



AMERICAN Teacher

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

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Empowering teachers to do a great job

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

WE RECENTLY ASKED our members to tell us why they teach and what they need to do a better job for their students. Not surprisingly, their answers revealed the extraordinary dedication and professionalism in our ranks.

Emily Graham from Michigan said: "I teach because I care. I teach because I know I make a difference, ... because I want to change the world, ... because it is my passion and my future."

Every teacher wants to be a great teacher, but many are frustrated because they feel they have to run just to stay in place. I recently made a series of proposals I hope will reverse this frustration and help make teachers' aspirations a reality. This reform plan acknowledges the awesome responsibility teachers are entrusted with, and it makes clear that others share responsibility for fostering great teaching and student success.

I am proposing a new path forward toward a public education system defined by excellence, fairness, shared responsibility and mutual trust. My aim is to help empower more teachers to do a great job, by moving toward a model that will support teachers at every stage of their careers and prepare our children for productive, successful and meaningful lives.

One of the proposals is to change teacher evaluation, which too often comes down to little more than a principal sitting in the back of a classroom observing a teacher one time, once a year. Such a snapshot fails to provide a full picture of a teacher's performance. It does nothing to reveal what's working in the classroom and should be replicated, and what isn't and should be abandoned.

We intend to change this. An AFT ad hoc

committee on teacher evaluation comprised of union leaders from around the country, working with leading education experts, has outlined what we believe are the components of effective teacher evaluation systems. This plan will strengthen teacher evaluation and adds a crucial element—teacher development.

It also puts data, including test scores, in the right context—as one of several measures to use but only when they are valid and reliable.

The AFT's approach to teacher development and evaluation includes: professional teaching standards, as well as standards for assessing teaching practice, implementation, teaching and learning conditions, systems of support and accountability. A system built around these components can then be aligned with a fair and effective due process system. The AFT is prepared to work with any district willing to work with us to take both steps—to implement a real teacher development and evaluation system and to create a due process system that's aligned to it.

Our new path forward also focuses on provisions that are necessary to successful schools, but frequently are lacking—the conditions teachers need to help students succeed, and the labor-management cooperation to make all other efforts achievable. (For more details about these proposals, see article on page 5 or go to www.futurestogether.org).

Why is a teachers union spearheading these efforts, which demand much of teachers and have consequential stakes attached? Because teachers already demand much of themselves,

and they want the supports in place to help them help their students. And because teachers and their unions should drive conversations and decisions about our profession—not be observers relegated to the sidelines.

We recently asked members the following question: When your union deals with issues

"I am proposing a new path forward toward a public education system defined by excellence, fairness, shared responsibility and mutual trust."

affecting both teaching quality and teachers' rights, which of these should be the higher priority—working for professional teaching standards and good teaching, or defending the job rights of teachers who face disciplinary action? By a ratio of 4-to-1 (69 percent to 16 percent), AFT members chose working for professional standards and good teaching as the higher priority. That might surprise some, but not those of us who work with teachers every day.

That is why you will hear me criticize ideas that others may call reform, but which show no knowledge or understanding of what it truly takes to help teachers teach and students learn. That is why I have laid out comprehensive proposals that can transform our schools so that teachers are treated as professionals and students are prepared for the realities of today's knowledge economy.

Teachers have an awesome responsibility to their students, but that responsibility is not ours alone. We are stepping up to the plate—and we are asking administrators and the many stakeholders in our children's futures to join us.



A Union of Professionals

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Building a better, more affordable car of the future

Philadelphia auto academy students are competing for a \$10 million prize



WEST PHILADELPHIA AUTO ACADEMY PHOTO

A TEAM OF STUDENTS from West Philadelphia High School has shown that they are capable of competing with the best in the world. They're still in the running to win first prize in a \$10 million contest to design an affordable car that gets 100 miles per gallon and can be mass produced.

In November, the competition announced that the kids from the auto academy were among 43 teams that will move on to the next phase of the design competition. Steve Wesołski, a member of the X PRIZE competition technical team that reviewed the school's submission, says "their level of detail and professionalism proved to us that they deserved to move forward in the competition."

Clockwise from above: Students from the West Philadelphia Auto Academy. AFT president Randi Weingarten during a recent visit to the school. PFT member David Jenkins is the academy's coordinator.



LAURIE PETERSON



LAURIE PETERSON

In addition to designing the high-mileage automobile, the students, who attend West Philadelphia Auto Academy, also must submit a business plan detailing where and how the car will be produced and marketed for sale.

The Philadelphia students are the only high school students in the X PRIZE competition, which is sponsored by Progressive Insurance.

They are competing against not only elite universities like Cornell but also noted car companies like Tesla Motors. The next phase of the competition judging takes place in the spring; the winner will be announced in October 2010.

Philadelphia Federation of Teachers member David Jenkins is the coordinator of the auto academy, which is housed in a building about two blocks from West Philadelphia High School. The hands-on training offered by the school "connects students with what they are doing in math, science and their other core courses," Jenkins points out.

About 130 students are enrolled in the academy, which offers courses in areas such as collision repair, electronics, brakes, suspension and engine performance.

Simon Hauger directs the school's X PRIZE competition team. He told the AFT's three national officers, who visited the school in September, that he began the program as a "way to bring together the academic and vocational."

Jenkins, who graduated from a Philadelphia vocational high school in the 1960s, bemoans the fact that students today don't have the vocational (or career and technical education) school options that he and his contemporaries enjoyed. "We had career choices and the opportunity to use our talents," he recalls.

The automotive academy, Jenkins says, exemplifies the saying "if you build it, they will come"—and apparently, they also will excel.

2010 CENSUS: STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

PARTICIPATING IN THE 2010 Census helps determine how more than \$400 billion in public funds will be allocated to communities throughout the nation. This means money for schools, roads and hospitals. And while it would seem as easy as making sure you fill out your census form (they're being mailed in March), there are hard-to-count communities that we can help reach. Historically, undercounted have included immigrants (both documented and undocumented), people of color, the homeless, formerly incarcerated individuals, and multiple-family, limited English-speaking, and low-income households.

In addition to adopting a resolution supporting the goals of the U.S. census, the AFT is in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau to make sure all of our members reach out to their students and co-workers to encourage a full count.

GET COUNTED

- Get involved in a "complete count committee"—there's one in every state. Go to http://2010.census.gov/partners/pdf/cccBrochure_update.pdf.
- Distribute fliers and information about the importance of the census. Go to <http://2010.census.gov/partners/materials>.
- Become a census taker. Even if you have a job, you can get temporary work as a census taker. Go to <http://2010.census.gov/2010censusjobs/>.

KEY DATES

- March 2010:** Census forms are mailed.
- April 1, 2010:** National Census Day—encourage family and friends to send their forms in.
- April-July 2010:** Census takers visit households that did not return a form by mail.
- December 2010:** the Census Bureau delivers population information to the president.



How can evaluation be part of a teacher's ongoing professional development?

IT'S YOUR VOICE We want to hear from you on issues throughout the year! Visit www.aft.org/voices today where you can respond to this and other questions.



Should classrooms go all digital?


NO

Black text on white paper still matters

BY JACKIE BENNETT

THERE ARE PLENTY of terrific reasons to include digital media in our classrooms. They give teachers and students access, quite literally, to a world of information. And they can deliver it via a medium that appeals to kids. Ultimately, however it is the job of teachers not only to meet kids where they are, but also to take them somewhere else. And, the question is not so much what we would gain from all-digital classrooms, but what would be lost.

What is lost is sustained linear reading. Digital technology tends to favor fragmentation, but what we owe children in a culture utterly splintered by fragmentation is a refuge from it. The ability to read black words on a white page unbroken by sidebars, catchy advertisements, and hot-linked avenues of escape—and the ability to do that for 20 minutes without looking up—that is a far more difficult skill to master than Googling and combining information into PowerPoint presentations (even when that Googled information has been critically evaluated and creatively combined).

To ignore digital technology and its potential uses in classrooms would be to play the Luddite, and I myself am no Luddite. Electronic readers deliver plain text unaccompanied by the bells, whistles and escape hatches of other digital forms. This appeals to the environmentalist in me, the reader in me and also the educator. And if I could get an electronic reader into the hands of all the fidgety students I've ever had the pleasure of introducing to a book, I'd do it. Who knows, after the fiddling is done, they just may read, and most teachers would call that a good start. They would not, however, be yelling, "mission accomplished."

It is true that the world wants our children to be able to access, evaluate and manipulate information. But is that all we want? I simply do not believe that surfing, clicking and creating yield us deeper pleasures, richer knowledge or a very thoughtful mind. Sustained linear reading can do that, but to become a sophisticated reader of sophisticated texts takes a lot of practice, even for natural readers. It is unlikely children will get much practice at that if they don't do it in our classes.

Jackie Bennett taught high school English in New York City for 18 years and is currently an executive board member for the United Federation of Teachers.


