

A New Path Forward: Four Approaches to Quality Teaching and Better Schools

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PREAMBLE: SEEING SUCCESS FOR A NEW ERA IN WEST PHILLY

On the West side of Philadelphia, in a plain building surrounded by graffiti-covered walls and boarded-up houses, a team of inner-city kids is hard at work building the ultimate car of the future.

Among them are kids who might have fallen through the cracks someplace else. But at the auto academy at West Philadelphia High School, they're building hybrid cars that—according to *Popular Mechanics*—are among the top 10 entries in a \$10 million contest to design the next generation of green cars. They're the only high school team in a competition that includes the likes of Tesla Motors, Cornell University and even MIT—until West Philadelphia beat out MIT to move to the next round.

These students are developing vehicles powered by biodiesel and electric motors, and the cars go from 0 to 60 in less than four seconds.

Thanks to great teachers, the West Philly kids are learning about engineering, design and business fundamentals—concrete skills for today's economic realities. They're developing habits of mind and learning real-life skills. They're gaining confidence that will help them reach their full potential in life; they're learning values that will inspire them to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

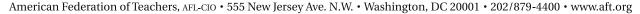
This is the kind of education that all of our public school students deserve.

But in too many places, our public education system—which educates over 90 percent of our children—still operates on an Industrial Age model. And in too many schools, No Child Left Behind has made it worse, creating the pedagogical equivalent of a factory—reducing the learning experience to a conveyor belt of rote prep sessions and multiple-choice tests.

Don't get me wrong. We need to set high standards for students and teachers. We need to measure what students learn. And we need to shine a light on the students and schools that have been left behind for too long.

But in a global knowledge economy, filling in the bubbles on a standardized test isn't going to prepare our children to succeed in life. If we are going to thrive in the 21st century, our entire approach to education must change—from what goes on in the classroom, to how we care for children's well-being, to how labor and management work together.

This is the time to shed the old conflicts and come together. This is the time to forge a new path for our public schools and change public education for our changing world.





This morning, I'd like to suggest a new path forward—toward a 21st-century education system, a serious and comprehensive reform plan to transform our schools, ensure great teaching, and prepare our children for productive, successful and meaningful lives.

A NEW PATH FORWARD

Shortly after I became president of the AFT, I gave a speech here at the National Press Club in which I said that anyone who advanced any idea that's good for kids and fair to teachers would find a partner in the AFT. Then, as now, I was clear that "no issue should be off the table, with the single exception of vouchers, which drain vital resources from public schools."

Some took us up on that offer, and in those places, we're seeing teachers, administrators, parents and elected officials work side by side to help their students reach greater heights.

But others have ignored our offer to work in common purpose. They have chosen, instead, to fixate on the supposed silver bullet of doing away with "bad teachers."

The problem with the so-called "bad teacher" refrain isn't just that it's too harsh or too unforgiving, or that it obscures the fact that ineffective teachers are far outnumbered by their effective peers. The problem is that it's too limited. It fails to recognize that we have a systems problem.

Today, I am proposing four initiatives that I believe will help us develop and support great teachers, and make new progress for our schools and our children.

First, I am unveiling a new template for teacher development and evaluation—a constructive, meaningful and ongoing system that incorporates standards and best practices for the teaching profession—and, yes, student outcomes.

Second, I'm putting forward a new approach to due process.

Third, I'll share my thoughts on what teachers need to help students succeed—the tools, time and trust to do their jobs well.

Fourth, I'll discuss changing the labor-management relationship, because that's the foundation we need to make each of these other ideas work.

CONSTRUCTIVE EVALUATION

As president of a labor union, it is my job to represent my members. They make it easy because of their extraordinary commitment to providing their students with the best education possible. Last summer, we asked our members the following question: When your union deals with issues 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 margin of 4 to 1 (69 percent to 16 percent), AFT members chose working for professional standards and good teaching as the higher priority.

Surprising to some in this room, I'm sure. Not to me. I know my members. They want to do what's best for their students, and they want to be treated as professionals.

