



AMERICAN Teacher

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| For the innovator in you | 2 |
| Common Core and ELLs | 4 |
| The impact of poverty | 7 |
| A school turnaround | 9 |
| Globe-trotting teacher | 20 |



Thinking Math helps schools make a smooth transition to the Common Core State Standards

common SENSE

PAGE 11

Pine Trail Elementary School teacher Stephanie Hajdin.

Learning is more than
a b c d
test score

PAGE 5

A vote for shared responsibility

PAGE 16

Superstorm Sandy

Answering the call

PAGE 12



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We need a fiscal plan that safeguards priorities

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

THIS COLUMN IS AN opportunity for me to share information about issues of importance to educators, our union and our communities. I want to use this particular column to urge you to take action on a matter that will affect you if not resolved the right way—what many are calling the “fiscal cliff.”

If Congress doesn't act by the end of the year, two consequential budget events will occur on Jan. 2. The first is that all the Bush tax cuts will expire. The second is that a process called sequestration will begin, which would result in devastating, across-the-board cuts to public education and other key federal programs and would directly affect our members, other workers and their communities.

That's why the AFT has called upon members from across the country to tell Congress to work together and agree on a fair and balanced deficit-reduction plan that safeguards vital priorities and includes revenue increases, such as requiring corporations and the richest 2 percent of Americans to pay their fair share of taxes. This would provide needed revenues to ensure essential programs like Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and aid to states and localities for public education will not be slashed.

The looming fiscal cliff is the direct result of the scheduled expiration of the Bush tax cuts in 2013 and the automatic spending cuts that will occur through sequestration (which is the result of the failure of a congressional supercommittee last year to agree on cuts to defense and domestic discretionary pro-

grams). Sequestration would impose an 8.2 percent cut in most nondefense discretionary programs. In human terms, this would mean:

- Title I grants to 4,000 schools could end, affecting nearly 2 million students. More than 16,000 teachers and aides could lose their jobs.
- 500,000 students with special needs could be harmed by this cut, and 12,000 special education teachers and aides could lose their jobs.
- 100,000 children would no longer participate in Head Start, and 20,000 Head Start employees would be forced to leave their jobs.
- 80,000 children from low-income working families could lose their child care.

■ Ensure Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid benefits programs are not cut and that the costs of these programs are not shifted to beneficiaries or to the states;

■ Avert sequestration, which would result in painful cuts in state aid, education and healthcare funding, and programs administered by public sector workers; and

■ Include components of the president's American Jobs Act that support job creation and retention as well as infrastructure investments.

It is crucial that the White House and Congress hear from AFT leaders and members during these deliberations. I urge you to e-mail or call (202-224-3121) your members of Con-

Voters made it clear that they believe neither **deep cuts** nor **preferential tax policies** for the superrich will strengthen our economy or our country.

In the days ahead, the president and Congress will face a series of high-stakes decisions on jobs and taxes that will directly affect our members, other workers and their communities.

The stakes could not be higher for the AFT, our 1.5 million members and the communities we serve.

The AFT believes that any deal reached must:

- Let the Bush tax cuts expire for those making more than \$250,000, while extending them for the middle class;

gress and ask them to take action to avert devastating cuts and to support the president's call for a balanced approach to deficit reduction.

These issues were center stage in the November elections. Voters made it clear that they believe neither deep cuts nor preferential tax policies for the superrich will strengthen our economy or our country. Democracy is a contact sport. In our deeply divided country, if you're not all in, you'll be left out of consequential decisions. Make sure you have your say. Send a message to Congress at <http://go.aft.org/fiscalcliff>.



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AFT Innovation Fund marks successes, seeks new grant applicants

THE AFT INNOVATION FUND marked a milestone in 2012, as its first grantees completed their work. Funded for the maximum three-year period, these projects made enormous impact on the school districts where they were implemented. The Fund continues to support creative educational ideas, and will be accepting letters of interest for 2013 grants from Jan. 2 to Feb. 1.

Among the most successful 2009 investments were grants to address the pressing issue of teacher evaluation. The New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) created the Teacher Evaluation and Development (TED) system; its teacher practice rubric has been approved by the state department of education for use across New York. The Rhode Is-

land Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals also focused on evaluation; both locals strengthened their plans through labor-management collaboration.