YES

More is better in today's digital age

BY SUSAN KNEIB SCHANK

STUDENTS TODAY ARE immersed in digital technology. They are far more at ease with a digital device in hand than paper and pencil. Why not move toward digital textbooks?

E-readers are quickly becoming more sophisticated and affordable. Regardless of the device, the advantages of adopting digital textbooks are many. They allow for up-to-the-minute content. Instead of waiting three or more years to adopt new textbooks, digital media can be updated continually. Digital textbooks allow teachers to customize content as well.

Going digital is more cost-effective. Instead of handing each student thousands of dollars in textbooks over the course of several years, a school system need only adopt a digital format that can be accessed on e-readers, phones and computers. Many textbook companies offer their content digitally, often at an average of 50 percent less than the cost of a new print textbook. The cost of providing each student a reading device is much more affordable than providing textbooks. Should students lose their devices, they would be charged just as if they lost a textbook.

Health benefits are another reason to go digital. Musculoskeletal problems are becoming more prominent in youth and young adults, partly due to carrying backpacks loaded with heavy texts. Digital technology makes it possible to eliminate this problem. And digital is green, helping to save natural resources.

Many e-readers are equipped to help students with special needs. The devices come with "read to me" features that will help sight-challenged students absorb content. This feature also allows students to multitask while studying. They can exercise, drive and do chores while listening to their reading assignment. This could also aid students who are not performing at grade-level literacy standards grasp subject content. Students who are physically challenged also will enjoy lighter, more portable readers.

E-texts are easily searchable, allowing students to locate specific topics and passages conveniently. They allow for note-taking and highlighting; and they offer extras, such as digital flashcards and quizzes. The more opportunities we give our students to use digital technologies, the better prepared they will be.

Susan Kneib Schank is a children's book author and school librarian in Kansas City, Mo.



WEIGH IN!

We want to hear your thoughts on the current "Speak Out" question. Go to www.aft.org/speakout to cast your vote.



In the last issue of *American Teacher*, our "Speak Out" question was:

Should educators end in-school fundraising?

ONLINE POLL RESULTS

37% YES

63% NO

"When my children were going to school, the building asked for \$20 per student so that they could end school fundraising. I was delighted to pay rather than buy wrapping paper and magazines I didn't need."

LINDA SMITH

 Anoka Hennepin
Education Minnesota

"Fundraising is the only way some schools can raise the money needed for sports, honor roll society, clubs, band and other activities."

PATRICIA HENRY

Detroit Federation of Teachers

"If the monies that are intended for education actually went to education, there would be less of a need to raise funds in the school."

WILLIE RICHARD III

Chicago Teachers Union

"How else will public schools get the supplies they need if fundraising is prohibited?"

JEAN LAWRENCE

 New Haven (Conn.)
Federation of Teachers

Teaching values that build character



IN SEVERAL LANGUAGES, the verb “to educate” refers not only to formal schooling but to a child’s entire upbringing. In this fullest sense of the word “education,” children learn good values every day and everywhere—at school, at home and in the community. The greatest need for this kind of education comes from children struggling with poverty or other circumstances that can block the ideas and ideals they need to

THESE KIDS HAVE HEART

THE AFT PARTNERED with Save the Children in fall 2009 to sponsor a card contest for Valentine’s Day. Students across the country submitted artwork incorporating hearts and values, and in December, young people nationwide voted for their favorite designs.

The top vote-getters have been turned into Valentine’s Day cards for anyone who donates to Save the Children’s fight against child poverty. Encourage parents, students and colleagues to support Save the Children and check out the winning designs at www.savethechildren.org/valentine.



A child’s creativity is reflected in one of the card contest’s winning entries.

become fine human beings.

The AFT has developed a Web site of activities that can help you instill five important values: compassion, courage, loyalty, honesty and responsibility. Examples appear below, and you can see the entire list, which includes activities for all grade levels, at www.aft.org/tools4teachers/generation-united/activities.htm. Included in these activities are references to classic literature, movies, music and art.

If you already teach these values, consider sharing your activities with us by filling out a brief form at <http://tinyurl.com/yly32ze>. If we add your activity to our Web site, we’ll send you a gift. Here are the five values:

Compassion incorporates love, mercy and pity in aiding others or in understanding what they’re going through. Too often we misidentify sentimentality as compassion, which is a virtue of action as well as emotion. It moves us to act for what is right and just.

Any literature inviting us to step into the shoes of other people, to share their perspectives and experiences, is relevant to cultivating compassion.

Sample activity: Middle to high school students—Explain the difference between sentimentality and compassion. Have them read the Walt Whitman poems, “O Captain! My Captain!” and “Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night” and identify which poem illustrates sentimentality and which illustrates compassion. Have students explain their reasoning.

Courage is not simply the mastery of fear through physical strength. It is fortitude that springs from spirit, honor and integrity. Courage develops over time. As Aristotle wrote: “We become ... brave by doing brave acts.” In other words, character traits, virtues and vices become ingrained through practice. Aristotle continues that “by being habituated to despise things that are terrible and to stand our ground against them, we become brave.”

Sample activity: Early elementary students—Read to students the story “Frog and Toad” by Arnold Lobel. Ask: Do you think Frog and Toad were courageous? Why?

Loyalty is being devoted to people, your country or a cause. Loyalty is at the core of human values. Without it, no social bonds exist. Loyalty can take many forms: the loyalty of the citizen to country, of the comrade to peers, of the individual to family. Loyalty requires us to look beyond our own needs and desires.

Sample activity: All students—Have them keep a journal reflecting on loyalty and whether their original thinking about it changes as they learn more about this value.

Honesty means telling the truth, even when it’s hard, and honesty goes hand in hand with integrity. Students must take themselves seriously, and one prerequisite is for teachers, administrators and other adults to take them seriously. Teaching

honesty should not be an exercise of convincing students that “honesty is the best policy.” It is better to teach that “honesty is better than all policy,” as Immanuel Kant wrote in his essay “Perpetual Peace.” **Sample activity:** Middle to high school students—Revisit “The Emperor’s New Clothes” and ask for historical examples in which people were dishonest in response to peer pressure, fear or insecurity. Ask students if they think there’s a way to eliminate these forces. How?

Responsibility is making sure you do what’s right and take ownership of your actions. Learning to be responsible is one of the most important lessons children are taught. They learn this value when they’re expected to complete their assignments, are entrusted with school property and are held accountable for their actions. Students also learn to be responsible by observing adults who act responsibly.

In a democracy, the lessons of responsibility are particularly important. Democracies require citizens to govern themselves, with individuals becoming responsible not only for their own actions but for those of the group.

Sample activity: Late elementary to middle school students—Have them identify unsung or lesser known heroes (historical and contemporary) who have acted responsibly, followed through and made the world around them better. Students should explain why they picked their hero.

A New Path Forward

AFT president proposes an action plan for a stronger public education system

PRESIDENT RANDI WEINGARTEN issued a challenge and an invitation to prominent education leaders in January: Cut through the mistrust, the long-standing animosities, the old growth that keeps schools rooted in a by-gone Industrial Age and chokes the path forward. Take those risks in good faith, the AFT president pledged, and you'll find willing, forthright partners in teachers and their unions.

Weingarten made her remarks at Washington, D.C.'s National Press Club in a major policy address on education, which was attended not only by the national media but also by AFT affiliate leaders, top education researchers and policymakers. The AFT president offered proposals for constructive action in four areas: evaluation, due process, classroom tools and labor-management relationships. All are avenues where stakeholders can blaze a path to progress and pull schools from the mire of factory models designed more than a century ago. "If we can work together on these four proposals, we can create a path to a stronger public education system that is defined by excellence, fairness, shared responsibility and mutual trust," she said. The result will be "a system rooted in the realities of the 21st century, focused squarely on serving the needs of our children and preparing them to reach their full potential."

This work is already under way, stressed the AFT president, who drew from real-life examples of how teachers, schools and districts already are taking risks together and embarking on a collaborative "new path" to school improvement. She spoke of teachers in Detroit who, at considerable personal sacrifice, negotiated a settlement that brought a school system back from the edge of economic collapse and kept progress on track. She highlighted groundbreaking agreements in Hartford, Conn., new models for professional

growth in Pittsburgh and Hillsborough, Fla., and one West Philadelphia high school where great teachers are helping students put together engineering projects that smoke competitors from Cornell and MIT.

These are the places where "we're seeing teachers, administrators, parents and elected officials work side by side to help their students reach greater heights," Weingarten said.

While examples of cooperation abound, "others have ignored our offer to work in common purpose," she cautioned. "They have chosen, instead, to fixate on the supposed silver

Teachers deserve more than a flimsy process that rests on "a snapshot from a brief classroom visit or one standardized test," Weingarten said, and AFT affiliates from Florida to Pennsylvania already are working to make them a thing of the past. Now, the union is redoubling its push for "informed evaluations," Weingarten told the crowd, by gathering AFT leaders from around the country to work with leading researchers on the issue. This ad hoc committee put forth a new approach that rests on professional teaching standards, multiple means of teacher evaluation, faithful implementation by administrators and professional support that extends throughout a teacher's career. "We propose rigorous reviews by trained experts and peer evaluators and principals, based on

"We're seeing teachers, administrators, parents and elected officials work side by side to help their students reach greater heights."

bullet of doing away with 'bad teachers.'"