No teacher—myself included—wants ineffective teachers in the classroom. Schools are communities where we build on each other's work. When a teacher is floundering, there are not only repercussions for the stu-

dents, but also for the teachers down the hall. When it comes to those teachers who shouldn't be in the class-room, it is other teachers who are the first to speak up.

They—and the AFT—want a fair, transparent and expedient process to identify and deal with ineffective teachers.

But they know we won't have that if we don't have an evaluation system that is comprehensive and robust, and really tells us who is or is not an effective teacher. That is essential for a fair and efficient due process system.

One won't work without the other. And that is why we will continue to oppose those who believe that simply subjectively removing teachers is a replacement for a true teacher development and evaluation system.

This brings me to my first proposal, for constructive and robust teacher evaluation: the creation of a system that would inform tenure, employment decisions and due process proceedings.

Our system of evaluating teachers has never been adequate. For too long and too often, teacher evaluation—in both design and implementation—has failed to achieve what must be our goal: continuously improving and informing teaching so as to better educate all students.

Right now, this is how teachers are commonly evaluated: An administrator sits in the back of the classroom for a few minutes, a few times in the first few years of teaching. The teacher then receives a "rating" at the end of the school year.

That's like a football team watching game tape once the season is over.

Let's think about that game tape for a minute. Coaches and players view it throughout the season and in preparation for every game. Why? To deconstruct and understand what's working and what isn't—so that necessary changes can be made. The goal is constant improvement and, of course, winning.

We need to put the same time and effort into developing and evaluating teachers. And we need to ensure that the women and men who teach our children are participants in every stage of the process. That's what we mean when we say do these things "with us, not to us."

Some suggest we simply evaluate teachers based on a single piece of data. But how does that improve student learning if that is all we do?

Yes, we must use good and meaningful data—but the real value of data is to show us what is working and should be replicated, as well as what isn't working and needs to be abandoned.

We propose rigorous reviews by trained expert and peer evaluators and principals, based on professional teaching standards, best practices and student achievement. The goal is to lift whole schools and systems: to help promising teachers improve, to enable good teachers to become great, and to identify those teachers who shouldn't be in the classroom at all.

This will allow for informed evaluations, rather than simply offering a snapshot from a brief classroom visit or one standardized test score.

Our framework has been developed by union leaders from around the country, with input from some of America's top teacher evaluation experts—researchers like Charlotte Danielson, Susan Moore Johnson and Thomas Kane.

This work is already under way in places like Pittsburgh, Pa., and Hillsborough County, Fla. AFT unions—

including recipients of the AFT Innovation Grants—are partnering with school districts to transform teacher evaluation from a perfunctory waste of time into a powerful catalyst for student achievement.

Our evaluation proposal includes the following key components:

Professional Standards

First, every state should adopt basic professional teaching standards that districts can augment to meet specific community needs. Standards should spell out what teachers should know and be able to do. How else can we determine whether a teacher is performing as she should?

Standards for Assessing Teacher Practice

Second, to assess how well teachers meet these standards, multiple means of evaluation should be used, because teaching requires multiple skills and involves several kinds of work.

Classroom observations, self-evaluations, portfolio reviews, appraisal of lesson plans, and all the other tools we use to measure student learning—written work, performances, presentations and projects—should also be considered in these evaluations. 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 in his classroom.

Implementation Benchmarks

Next, implementation benchmarks must be established, because even the best ideas do little more than gather dust if we don't put them into action. Take California. It has long-standing but little-used professional standards. At the very least, principals and superintendents charged with implementing this new evaluation system need to take responsibility—and be held responsible—for making it work.

Systems of Support

Finally, because evaluation should help teachers improve throughout their careers, not just at the beginning, every district should have ways to support and nurture teacher growth. This includes solid induction, mentoring, ongoing professional development, and career opportunities that keep great teachers in the classroom.