Other pioneering Innovation Fund grants include the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers' community schools program, linking schools and neighborhoods; and the San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel's involvement in opening in-district charter schools, and its alliance with the National Council of La Raza to support a parent engagement training program for Latino families.

Since the 2009 grants were awarded, the



MICHAEL WEBBROT

Teachers participate in a NYSUT evaluation training.

land Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals also focused on evaluation; both locals strengthened their plans through labor-management collaboration.

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and health programs at a high-poverty elementary school and to devise a flexible schedule for teachers, while the Providence Teachers Union in Rhode Island is expanding learning time as part of a turnaround effort at three Providence schools.

Thus far, the AFT Innovation Fund has made 25 grants, and expects to award four or five more in 2013. Submissions must relate to union work, but all ideas about how to improve student learning are welcome. Webinars are available to learn more about how to apply; the Webinars (both on Monday) are scheduled for Jan. 7 and Jan. 21 at 3 p.m. EST.

For more information, go to www.aft.org/innovate.

Teacher preparation should require bar-like exam

ALL FUTURE TEACHERS should be required to meet a universal and rigorous bar that gauges mastery of subject matter and demonstrates competency in how to teach—much like the bar exam aspiring lawyers must take before they can enter the legal profession. "Raising the Bar—Aligning and Elevating Teacher Preparation and the Teaching Profession," released by the AFT Teacher Preparation Task Force Dec. 2, champions a systemic approach to preparing teachers and a more rigorous threshold to ensure that every teacher is ready to teach.

"It's time to do away with a common rite of passage into the teaching profession—whereby newly minted teachers are tossed the keys to their classrooms, expected to figure things out, and left to see if they and their students sink or swim," says AFT president Randi Weingarten. "This is unfair to both students and their teachers, who care so much but who want and need to feel competent and confident to teach from their first day on the job."

In addition to the exam, the report recommends collaboration among teacher education institutions, K-12 schools, accrediting agencies, education boards, government, education associations and unions to develop a well-grounded vision of effective teaching. It also places primary responsibility for setting professional standards on K-12 teachers and teacher educators. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has agreed to convene the group of stakeholders to begin designing the standards and entry assessment.

To see the full story and the report, go to <http://bit.ly/QYoTv1>.



Cheryl S.: "[Schools] spend much too much time on awful tests that ... educate no one. Meanwhile, kids don't know history or geography; they are busy tagging, memorizing and dealing with stress. ... It is time that our kids are given the chance to learn, to be curious, to create, to get back music and art. It's time they had the opportunity to enjoy learning."

www.facebook.com/AFTunion

Should schools spend more on healthier, sustainably grown food?


YES

Expenditures will pay off in the long run

BY CHELSEY SIMPSON

WE ALL KNOW the pillars of a good education: reading, math, science and lunch. Yes, lunch. When is the last time you had a really productive day without eating a decent lunch? My guess is, you aim to make good food choices, not just because you want your favorite pants to fit, but because food is the fuel that powers your day. Kids are no different.

Studies have shown that students who don't eat a nutritious breakfast and lunch are more distracted and cause more distractions in the classroom. They simply aren't prepared to learn. And it isn't just about calories. Serving high-quality food is the first step to ensuring that students actually eat what they are served instead of throwing half of it away, then eating a candy bar, and sitting down for biology class in a sugar haze.

But putting healthy food on lunch trays won't do any good if students don't eat it, which is where Farm to School programs come into play. "Farm to School" is the practice of connecting schools with local farms for food procurement and education opportunities, such as school gardens or cooking classes, which help students form a real connection to their food. Research shows that kids participating in Farm to School programs eat as many as 1.3 additional servings of fruits and vegetables with their school meals and make healthier food choices at home, too. In fact, Farm to School has also been shown to increase overall academic achievement.

In the end, we have to remember that we educate our children not just because it is the right thing to do morally, but because we are making a calculated investment in the future of our society. Spending money on healthier food will pay huge dividends down the road by helping children avoid a host of diet-related diseases. Not only will students benefit as individuals, but a healthier population will help curb our nation's healthcare expenditure. Spending an extra 6 cents on lunch today might save thousands of dollars down the road.

So while you could argue that funding would be better spent on smaller class sizes or new computers, all the education resources in the world can't overcome the distractions faced by a hungry or unhealthy child.

Chelsey Simpson is the membership and communications associate for the National Farm to School Network.