It's a dead-end remedy, one that bodes ill for teachers and students alike, Weingarten warned. "It fails to recognize that we have a systems problem."

Real change demands that schools improve teacher development and evaluation. For too long, teachers have been saddled with an outmoded system where an administrator sits in the classroom for a few minutes, a few times in the first few years of teaching, and the teacher is "rated" at year's end.

"That is like a football team watching the game tape once the season is over," Weingarten said.

AFT president Randi Weingarten, left, speaking at the National Press Club on the need to work in partnership for better schools.

professional teaching standards, best practices and student achievement."

When it comes to achievement, "student test scores based on valid and reliable assessments should also be considered—not by comparing the scores of last year's students with the scores of this year's students, but by assessing whether a teacher's students show real growth" while they're in the teacher's classroom.

Weingarten prefaced her second reform, in the area of due process, by unleashing a withering attack against those who say teachers treat evaluation as a way to mask poor performance. It's a straw man, Weingarten said, part of the "bad teacher" narrative—and it's the teachers themselves who will have nothing to do with it.

AFT members by a ratio of 4-to-1 say working for professional standards and good teaching should be a higher union priority than de-

Continued on next page



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL CAMPBELL

Continued from previous page

fending the job rights of teachers facing disciplinary action. "When a teacher is floundering, there are not only repercussions for the students but also for the teachers down the hall," Weingarten said. "They, and the AFT, want a fair, transparent and expedient process to identify and deal with ineffective teachers."

The union stands ready to work on this issue—but the groundwork must be in place, the AFT president said.

"We are prepared to work with any district

willing to work with us to take both steps—to design and implement a real teacher development and evaluation system and to create a due process system that's aligned to it. But *only* if they're prepared to do both."

In cases of misconduct and malfeasance, "teachers have zero tolerance for people who, through their conduct, demonstrate they are unfit for our profession," and the AFT will work to develop "a fair, efficient protocol for adjudicating questions of teacher discipline and, when called for, teacher removal" with Kenneth Feinberg, known for his work as special master for the September 11 Victim Compensation Fund.

Schools can make promising inroads with a fresh approach to due process and constructive evaluation, Weingarten said, but, "if our goal is to truly transform our public education system, we can't stop there."

Schools and school systems must be held accountable, too, for providing "an environment that sets everyone up for success." It would feature "small classes, safe schools, a solid curriculum, healthy and adequate facilities," Weingarten explained, "and opportunities for parent involvement." It also would foster a climate of trust, where teachers are treated as real reform partners, and restore that scarcest

of educational commodities: time.

"Let's face it: Teachers have plenty on their plates just trying to get through the day," Weingarten pointed out. "More and more is piled onto teachers so they often feel like they're running faster and faster just to hold their ground. ... Time to share and grow together is as critical as any other educational ingredient" for teachers.

Finally, Weingarten called for a new labor-management chapter in schools—one where "a mutual responsibility to ensure student and school success" is ultimately transformed into "a mutual commitment" to those ends. "Our relationship should be a constant conversation that begins before and continues long after we leave the bargaining table."

These changes won't happen overnight, nor will they happen without a good-faith commitment to truly involve teachers in the classroom, Weingarten reminded the audience.

"True progress takes place in those important hours when students and teachers come together and the spark of learning can catch light," she stressed.

"Our job is to make sure that everything is in place for those daily miracles to occur."

WEB SITE CHARTS 'A NEW PATH'

THINK OF IT as your own briefing room. The AFT's new, dedicated Web site (www.futurestogether.org) allows members to watch the full video of AFT president Randi Weingarten's Jan. 12 speech and offers valuable background on this major policy address. Featured are the full text of the AFT's Continuous Improvement Model for Teacher Evaluation and personal stories from teachers that illustrate their dedication and professionalism. Members also can sign up to stay informed as this "new path forward" builds momentum across America.



TEACHERS' LOUNGE

JITTERS BE GONE Here's a tried-and-true method for overcoming nervousness, sent in by retired speech and English teacher **Shula Hirsch of Bellmore, N.Y.** When her students got jittery while presenting book reports, speeches, or even during class discussions, she would instruct them to curl their toes. "It removes the tensions from the neck and speech mechanism to the toes, which no one else can see," Hirsch says. "As a result, the speaker becomes relaxed and does a better job of communicating. To this day, Hirsch says she receives letters from students she taught 30 or 40 years ago—who are now doctors, lawyers, judges and salespeople—thanking her for this tip, which they say has helped make their work easier and still helps reduce anxiety."



"ASK IT" BASKET "I made up this activity years ago for my speech communications class," but it can be tailored to fit any classroom, says high school teacher **Simona Herring of Pinson, Ala.** The idea provides an anonymous way for a student to ask a difficult question and receive advice from peers. "We sit in a circle, and students put their questions in a basket that we pass."



WWW.COULTERINDUSTRIES.COM

Herring monitors the questions. "It's a wonderful way to get some good info and feedback and not feel intimidated," she says. "Those who want to respond do—but it's not required. The types of questions the kids ask: How do you handle your parents' divorce? What is the best way to tell your friend to stop drinking? Do you think it's all right for girls to ask guys out? The monthly activity is very popular, Herring says. "Getting feedback from peers in a non-threatening atmosphere is invaluable."

DUST BUSTERS If you like a clean chalkboard, but have one that doesn't get washed as often as you'd like, "don't fret," says middle school foreign language teacher **Elaine Smith of Macomb, Mich.** Purchase a box of those extra-soft facial tissues that

contain lotion, Smith advises.

"They're not for your nose, but for your board. Simply wrap one around your eraser before you erase and 'Voila!' Your board will look like it has just been washed. I don't erase without one."

RECESSION-PROOF IDEA "Tough economic times called for 'tightening my belt,' not only at home but also in my classroom," says **Billie Rainey of Winter Park, Fla.**, who teaches grades 6-8. To streamline classroom goodies or incentives, she's replaced concrete rewards (which earlier included school supplies or edible treats) with music. She reports that classroom management is now "a breeze." When students stay on task, they can mellow out to their favorite tunes. "I warn them that if the group is not following classroom procedures, my choice of music (old-school) may be playing in the background." The peer pressure is on. "They do not want to hear Ms. Rainey's music!"

HAVE A TIP TO SHARE?

Submissions to "Teachers' Lounge" can be made online at www.aft.org/teacherslounge or sent in care of *American Teacher*. We will pay \$40 for each idea published.



National education coverage is almost invisible

Study finds only 1.4 percent of national news devoted to education

FIRST THE GOOD NEWS. National media coverage of public education doubled from 2008 to 2009. The bad news? Even with that increase, only 1.4 percent of national news coverage in 2009 dealt with education.

The title of a new report from the Brookings Institution aptly describes the current state of national media attention to education: “Invisible: 1.4 Percent Coverage for Education Is Not Enough.” And the stories that did appear were only marginally related to the central issues of improving education, such as standards, assessments and teacher quality. Instead, budget problems, school crime and the H1N1 outbreak were the top stories of the year.

One challenge for newspapers, in particular, has been the steady decline in circulation, which has led to consolidation and layoffs across the industry. A casualty at some papers has been the reporter working on the education beat. Overall, the report notes, from 1990 to 2008, the number of newspaper subscribers has dropped 22 percent—this during a period when the overall population

increased more than 20 percent.

One segment of the education sector was particularly overlooked in 2009: Community colleges, which have become an especially important part of the discussion about job training and retraining to prepare students and workers for the changing economy, received only 2.9 percent of the overall education coverage. “From the standpoint of national media coverage,” the report says, “community colleges barely exist.”

New media, such as blogs, have helped fill the gap in education coverage to a small extent. But, the authors add, they are not a replacement for “regular, systematic and ongoing coverage” by news outlets. The online coverage of education by national outlets—including major operations such as CNN, the *New York Times* and MSNBC—was typically much more extensive than coverage in their broadcast or print versions.

The report also looked at some examples

of local education coverage and found that, in general, local newspapers were more substantive, and devoted more attention to education policy and school reform than did national news organizations.