A FRESH APPROACH TO DUE PROCESS

We believe that a system built on the components I've just laid out will make teacher development and evaluation a tool to improve teaching and learning, and will lay the groundwork for a new approach to due process.

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.

And today, I also want to address the question of due process in those cases when teachers are accused of misconduct or malfeasance.

Let me clear: Teachers have zero tolerance for people who, through their conduct, demonstrate they are unfit for our profession. And in those rare cases of serious misconduct, we agree that the teacher should be removed from the classroom immediately.

Just as there is a need for due process when dealing with ineffective teaching, there is a need for due process in cases of alleged teacher misconduct. False allegations do happen, and they destroy much more than a teacher's livelihood. A false allegation can destroy a teacher's life.

We recognize, however, that too often due process can become glacial process. We intend to change that.

We will lead the way in developing a fair, efficient protocol for adjudicating questions of teacher discipline and, when called for, teacher removal.

I'm pleased to announce that Ken Feinberg has agreed to spearhead the AFT's effort. As you know, Mr. Feinberg is trusted as a voice of fairness and reason on some of the most consequential issues in our national life. He served as Special Master of the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, and currently serves as the Special Master for TARP Executive Compensation. We look forward to working with Mr. Feinberg on this critical undertaking.

TOOLS, TIME and TRUST

Creating a fair and constructive evaluation system and designing a fresh approach to due process have the potential to initiate important improvements in public education.

However, if our goal is to truly transform our public education system, we can't stop there.

What have we done about the list of challenges Secretary of Education Arne Duncan laid out in a recent speech to the United States Chamber of Commerce—"everything from low standards to weak curriculum, absent parents to unmotivated students, underfunded schools and limited educational options"?

The short answer is, not enough.

At the very least, we must make sure that teachers have what they need to do a good job: tools, time and trust.

Let's begin with tools: what teachers need to do their jobs.

Every day teachers do what they can, with what they have, to make a difference in their students' lives.

But neither they nor their students will thrive in an environment that is not conducive to teaching and learning.

So let's offer teachers and students an environment that sets everyone up for success: small classes, safe schools, solid curriculum, healthy and adequate facilities (including the most current technology), and opportunities for parental involvement.

And let's hold schools and school systems accountable for providing our teachers and students the conditions they need to succeed.

Tools also mean getting standards right, once and for all. That's why we support common standards that are deeper, clearer and fewer, and are geared toward preparing our students for college, work and life.

Another crucial factor in fostering student growth and teacher success is time.

Let's face it: Teachers have plenty on their plates just trying to get through the day. They spend hours outside of the school day grading papers, creating lesson plans, communicating with parents and participating in school activities. Increasingly, more and more is piled onto teachers, so they often feel like they're running faster and faster just to hold their ground.

For teachers, who already work after they leave "the office," time to share and grow and work together is as critical as any other education ingredient.

Imagine a system in which teachers have time to come together to resolve student issues, share lesson plans, analyze student work, discuss successes and failures, and learn through high-quality professional development. Imagine a system in which students can't fall through the cracks—because they're backed by a team of teachers, not just the one at the front of the room.

In addition to tools and time, we must also foster a climate of trust. Teachers must be treated as partners in reform, with a real voice.

Trust isn't something that you can write into a contract, or lobby into law. Trust is the natural outgrowth of collaboration and communication, and it's the common denominator among schools, districts and cities that have achieved success.

A teacher in West Virginia said it well: "I have put my heart and soul into the education of these children daily for over 20 years. I know what works. Just respect me enough to ask."

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND THE LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONSHIP

Finally, let me talk about labor and management, those of us charged with educating our children. We have a mutual responsibility to ensure student and school success.

The just-completed application process for the federal Race to the Top grants has exposed the fault lines in many labor-management relationships. A program designed to put a premium on collaboration among stakeholders has, in too many instances, done just the opposite.

All of this must change. We must transform our mutual responsibility into mutual commitment. Our relationship should be a constant conversation that begins before and continues long after we meet at the bargaining table.

