaches. Research Dissemination Coaches (RDCs) are the critical link that connects the research knowledge base to significant numbers of teachers and support staff. Local Site/Strand Coordinators train cadres of coaches who disseminate the research to their peers, either at their schools or at the district level.

WHAT MAKES ER&D DIFFERENT?

Teachers have long been subjected to inservice sessions that are offered sporadically, based on the latest education fad, and often delivered by “outside experts”—the type of staff development that typically has little impact on classroom practice. ER&D, on the other hand, offers a focused, coherent program of professional development that is delivered by local practitioners and provides ongoing support.

The ER&D Program is unique because it:

- provides solid, research-based content;
- is created and delivered by classroom teachers and school personnel;
- is an ongoing process, rather than an inservice event;
- offers a nonthreatening, nonjudgmental learning environment;
- provides opportunities for thoughtful discussion about teaching and learning among colleagues and researchers;
- builds in opportunities for self-reflection, application, and implementation of instructional strategies, resulting in real change in practice;
- validates existing practice while encouraging professional growth;
- builds a sense of pride in the quality of a union service.

WHAT DO ER&D PARTICIPANTS LEARN?

The ER&D Program currently includes 13 courses covering a wide range of topics that are applicable to all educators.

The ER&D Program includes the following courses:

- Foundations of Effective Teaching I: Organizing the Classroom Environment for Teaching and Learning
- Foundations of Effective Teaching II: Building Academic Success
- Beginning Reading Instruction
- Reading Comprehension Instruction
- Thinking Mathematics 1: Ten Principles, Additive Structure
- Thinking Mathematics 2: Multiplicative Structures, Proportional Reasoning
- Thinking Mathematics 3: Fractions, Decimals, Ratio
- Thinking Mathematics for Middle School: Journey to Algebra
- Instructional Strategies That Work for All Disciplines
- School, Family and Community: Supporting Student Learning
- Managing Antisocial Behavior
- Managing Student Behavior for Support Staff
- Delivering Effective Professional Development (*a required mini-course covering presentation strategies and program development*)

Research translations are the basis for all ER&D courses. The AFT collaborates with leading researchers in the field of education to synthesize reliable findings on best practice and translate them into a user-friendly format that connects the research to its applications in the real world of classrooms and schools.

Classroom-based activities help participants connect the research findings to their daily work. ER&D classes model strategies that research finds provide the most effective adult learning experiences. These activities include small group interaction, role-play, case studies, simulations, Socratic seminars, and shared reflection.

HOW CAN YOU DELIVER ER&D?

ER&D does not offer one fixed approach to program design. There are a variety of formats and delivery models that have proven effective. The AFT recommends that a local determine its goals for the program, identify member needs, assess district initiatives, identify potential partners, and then *customize* the delivery of ER&D to fit its own situation.

ER&D content can be delivered as courses, mini-courses, workshops, or awareness sessions. While full courses produce the greatest results, each delivery format has its purpose, and each is appropriate under certain circumstances. Whenever possible, ER&D should be integrated into existing union/district programs and structures. ER&D materials are highly effective as the basis of mentor, induction, and/or peer assistance training programs.

ER&D sessions can be offered during district release days, after school, on weekends, or in the summer. Many local programs provide special orientation sessions for new teachers and paraprofessionals at the beginning of the school year.

A variety of incentives can be built into the program to encourage participation. In many places ER&D is offered for continuing education units to earn salary increments or meet state requirements for licensure renewal. In some sites, ER&D courses are offered in collaboration with a nearby university, allowing members to earn undergraduate or graduate credits through ER&D.