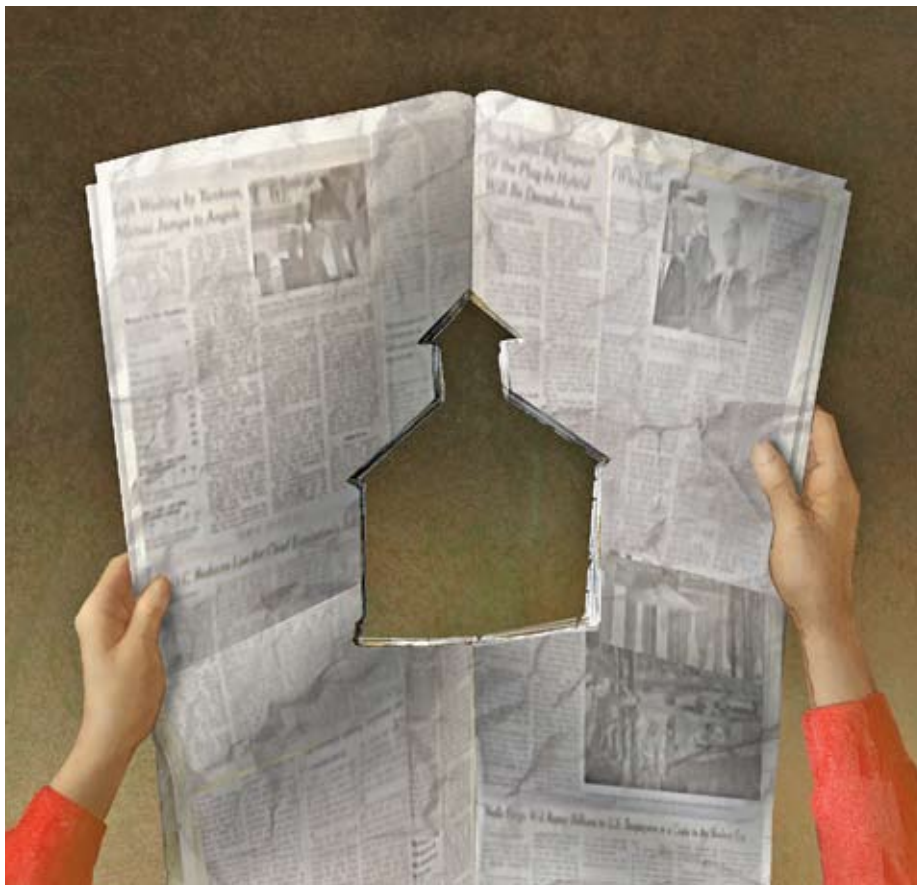
“The disappearance of education news coverage is so pervasive and so rooted in many different causes that it will take a concerted effort on the part of all involved (news organizations, education administrators, government leaders, school boards, parents, students and community leaders) to slow,

“The paltry amount of space and time accorded to the core questions surrounding educational improvement is inimical to the public interest.” —BROOKINGS INSTITUTION REPORT

much less reverse, this trend,” the authors write. They include eight steps they believe would make a difference in improving both the quantity and quality of education coverage.

Among the recommendations: Schools need to understand that communications is important to their central mission; students can be an important part of communications, through student newspapers, social media and other vehicles; reporters should draw on education research in the way that healthcare reporters use medical research; newspapers and other media outlets that have cut back on education reporting should reconsider these decisions; and media publishers and editors should find ways to integrate high-quality education blogs and forms of citizen journalism into press outlets.

“The pressures to cover hot-button issues and ideologically divisive questions are immense,” the report concludes. “News organizations are usually rewarded by interested readers when they cover celebrities or controversial personalities. We fully understand the financial pressures facing traditional news outlets. But the paltry amount of space and time accorded to the core questions surrounding educational improvement is inimical to the public interest. We count on the media to bring critical issues to the attention of a free citizenry. ... We do think that the media can do better than according a mere 1.4 percent of their output to the future of our children.”



NENAD JAKSEVIC

Testing: Members add classroom voice to federal hearings

AFT makes sure Obama administration hears teachers' views on student assessments

AFT MEMBERS SPARED no effort this past fall when it came to keeping the voices of frontline teachers in the mix at a series of federal hearings on how to help states build a new, better generation of student assessments.

At stake was the administration's new \$350 million competitive grant program to help states work together as they develop and implement high-quality assessments. These assessments will be aligned to a common set of internationally benchmarked K-12 standards. The program, known as the Race to the Top Assessment Program, is distinct from the more publicized \$4.35 billion program with a similar name. However, many of the assessment strategies developed by consortia of states under the smaller, testing-focused competitive grant program are expected to hold great sway over Race to the Top grants and even the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

At a series of fall hearings in Atlanta, Boston and Denver, the U.S. Department of Education gathered leading researchers in testing and solicited public comment as it begins to

constituted the biggest voice for classroom teachers at these hearings, expressing on-the-ground professional concerns and hopes when it comes to testing and accountability.

The nation "has the potential to implement assessments that are responsible and fair," said Catalina Fortino, a Teacher Center staffer in New York City public schools who traveled more than 2,000 miles to testify at the Dec. 2 Denver hearings, which focused on assessment of English language learners (ELLs).

Current testing of ELLs' content knowledge is "often not fair, not valid—and neither reliable nor appropriate," stressed Fortino, who works with content-area teachers on strategies to help ELL students do their best. Much of ELL testing today is simply an afterthought, often grafted from work tied to the needs of students with disabilities.

"I know all too well the toll that a rigorous exam can take on ELLs who have not had enough time to learn the core academic language," Fortino told the Education Department panel.

Jody Papini, a 15-year veteran teacher in Douglas County, Colo., also testified at the Denver hearings. She urged the administration, as it develops rules for the new assessment initiative, to carefully consider the AFT's "Smart Testing" criteria—including supportive professional development that details how assessments are tied to state curricula and standards.

She suggested that the Education Department require states that participate in the program to develop tests that do not duplicate across education system levels and that do generate user-friendly test results. "Most importantly, require that they take into account the impact of such assessments on the day-to-day classroom experience of our children."

The AFT is urging the administration to develop rules that will spur states to recognize that strong standards and assessments are the "bookends" of reform. Their success depends on time, adequate resources, strong professional development and other elements that constitute the heart of school improvement.

Rules for the new competitive grant program are expected by March.

DETROIT TEACHERS SHOW COMMITMENT TO CITY'S SCHOOLS

MEMBERS OF THE Detroit Federation of Teachers have ratified what AFT president Randi Weingarten calls a "remarkable contract" that includes cutting-edge education reforms as well as financial sacrifices by the city's teachers.

The Detroit Public Schools (DPS) has committed to provide better teaching and learning environments, improved tools for instruction, more professional development, and a voice in education decisions. Although compensation in the next two years will be reduced, teachers will receive a raise in the third year and a bonus when they leave the district.

"Teachers had to swallow hard and accept financial sacrifices," Weingarten says. "The approval of these provisions demonstrates Detroit teachers' unwavering commitment to improving teaching and learning in their public schools."

Through a respectful, collaborative process, both sides achieved two crucial goals—stabilizing a school system and stabilizing a city.

"We hope negotiations with DPS's office employees and paraprofessionals will be conducted in the same solution-oriented and cooperative manner," the AFT president adds.

From left, AFT members Jody Papini, Catalina Fortino and Kristina Robertson brought the teachers' voice to federal hearings on testing.



ERNIE LEYBA

the turnaround

In Atlanta, improved collaboration pays off in student gains, better union-district relations



Member involvement has grown along with improved relations between the union and school district officials, says Atlanta federation president Verdallia Turner, at right above. Below, the AFT affiliate's professional development program has "taken off," says Remonia Toombs, center.



PHOTOS BY ALEX JONES

THINGS ARE LOOKING UP in Atlanta where a close working relationship between the Atlanta Public Schools and the Atlanta Federation of Teachers has resulted in improved student performance and increased access to professional development for teachers. Both sides agree that the once-dysfunctional relationship between the AFT affiliate and the district's superintendent and school board has been transformed.

"The maintenance of a good working relationship with the Atlanta Federation of Teachers is an important ingredient in fostering the remarkable turnaround in our student academic performance here at the Atlanta Public Schools over the past decade," says Atlanta school superintendent Beverly L. Hall. "I highly value this relationship, because it allows us to continue to devote our energies to escalating student achievement in our classrooms."

Since Hall took the helm of the Atlanta schools a decade ago, students have posted significant academic gains on state tests for eight consecutive years, class sizes have been reduced and all of the district's elementary schools have met adequate yearly progress. In addition, the school system has received a \$1.4 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support its effort to improve high school graduation rates.

Hall and the AFT opened up lines of communication that had been severed during previous superintendencies.

Hall is "open and receptive to our input," says Verdallia Turner, president of the Atlanta AFT local, which represents 1,800 teachers and paraprofessionals. "The new relationship is building a greater respect for the union and

that has been good for the kids and good for teachers."

The city still has its problems—a shrinking population, teacher turnover and a lack of parent involvement—but "instead of fighting one another, we can work together to get the resources we need for student learning," says Turner. "We can have open, honest dialogue about what's working and most importantly, what's not. And we know that our opinions are thoroughly respected."

Now that the union and the district are engaged in an active partnership, the AFT has been able to focus much more of its efforts on professional development—through its Educational Research and Dissemination program (ER&D). Remonia Toombs, who oversees ER&D for the local, says she has seen a remarkable change over the years.

"Our ER&D program has really taken off," reports Toombs, who says members are very receptive to the professional development programs offered by the local. So much so, that the union has had to turn people away.