So much of what is bargained is an attempt to codify behavior that, in a trusting relationship, would never need to be codified.

If we adhere to this vestige of the factory model, there will be no sustainable, positive change in public education.

Collective bargaining should be a tool to implement this relationship, rather than what defines the relationship. Labor and management must understand our shared responsibility to our communities. Great schools, skilled teachers and well-prepared students can only be achieved in partnership.

Collective bargaining isn't only a vehicle to protect employee rights and ensure workplace fairness. It's a vehicle for both sides to improve teacher quality, ensure school improvement and establish rigorous academic standards.

All over the country, I've seen teachers and administrators who share the same goals for kids agree to modify, waive or create new contract provisions and district regulations that enable them to work more effectively.

We've seen it in New Haven, Conn. It wasn't easy, at first, to establish trust. Even Mayor John DeStefano admitted that he was ready for conflict at the beginning.

But as the process went on, he engaged with the union in a collaborative way. The result is a contract that achieves real reform—and makes teachers real partners in that effort.

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¹ Melissa Armann

The agreement includes reforms like rigorous evaluations, more flexible hiring authority, and performance pay on a school-by-school basis, with a cost of living raise.

And the vote? 855 in favor, 39 opposed.

Try to get a vote like that in Congress.

And in Detroit, where the school system faced serious budget challenges, they could have declared bankrupt-cy and declared war. Instead, the union and the district worked together to establish a covenant that outlined the goals for their new contract—a contract that now includes comprehensive evaluation systems and school-based performance bonuses, a contract that recognizes that the school system, the city and its children either sink or swim together.

These successes would not have happened without fundamental changes in the relationship between labor and management. These relationships need to be nurtured and expanded—and new relationships need to be built—if we want to see more successes.

As a first step, let's replicate a good idea the Obama administration established in the federal sector. On Dec. 9, the White House issued an executive order creating a forum for labor and management to come together to improve the delivery of federal services by first improving their working relationship.

As the order states, "A nonadversarial forum for managers, employees, and employees' union representatives to discuss Government operations will promote satisfactory labor relations and improve the productivity and effectiveness of the Federal Government."

We'd like to see governors, mayors, school boards, teachers unions and other stakeholders start building protocols and trust for their labor-management relationship, in order to better deliver to children that most essential and fundamental right: a great education.

This morning, I've written to the National Governors Association, the United States Conference of Mayors, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the American Association of School Administrators, the National School Boards Association, the National Association of State Boards of Education, and the Council of the Great City Schools, asking that they join us to construct a mechanism on the state and local levels, similar to that created by the executive order. The Council of the Great City Schools and the AFT have already started some of this work by identifying districts and union partners that can work together to implement common high academic standards.

CONCLUSION

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. 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 as workers, citizens and individuals.

All over the country, what we're trying to say is this: The door is wide open. Let's work together to make progress for our children.

Because at the end of the day, education doesn't happen in the corridors of power in Washington, D.C., or state capitols. And change won't occur just because lawmakers and talking heads say it should.

True progress takes place in those important hours when students and teachers come together and the spark

of learning can catch light.

As we meet here, more than 3 million public school teachers are working in classrooms around the country, helping young minds embrace new facts, new skills, new ways of thinking. They get up early, go to bed late, and bring patience, dedication and energy to one of the most important jobs in the world.

Helping those kids at West Philadelphia High School build not just vehicles, but minds that will change their lives, and the world; ensuring that students in Detroit can rise and bring their city with them—that's who teachers are.

We need to listen to them.

Like Emily Graham from Michigan: "I teach because I care. I teach because I know I make a difference. I teach because I place a high value on children, and believe in my heart that it should be of the utmost priority to teach this generation how important education is. I teach because I want to change the world. ... I teach because it is my love, it is my passion, and it is my future."

As a former high school teacher, I can add my words to Emily's: There isn't anything more magical than the small miracles that take place every day in the classroom.

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

And it's a job I know we can do, successfully, together.

Thank you.

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