



*A Union of Professionals*

## **Community-Driven School Reform + Solution-Driven Unionism = Real Solutions by Real People**

When parents, teachers, students and community members work together, we can make every public school a place where parents want to send their kids, where teachers want to teach, and where students want to learn. That's why the AFT and community organizations from ten cities throughout the country are announcing a series of community conversations, aimed at developing "bottom-up" solutions for our country's struggling schools. This effort is designed to ignite vital, authentic conversations that have been silenced for far too long.

We are coming together out of a shared sense of responsibility for the children we nurture and teach, as well as a shared sense of urgency around the need to strengthen our public schools. We have worked for years to create the kinds of schools all children deserve, often watching with heavy hearts as a barrage of misguided top-down, "silver-bullet" reforms tear through our schools, shattering important school-community bonds in the process.

The issues recently raised by Chicago's educators and parents resonate across this nation because they are being felt by teachers, students and parents everywhere. These issues include endless budget cuts that have eliminated art, music, gym and other critical subjects from our public schools; a growing obsession with high-stakes testing, denying kids the rich learning experiences they need; closing down rather than fixing neighborhood schools, which destabilizes neighborhoods; and concentrated poverty that forces schools to take on more in the face of dwindling resources. As important as any of these specific issues is that reforms are being imposed on parent, students and teachers rather than developed with them. These issues are at the heart and soul of public education in America, and Chicago has demonstrated that we have a shared responsibility and a national obligation to address them

We believe every child deserves a full, rich educational experience that helps them meet their true potential. We know that teachers must be given the time, tools and trust they need to help children succeed. We are encouraged and inspired as we and other public school communities nationwide continue to rise up and come together to put the needs of children and communities—not political and corporate interests—back at the forefront of the education reform agenda.

We know that each group of school stakeholders has important ideas and knowledge to contribute to making that dream—a high-quality public education for every child—a reality. Over the next few months, in these cities and towns, community groups, educators, students, families, business leaders and local leaders will be coming together to:

- Raise awareness of the underlying problems facing public schools in our local communities
- Explore proven ideas for improving education
- Identify ideas that will work best for improving our local schools and our communities more generally
- Develop plans to adopt and implement community-led education reforms.

To aid us in this effort, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform will document all of the community conversation and publish a report summarizing the findings. It is our hope that the ideas developed and implemented at the local level can form the basis of a national education reform agenda, which supports and empowers all members of our schools and our communities to create the kinds of sustainable, widespread and *positive* changes that will give all children the chance to succeed.