"We used to struggle to get people to sign up for these courses," says Toombs. Now the school district is doing more to promote the program, she says. For the last couple of years, the superintendent has included the union's ER&D courses in the district's professional development catalog.

There had been "a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation in the past," says Turner. "Now that there is a better relationship, we can call on the district to answer questions and get an answer, not the brushoff."

The AFT's influence has grown in other ways as well. The school board also has a warmer relationship with the local now, even seeking the union's advice before making decisions concerning policy. And state lawmakers are starting to ask for the AFT's position on certain legislation, adds Turner.

The local president also notes that the union has better working relationships with school principals, which often means that problems can be solved before they reach the grievance level. "There is a much more respectful atmosphere," Turner says, "and that has opened up the lines of communication at all levels."

One of the best changes of all: "Our members are more involved," says Turner. "They come out and participate in our events. Some of them want to be building reps. Before, we had to go looking for people to get involved."



A quality arts education can

BY ROGER S. GLASS

WE'VE ALL HEARD stories about struggling students who were falling further and further behind their peers (and whose interest in school was waning along with their grades) until someone, usually a teacher, pushed the right button. And, all of a sudden, those students had a renewed interest in school and in their future success.

For some young people, that “right button” is the arts. Many kids find their motivation and future niche in science, math or English classes, but for others it’s exposure to music, theater, dance or the visual arts that both motivates them and gives them an opportunity to shine.

New York City second-grade teacher Jessica Carbone has witnessed profound changes in students who have been exposed to the arts. “I’ve seen shy students come out of their shell and develop a self-confidence that I hadn’t seen before. They start to believe in themselves.”

There’s a wealth of research to support assertions that instruction in music and the other arts has a positive impact on everything from brain development and test scores to study habits and a student’s interest in school.

“For many students, the arts and music

are what make school really interesting. They provide outlets for creativity and emotion. They provide opportunities to engage all the senses, and they support academic learning,” asserts Ann Teich, a member of Education Austin in Texas.

Yet, despite the well-documented value of arts education, many art and music teachers say they are regularly called upon to rationalize their worth, to prove that what they teach is more than a “fun” subject or a frill designed to provide students with a break from their regular classroom routine. This is especially true in the current environment with its emphasis on testing and “core” subjects.

“For some reason, there is this underlying element in the arts that makes you feel you have

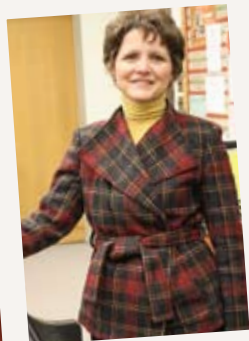
to justify what you’re doing,” says Karla Beck, who teaches choral music and music history at St. James High School in St. James, Minn.

It’s not just hard-working educators who recognize the importance of art and music instruction to a well-rounded education. In a letter to education leaders last August, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan noted that the arts “play a significant role in children’s development and learning process.”

“The arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem solvers who are confident and able to think creatively,” wrote Duncan, pointing out that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act defines the arts as a core subject.

Supporting the teaching and learning of the arts

Do we give music and art education too much credit for enhancing academic and social success? Richard Kessler doesn’t think so. Kessler is the executive director of the Center for Arts Education (CAE) in New York City. A recent CAE study shows that the high schools with the most access to—and support for—arts education have the



Minnesota choral music teacher Karla Beck, left, has her students, right, keep a portfolio with information about the songs they sing. Jessica Carbone, far right, teaches at a New York City school where art is integrated across the curriculum. Teachers admire a student’s art project, bottom right.





enhance a student's academic performance.

city's highest graduation rates.

"As we looked at the data, we started to see the consistency in terms of what schools provide in the arts and how these schools and students were doing," Kessler says.

Like other arts education advocates, Kessler believes the arts are essential to developing the whole child. "If we really are concerned about all kids getting a quality, well-rounded education," then arts education must be part of the equation.

Not surprisingly, there are often profound inequities in access to art and music education. While most private schools and suburban schools offer a range of art and music programs, that's often not true of schools that serve our most disadvantaged youngsters.

In those New York City schools with the lowest graduation rates, students have the least opportunity to participate in arts learning, the CAE study shows. A core mission of Kessler's organization has been to build a "critical mass of schools with quality arts education programs in order to highlight their value and importance and encourage similar programs throughout the New York City public schools," Kessler says.

The Center for Arts Education has collaborated with the United Federation of Teachers' Teacher Center on a series of arts education professional development conferences. The first, held in mid-November, focused on grades K-5 and the integration of arts across the curriculum. Educators, parents and administrators attending the conference were joined by professionals from the world of

dance, theater and music.

CAE is committed to "doing more to support the teaching and learning of the arts," including helping to make sure teachers receive the professional development and in-service training they want and need, says Kessler, who credits the UFT with helping to create CAE almost 20 years ago.

"It's important that we show members how to integrate the arts into their lessons," says Roberto Benitez from the UFT Teacher Center staff, adding that tighter school budgets are forcing educators to find "creative and innovative ways to teach the arts."

Benitez says the union also wants to help schools identify arts organizations, museums and other cultural institutions that it can partner with to bring additional arts resources into the schools.

Carbone, who teaches at P.S. 151 in Brooklyn, was a presenter at the November conference. The UFT member says the integration of arts instruction across the curriculum is a central aspect of the elementary school's program. And "you don't need a vast background in the arts or music to incorporate arts into the curriculum."

Students are introduced to advanced vocabulary words through the dialogue and songs they learn in preparing for a play, Carbone says. "And the arts have helped them learn to work cooperatively and to believe in themselves and their talents, which carries over into their classroom performance."

Florida teacher Scott Leahy, below, says that students like those in the band he conducts benefit immensely from the outlet provided by the arts.

Continued on page 12

How does arts and music education contribute to student success?

"Not all students are able to learn in the traditional paper-and-pencil setting. Art or music gives them another avenue they may follow that will allow their creativity to flow, give them a positive experience and allow that experience to help them learn the skills needed to be successful."

KATHI VOGLER
Cleveland Teachers Union

"It's high time that arts classes are considered to be core subjects. No more designation as 'frills!'"

CORINNE McVEE
Anchorage (Alaska) Council of Education

"Arts and music education is the reason some kids get up every morning and come to school."

EVERICE MORO
Oregon School Employees Association

"If readin', writin', and 'rithmetic are the heart of education, the arts and music are the soul."

MARTHA HANSEN
Harrison (N.Y.) Association of Teachers

"When schools phase out their fine arts program to make way for more classes geared toward passing standardized tests, a great disservice is done to the child."

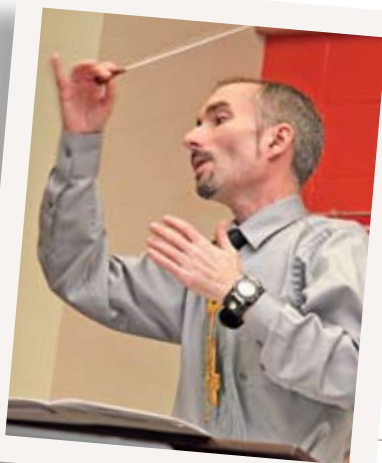
RHONDA POHNER
Education Austin (Texas)

"Music and art education serves to broaden children's perspective on life and helps them to become more well-rounded individuals."

NORMA CORONA
Chicago Teachers Union

"The arts are what keep us grounded and humane. Without them as a part of our life, we would lose so much of our history, culture and who we are as a people."

SHARON MOREHOUSE
Beaverhead (Mont.) Education Association





Continued from page 11

Connecting across the curriculum

Arts instruction is often most effective when three or four art forms—such as music, dance and acting—are combined.

Scott Leahy, who teaches music and band at Stewart Middle School in Pasco County, Fla., recalls a musical production he helped put together at a county elementary school where he used to teach. The musical was about the Roman Empire, and Leahy and several other classroom teachers used it as a springboard to incorporate lessons about the period into their curriculum.

The school's art teacher "had her students do projects based on the historical period that the students were learning about in preparation for the play," says Leahy, adding that the students' art was displayed in an area set up as a "museum," which parents could visit when they came to see the musical.

At Stewart, Leahy continues to try to connect what students are learning in their other classes to what he teaches.

Currently in her 11th year as a teacher, Beck considers her class a wholistic experience that engages a student's mind, body and spirit.

Kids in her choral music class learn how to read music, receive instruction in good posture and breathing techniques, and gain an appreciation for how music and the other arts feed the spirit.

There's more to choral music than meets the eye—or ear, Beck stresses. "A lot of people think that we just get up and sing."

Beck often has her students sing songs in languages other than English. "My students have learned Spanish, Latin and Hebrew" through the songs they've been asked to sing.

"The arts have helped students learn to work cooperatively and to believe in themselves and their talents, which carries over into their classroom performance." —JESSICA CARBONE, New York City elementary school teacher

Keeping kids engaged and in school

Several of the educators interviewed for this article say today's emphasis on testing and test prep often is done at the expense of electives like arts education.

Leahy believes this hurts the very kids who benefit most from music and art—students who are struggling academically and need both the outlet and the opportunity to experience success in school that the arts can provide. "Sometimes we don't look at the big picture when it comes to music and art and how they enhance learning," he says.

Galveston, Texas, English teacher Selena Stair is convinced that many of her students

"would have dropped out if they had not had the creative outlet, personal validation and sense of community that come from playing in a band or working on a play."

CAE's Kessler thinks it will take parents, teachers unions, administrators—and their community and business allies—working together to ensure that arts education continues to play a pivotal role in a child's public school education. "A big part of what's been missing is advocacy and public engagement on behalf of arts education," he says.

Leahy agrees. "We've got to be more proactive in communicating the value of arts and music education."

BETTER LEARNING THROUGH MUSIC AT ONE CHARTER SCHOOL

RESEARCH SHOWS that knowledge and music are intertwined, and it would be tough to name a school that weaves this fabric tighter than the Conservatory Lab Charter School in Brighton, Mass.

AFT-represented teachers at this unique K-5 school work collaboratively to implement an instructional approach called the "Learning Through Music" curriculum model first developed at the New England conservatory. It holds that the five processes underpinning the study of music—listening, questioning, creating, performing and reflecting—also serve as the essential ingredients for teaching and learning in all disciplines. It's easy to see this strategy in action at Conservatory Lab: Students learn addition and subtraction in math class and then use those skills to compare and vary rhythmic patterns in music; in Social Studies, they make the American Revolution come alive by learning and singing songs of the period.

It's "the most innovative school I've ever taught at," teacher Christina Marasco-Lopreste told the AFT Massachusetts *Advocate*. "The staff has big ideas—we care about kids."

While the vision behind Conservatory Lab is clear and singular, the school in its 10-year history has dealt with the same problems that have beleaguered many charter schools. Turnover rates topped 50 percent in a typical year, and there had been a revolving door of administrators and a pervasive sense of insecurity and instability that was ill-suited to both staff and student success.

But the charter school and its teachers took a major leap forward this school year to restore continuity and true collaboration so necessary to the success of any school. Last year, teachers voted to make Conservatory Lab the first unionized charter in Massachusetts. This past fall, both sides approved a new three-year agreement that addresses chronic instability through "just cause" language and a grievance procedure with binding arbitration. And it also includes a new evaluation tool that teachers at Conservatory Lab will play a major role in designing.

All of these elements bode well for the school, says Mona Rashad, who taught violin at the school. She hopes the contract will return Conservatory Lab's program to the forefront, rather than "so many issues related to working conditions."



Race to the Top revisited

AFT input yields improvement in \$4.35 billion school program—but are states on board?

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT of Education released final rules for its Race to the Top (RTTT) grants late last year, and the final product is a substantial improvement over earlier drafts.

Many changes in the final rules reflect suggestions made by the AFT, our affiliates and our members. Final RTTT regulations are less prescriptive on such key issues as charter school proliferation and the use of test scores in teacher evaluation. Yet they are more explicit on the need for evaluation systems designed and developed with teachers. Significantly, the \$4.35 billion competitive grant program features strong, clear incentives for states to work with teachers, their state and local affiliates, and other stakeholders.

“The Department of Education worked hard to strike the right balance” and promote deep collaboration that leads to systemwide improvement for schools and kids, AFT president Randi Weingarten says. And AFT affiliates around the country have fought tooth and nail to keep that promise—taking every opportunity to work with states on plans that stand a real chance of succeeding because they are rooted in real partnership.

When bids came due in late January, however, it was doubtful that all states would join the AFT and remain faithful to the RTTT promise.

As *American Teacher* went to press, good progress was reported in states such as Colorado, Connecticut, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. These states were inviting teachers to the table—looking to win the broad buy-in that RTTT is explicitly designed to support.

Teachers in other states have not been so fortunate. Their efforts to work collaboratively and substantively have been shunned, and

RTTT drafters have opted to cheat or game the system. Some states, for example, have adopted a “shut up and sign” approach with stakeholders when it comes to RTTT plans, keeping them under wraps throughout the process. Others paid lip service to collaboration and then cut the playing field in half—imposing things like arbitrary rules on how much student test scores must count in teacher evaluation before the discussion even began.

“Teachers’ top priority is their students. That’s why they are withholding support for Race to the Top applications in states where the process has been more like a dictatorship than a partnership, and where the so-called reforms would do more harm than good,” Weingarten told the *Wall Street Journal* last month. “In some cases, teachers were asked to OK the application before they were allowed to read it. Only a fool would sign an important document without reading it, and teachers are no fools.”

Without the teamwork that RTTT is designed to support, the AFT president warned, “we could be back in a situation where top-down management practices continue, data collection and measurement for measurement’s sake still rule the day, and responsibility for student performance is not shared with anyone beyond teachers and schools.”

Although a minority of states are expected to receive funding, the influence of RTTT will likely extend beyond the participants. That’s because many concepts embedded in Race to the Top regulations—particularly in the areas of teacher evaluation and help for low-performing schools—are expected to shape other federal education law. And RTTT also offers a litmus test on policymaking. There are promising state examples of old wounds

being healed, new partnerships being forged and real progress being made. There are also examples of lost opportunity—RTTT turned on its head, used as a cleaver to split partners or as a bludgeon to settle old scores.

RTTT “put a premium on collaboration among all stakeholders—and for good reason,” Weingarten says. “It is the only way to ensure that all children have the education we’d each want for our own child.”

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS ARE A MIXED BAG

FINAL RULES for Title I School Improvement Grants (SIG), a \$3.5 billion fund to help schools deemed to be the most persistently low achieving, turned out to be a mixed bag for schools—reflecting to some degree input from the AFT and its affiliates, but also saddled with requirements that are neither research-based nor likely to increase student achievement.

On the positive side, SIG rules contain prescribed models for turning around struggling schools that emphasize job-embedded professional development, improved school climate and discipline, expanded instructional time, and strategies to engage families and communities. All of these were AFT-supported positions, and all were preserved in the final regulations. Some other changes the union suggested—such as ensuring that communities are not disrupted and students are not displaced when schools are closed—also were incorporated in the final rules.

Unfortunately, some SIG rules do not reflect the research base and are unlikely to help the program achieve its aim of turning around persistently low-achieving schools. They also place the federal government in the middle of individual school staffing decisions and collective bargaining discussions. For example, one of the four turnaround models included in SIG still requires replacing 50 percent of staff despite there being no evidence that this has any track record of success.

Funding for SIG has risen dramatically—up from \$125 million in 2007—with most of the increase coming from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.



Learning and fun that are second to none

Washington, D.C., preschools showcased during educators' conference

CASE STUDIES IN “hope and possibility” is how AFT president Randi Weingarten summed up the experience when she and Washington Teachers' Union president George Parker joined school officials in late November for a tour of preschool classes serving some of Washington, D.C.'s toughest neighborhoods.

The delegation, which included District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Deputy Chancellor Kaya Henderson and Director of Early Childhood Education Miriam Calderon, visited William B. Patterson Elementary School and Leckie Elementary School. Together, union leaders and administrators paid tribute to the good work under way for young learners in the nation's capital. And, in a school system that often makes headlines for stormy relations, AFT and DCPS officials both welcomed the opportunity to showcase the teamwork that has made early childhood education in D.C.'s public schools

a bastion of progress and a national beacon when it comes to quality, scope and reach.

According to DCPS, 85 of the 123 schools in the system have early childhood education programs. These programs include prekindergarten for 4-year-olds, Head Start and preschool for 3-year-olds. The WTU's Early Childhood Educators Network leads the professional development program for early childhood educators, working in partnership with the nonprofit advocacy group PreK for All DC, and the Early Childhood Leadership Institute based at the University of the District of Columbia, to provide high-quality training. And in 2008, the union launched classes for early childhood educators to study and share best practices.

These efforts are clearly paying dividends at Patterson and Leckie. The 3- and 4-year-olds often seemed too engaged in well-structured lessons, games and projects at activity stations to pay much mind to the officials and cameras crowding into their rooms during the tour. The children were generous, however, when it came to including the adults in their circle discussion of a story about pilgrims and Native Americans—and they not

only let the adults help put finishing touches on art projects tied to the seasons of the year, but also allowed them to join in a spontaneous, a cappella rendition of “Let It Snow.”

‘They can do anything’

Patterson preschool teacher Angela Thompson-Murphy says that she and paraprofessional Margaret Wage work to offer developmentally appropriate activities with the right mix of fun, learning and high expectations. “The school's basic belief is that students can do anything, and they know that.”

Wage says she and Thompson-Murphy often receive compliments from faculty in upper grades who tell them that students from the preschool come well prepared to learn. “We work with [the preschoolers] so that they know the set-up and the routine” of the school day. “It's very important for them at this age.”

“As good as anything you'll find at Sidwell Friends,” was the deputy chancellor's assessment of what she saw, comparing preschool programs serving one of the District's most disadvantaged with those housed in one of the city's elite private schools.

“The collaboration here is real—you can see it, you can feel it, you can touch it,” said Weingarten. The mission now, she stressed, is not just to celebrate what's happening in these programs but to build on it. “It's all about how to grow what works—and these two great schools are all about what works.”

“There is so much quality here, in the teaching and learning going on in these classes, and it shows up later” as students move to upper grades, said Parker. The WTU president noted that it was exciting and fitting to showcase District preschool classrooms on a week when 20,000 educators gathered in Washington, D.C., for the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Many Washington, D.C., teachers took time to join colleagues at the NAEYC conference, where the AFT offered professional training and materials to educators. The union also collected signatures for the AFT “Worthy Wage Day” quilt. The quilt—filled with signatures of Americans urging policymakers to support professional compensation for the early childhood educators—will be delivered to Capitol Hill.



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL CAMPBELL



Clockwise from bottom: Washington Teachers' Union president George Parker shares a happy moment with a group of preschoolers. AFT president Randi Weingarten gets a kid's-eye view of the District of Columbia's outstanding preschool programs. AFT training and materials were a hit during a major early childhood education conference held in Washington, D.C., in the fall.

Teaching green principles, pushing for green schools

As frontline experts on environmental education, teachers are sharing their knowledge

TEACHERS TEND TO BE pathfinders in doing the most good for the most people, and that's certainly true when it comes to teaching the next generation to "go green."

Last fall, the AFT co-sponsored an online seminar about educating for sustainability in K-12 schools. During the webinar in November, which can be replayed online (<http://tiny.cc/teachingsustainabilitywebinar>), educators presented case studies and shared resources on how they infuse environmental principles into their teaching. Narrated slide-shows ranged from a statewide farm-to-school project in Vermont to studies of the water cycle in Georgia and native cougars in Washington state. Among about 230 listeners, the AFT had more than a dozen participants from Indiana, New York, Texas and other states.

The webinar was part of the AFT's Building Minds, Minding Buildings campaign. Other co-sponsors included the Association for Career and Technical Education and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher

Education.

Not only do educators teach students how to "reduce, reuse and recycle," but they also want a greening of the very buildings they work in.

Several AFT members from across Texas attended training in December on the Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS) rating system for green school buildings, which resembles the better-known LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification system. Seminars in Dallas and Houston introduced them to a new CHPS system created especially for Texas schools.

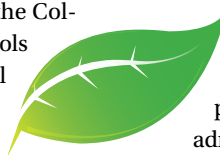
Also last fall, the AFT helped launch the Coalition for Green Schools, a first-ever alliance among education groups committed to working toward the vision that all children will attend a green school within one generation. "Every child deserves the healthy learning environment of a green school," says AFT executive vice president Lorretta Johnson.

Besides the AFT, the 12-group coalition

includes the U.S. Green Building Council, the National Education Association, the National PTA and the Healthy Schools Campaign.

According to the council, one in five Americans spends the day in a K-12 school, and too many of those schools are substandard by any measure. The AFT agrees, and luckily, we've helped elect allies who want to fix that problem. As part of the Obama administration's economic stimulus, the government is supporting school modernization projects.

A handful of AFT members already work in LEED-certified schools. Many more members have taken the initiative as green pioneers, advocating for environmentally sound construction by union labor. High-performing buildings help produce healthier, higher-performing students, and green schools also cost less to operate and use fewer natural resources, the council says, adding that the typical green school saves \$100,000, which can be reinvested in education.



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Schools benefit when teachers drive reform



Principal Jason DiCarlo and teacher Jessica Weintraub say the Mass TeLLS project sparked substantive discussions at school.

MARILYN HUMPHRIES

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT strategies work better when teachers are treated as facilitators rather than foils.

Just ask Jessica Weintraub, a 12-year veteran teacher in the Lowell, Mass., public schools, a system outside Boston. The third-grade teacher has seen a noticeable and positive change since her district began to collect and analyze classroom teachers' views on the conditions of teaching and learning. The effort stems from a state initiative called the Massachusetts Teaching, Learning and Leading Survey (Mass TeLLS). This extensive online tool has given every teacher in the state an opportunity to voice a candid opinion

Christa McAuliffe students for a successful transition to middle school.

These meetings are not the type where someone is just feeding you information, Weintraub reports. They are teacher-driven. "People ask, 'How do you see this working in your classroom?' [and] you leave thinking, 'that was great. I can't wait to try it.' Teachers wanted empowerment, and now we're getting it."

Developed under the auspices of the New Teacher Center (NTC), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based at the University of California at Santa Cruz, Mass TeLLS has helped fine-tune reform efforts in Lowell and

tween the district and the union. Mass TeLLS data have been the springboard for a variety of successes, including a joint district-union mission statement pledged to "build a mutually respectful and authentically collaborative culture"; math and English language arts summits that promote team building and data analysis at the building level; and new opportunities for district leaders to meet and coordinate work.

New teacher-tailored professional development also has flowed from Mass TeLLS, as have new opportunities at the school level for discussion and analysis of student data.

These reforms are on sound footing because of the hard work that went into generating teacher buy-in for the Mass TeLLS survey, says Patty Meyers, a sixth-grade teacher at James S. Daley Middle School in Lowell and the local's vice president for middle schools.

The AFT affiliate used its network of building reps to get out the word about the survey to members, and to emphasize that teachers could feel secure in offering their most candid assessments without worrying that their remarks might come back to haunt them.

District administrators and building principals, too, were strong partners in this effort, stresses Meyers. Up and down the line, "the administration was extremely supportive, even allowing common planning time" for teachers to fill out the extensive Mass TeLLS questionnaire. The result was a 92 percent participation rate at Daley Middle and a district that ranked near the top of the state, with more than two-thirds of Lowell teachers completing the Mass TeLLS survey.

Then there was the follow-up.

A union-district team from Lowell journeyed to New York City last winter to participate in the Center for School Improvement (CSI) Leadership Institute, which includes in-depth training provided by the national AFT and New York affiliates' acclaimed Teachers Center, which also conducted follow-up training for building teams in Lowell last summer.

The bottom line: There is "a lot more ownership and accountability" at all district levels, says Weintraub. "I'm not a betting woman, but if I were, I'd put my money on the kids and these schools. ... I see success in our future."

In Lowell, "they've taken the results of Mass TeLLS and are really doing something wonderful," says AFT Massachusetts president Tom Gosnell. "We see the opportunity for even more districts, using the types of supports that Lowell used, to make inroads."

"Teachers wanted empowerment, and now we're getting it."

—JESSICA WEINTRAUB, United Teachers of Lowell

about what is working, and what isn't, when it comes to curriculum, discipline, school-based leadership and other building blocks of reform.

The lines of communication have always been good at Christa McAuliffe Elementary, the school where Weintraub teaches and serves as building representative for the United Teachers of Lowell (UTL). But Weintraub has no doubt they've grown even stronger in the past three years. Whether in grade-level meetings, regular gatherings of language arts and math specialists, or in strategy sessions that link teachers from different grade levels, the dialogue at the school is rich and focused—and the emphasis is on preparing

districts across the state by harnessing the eyes, ears, judgment and experience of classroom teachers.

In Lowell, for example, the Mass TeLLS data confirmed many of the findings from prior surveys conducted by the union, reports UTL president Paul Georges. "Teachers felt they were out of the mix, that they were not asked about initiatives" launched in schools.

"We saw [the Mass TeLLS project] as an opportunity to work together to build a truly authentic, collaborative environment," explains Georges.

And that's precisely what happened, thanks to a strong working relationship be-

Granting classroom wishes

Retiree program makes lessons more meaningful

MEMBERS OF THE Florida Education Association retirees chapter (FEA/Retired) used to award small scholarships to college students, but the retirees were never quite sure how the money was spent or if it really helped. “We never got any feedback from students,” says Vivian Berner Silbiger, president of FEA/Retired. So, the retirees decided to switch gears.

Using money from a silent auction at the annual delegate assembly, coupled with earnings from the sale of lifetime memberships, the retirees set up a classroom enhancement grant program for working FEA members to spend on projects for students that otherwise couldn’t be done because of a lack of funds.

The response was phenomenal. “People came up with some really great ideas. I was blown away,” says Silbiger.

FEA/Retired awarded 10 grants of \$100 to members all over Florida. The winners used the grants for a variety of projects. A third-grade teacher in Ormond Beach held an ice cream social for students and used the event to teach them about graphics, multiplication

and how to write invoices. A kindergarten teacher in Largo purchased magnetic white boards so the students could practice their letters and words for reading readiness.

Darci Halloran, a music teacher at Pine-wood Elementary School in Mims, used her grant to purchase guitars to start a beginners’ guitar class for her students. “The grant was a great help,” says Halloran, a member of the Brevard Federation of Teachers. “One hundred dollars goes a long way in music class.”

The school has a string instrument program that allows students to learn the violin, viola, cello and bass, and even though many families were interested in guitar lessons for their children, the school didn’t have any of the instruments. “Other things took priority. We had to take care of some basic things before we could purchase guitars,” says Halloran. Although there was an after-school guitar club, the only students who participated were ones who already owned guitars, explains Halloran. “This grant opened the door to students with financial barriers to take part.”

Halloran is grateful for the grants program



CHAD PILSTER/PILSTERPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

that FEA/Retired put together.

“It’s wonderful to see retirees continue to give to the profession after serving for so long,” she says. “It just shows that teaching remains in the heart.”

That’s just the kind of response that retirees like Silbiger were hoping for when they modified their program. “We just want members to know that the retirees are here.”

The next round of grants from the FEA/Retired classroom enhancement grant program will be awarded in February, with one important change: This year, there will be 20 grants instead of 10.

Darci Halloran, a music teacher in Mims, Fla., used a \$100 grant from the retirees chapter of the FEA to purchase guitars for her classroom.



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Paralysis by analysis

BY DON KUEHN

Dear Your Money:

OK, I'll admit it. I panicked when the markets tanked, and I sold some pretty reliable mutual funds. I see where you have been talking about getting back into the markets, but I can't make a decision about what to do. Help me.

Sincerely, Deer in the headlights

Dear Deer:

Yeah, you and millions of other people who watched the markets fall farther than they could have imagined. Truth be told, I trimmed back some of my holdings, too. The question is how to shake the "paralysis by analysis."

As a general rule, before dollar-cost-averaging all of your stash back into the market, I'd want you to have an emergency reserve of at least six months' worth of living expenses in a money market, bank or credit union account.

For most people, I preach investing exclusively in no-load, low-cost mutual funds. There are many places you can go to research

mutual funds. But one of the best is Morningstar.com.

Start with a "core" holding like an index fund that tracks the S&P 500. It will hold the stocks of the largest, most broadly based companies traded on the stock exchanges. As your investments grow and you save more, you will have more money to invest. Then you'll have to pay attention to asset allocation and diversification.

Asset allocation is how much money you invest in stocks, in bonds and in cash. When you're younger, you can consider investing a greater percentage of your assets in stocks, which are riskier. As you age, the balance should shift gradually toward bonds.

As for diversification, you want to evolve toward a mix of funds that expose you to small-, mid- and large-capitalization companies. You also can mix value with growth funds, and you'll want to have some money in foreign markets.

Finally, look at sector investments that seem poised to do well in the future. These days, an investor can put money into any of hundreds of narrow niches with mutual

funds that invest only in energy companies or pharmaceuticals, for example.

With stocks, you buy a small sliver of ownership in a company. When you buy a bond, you're making a loan to a company or to a branch of government, like a water utility. In exchange for your investment/loan, the bond issuer pays an agreed-upon interest rate for a set period.

Short-term bonds typically pay less interest, but are more price stable, than their longer-term cousins. Long-term bonds fluctuate more in price but reward you for those swings by paying higher interest.

If you sold funds when the markets crashed hoping to get back in when the time was right, it's probably time. I know, it's *your money*, but stop the paralysis. Do your homework. Proceed cautiously and diversify your investments.

Sincerely, Your Money

Don Kuehn is a retired AFT senior national representative. For specific advice relative to your personal situation, consult competent legal, tax or financial counsel. Comments and questions can be sent to dkuehn60@yahoo.com.

For an expanded version of this article, go to: www.aft.org/publications/your_money.



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Teachers seeing more hungry students in their classrooms

AFT partners with anti-hunger group, Share Our Strength, to raise awareness

EDUCATORS NATIONWIDE are noticing increased hunger and impaired learning among their students, despite programs intended to ensure that children have enough to eat.

Teachers responding to a survey by the anti-hunger group Share Our Strength (SOS) cataloged an array of issues confronting the nearly 17 million U.S. children at risk of hunger at some point each school year. Because educators are the first responders to hunger in our classrooms, the AFT is joining SOS in raising awareness. The problem has worsened, teachers say, describing symptoms of chronic hunger including headaches, stomachaches, lethargy and poor concentration.

Nearly two-thirds of teachers surveyed say they spend their own money to buy food for students who often are thinking less about the day's lesson and more about where they will get their next meal. Elementary teachers report spending an average of \$27 a month on food. Middle school teachers spend about \$38 a month.

Despite the best efforts of school employees, many children have nothing to eat from the time school lets out until they come back the next morning. "They have lunch at 11:30 and then don't eat the rest of the day," says Amy Di Biase, an AFT member and fourth-grade teacher in the Bronx, N.Y. "I don't know how people expect them to do their homework. It's just one more thing that makes it so hard for them to learn."

In an SOS video, Di Biase describes a boy who regularly shows up to help her, hoping she'll give him a granola bar. Christine Gottshall, another AFT member and fifth-grade teacher in Roxbury, Mass., participated in an online webinar to discuss the survey results. Beyond what the survey found, AFT members have related stories of cafeteria workers handing out extra food and classified staff who keep snacks on hand.

That any child in America comes to school too hungry to learn is a travesty, says AFT president Randi Weingarten. She's asking administrators to redouble their efforts to get children signed up for meal programs and help remove the stigma of free meals by making food more accessible before, during and after school, as well as on weekends and during the summer.

"Student hunger is one of those 'outside the classroom' problems that could be addressed in part by community schools that become not only centers for education but also places where students and their families can access a variety of social and public services and information," Weingarten says.

Tell your story about child hunger at school. Go to <http://tiny.cc/SOSshareyourstory>. More on teachers' efforts to fight hunger is at www.strength.org/teachers.



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LITERACY WEBINARS Using the power of nonfiction text is the focus of a live 40-minute webinar sponsored by *Weekly Reader*. The webinar, slated for the beginning of March, is the third in the Teaching Reading to Today's Wired Kids series. This free resource will feature experts presenting explicit strategies to help improve literacy and reading comprehension. Visit <http://weeklyreader.com/webinars> for times, dates and to access the first two archived events in the Webinar series: "Using Tech Tools To Improve Literacy Instruction: K-6" and "A Fresh Look at Reading Comprehension Instruction for Grades K-6."

YOUR TOWN The 100 Best Communities for Young People is a biannual competition recognizing outstanding community efforts that improve the well-being of young people. Sponsored by the nonprofit America's Promise Alliance, the competition also seeks to inspire other localities to take action and ensure they're meeting the challenges young people face today. The competition's next round is in 2010, and a national forum will showcase and recognize the communities selected to be the "100 best" and the innovative, youth-targeted strategies they've developed. For details, visit www.americaspromise.org and enter "100 best" in the search field.

SHOPTALK ONLINE "Using wikis in the classroom or as a collaborative tool" and "International collaboration for teachers" are among the featured discussions at LearnCentral, an online professional social network for educators. Sponsored by Elluminate, the free open resource allows educators to share best practices, discuss issues in

education or learn about upcoming online events. For details or to register, visit www.learncentral.org.

HOLOCAUST STUDIES Secondary school teachers who teach the Holocaust as part of their curriculum have a unique opportunity to participate in "Summer Seminar Program on the Holocaust and Jewish Resistance." The program, to be held July 5-26, consists of study in Israel, Germany, Poland and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. The program features visits to historic sites and discussions with survivors and prominent scholars. The cost is \$3,000, which covers round-trip travel from Washington, D.C., hotels (double occupancy), bus transportation and two meals daily. The program is sponsored by the AFT, the Jewish Labor Committee and the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. Applications are evaluated as they are received, and spaces are filled on a rolling basis—so applying early is key. All applications must reach our office by **March 26**. Visit www.jewishlabor.org or call 212/477-0707 for an application and information.

GENOMICS MATERIALS The U.S. Human Genome Project offers a variety of free materials

to help bring historic science into the classroom. Visit <http://genomics.energy.gov> and click on "Education" where you will find a wealth of resources ranging from classroom posters to lesson plans, student activities and videos. Begun in 1990, the U.S. Human Genome Project was a 13-year collaboration by the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Institutes of Health to identify more than 20,000 genes in human DNA. The work ultimately will lead to revolutionary new ways to diagnose, treat and prevent medical disorders.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY KIT GLENNING

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND BLACK HISTORY MONTH

FEBRUARY'S CELEBRATION of Black History Month will highlight the theme of economic empowerment. Teachers can bring this rich story to the classroom by visiting the AFT Web site (www.aft.org), which has a large selection of materials, including information on how our union helped write a major chapter in the fight for equal rights and full participation in organized labor.

This February, the AFT Web site also will debut a special section devoted to Mary McLeod Bethune. The daughter of emancipated slaves, Bethune went on to become a pillar in the civil rights movement, a noted educator who started a school for girls in Daytona, Fla., and a top adviser to President Franklin Roosevelt.

Teachers also will find useful information at the American Labor Studies Center, www.labor-studies.org, where a variety of resources detail watershed moments in black labor history, such as the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers' strike.

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(You're on your own with that no-carb diet.)

+

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