NO

Money should be spent on more important resources

BY LINDA O'CONNOR

IT IS A MISAPPROPRIATION of funds to spend money on organic and fresh fruits and vegetables when funds can be better spent on the manifest function of public school systems: educating students.

State budget cuts, declining revenues, struggling schools. These have been the headlines for the past couple of years. And in many schools, student dropout rates and graduation rates are more critical than ever. Yet, we currently are prioritizing an increase in funding for school lunches. Taxpayers are spending more on providing a hard, unripe peach rather than addressing what must be done to reverse failure rates and make our schools more successful.

No one would ever debate that schools should not offer a nutritional meal balanced with all food groups. After all, this has been done since the inception of the National School Lunch Program. So, why the change? Yes, childhood obesity rates have increased. However, it is not school lunches that have contributed to this obesity epidemic. Candy bars, huge sugar-laden drinks and chili cheese fries have never been standard fare on a lunch tray. Rather, it is the eating habits learned at home and the declining activity level of students that has caused this epidemic.

Additionally, one size does not fit all. Very small school districts have different nutritional needs compared with larger ones. Well over half of the students in my school compete in extracurricular sports, and most take strength and conditioning classes. Our district should not have to follow the same nutritional guidelines as schools with students who are much less active. Control must be given back to parents and local school boards who understand the nutritional needs and preferences of students.

Common sense is needed not only for reinvigorating our education system but for deciding how much money should be spent on school lunch. The better response would be to increase funding for physical education, which should include lessons in nutrition and wellness. The mindless forcing of food down the throats of children who have no understanding of its nutritional value does not advance civilization. Education does.

Linda O'Connor is a high school English teacher in Sharon Springs, Kan., who wrote and co-produced the YouTube video "We Are Hungry" with her students.



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 high school students have a later start to the school day?

ONLINE POLL RESULTS

56.6% YES

43.4% NO

"We need to stop ignoring the studies that support later start times for high school students."

JEFF WELCHER

New York State United Teachers

"Why not flip the whole school day? Kids involved [in extracurriculars] can arrive as early as they like, while those who would prefer to get some sleep could arrive at the new later start time."

ALAN BRONSTEIN

Philadelphia Federation of Teachers

"[Students] will not be able to pick their start time in a job or college. Responsibility is key for high school students."

KATHY SCHMITT

Cleveland Teachers Union

"You are not preparing children for the real world, where start times are 5 and 6 a.m. If children are in bed at a reasonable time, they can get up for a 7 a.m. or 8 a.m. start time."

KAREN KACHADURIAN

Detroit Federation of Teachers

Common Core for English language learners

IF YOU'VE BEEN SEEING more English language learners at school, you're not alone. According to the Center for American Progress, in the decade between 1997-98 and 2008-09, the number of ELLs in public schools increased by more than 50 percent, while the general population of students grew by only 7 percent.

These English learners already face challenges: They're rarely exposed to complex texts, and most (more than 70 percent across grade levels) score "below basic" in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the only nationally representative assessment of what students know and can do. ELLs have the highest dropout rate among ethnic groups, estimated at 43 percent.

We know these kids have to cross a chasm to reach the more rigorous Common Core State Standards. This means we should:

- Possess deep comprehension of the CCSS content and skills expectations, as well as English language proficiency.
- Be able to describe Common Core expectations in terms of student actions—what it will look like when kids at different levels of language proficiency show they have knowledge and skills.
- Establish long- and short-term learning goals.
- Scaffold instruction for ELLs at different levels of mastery.
- To guide instruction, use ongoing formative assessments that measure ELLs' attainment of language and content objectives.
- Understand the purpose and use of summative content assessments as well as summative English proficiency assessments for ELLs.

To do this, we need to pursue language and content acquisition at the same time. It's important not only to think of the content but also to think about the language objectives. For example, take this sample standard and suggestions for how to address both content and language:

At grades 9-10, a reading-for-information standard (RI.9-10.3) states: Analyze how the author



MARJORIE COTERA

unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are developed, and the connections between them.

Content objective: Students will analyze how Abraham Lincoln establishes the importance of what he's saying in the Gettysburg Address.

■ Instructional Strategies for Content:

- Graphic organizer to make sense of the speech
- Translated version of the Gettysburg Address
- Supplementary text about history at that time

Language objective: Students will learn and apply elements of speeches to analyze the importance of the Gettysburg Address.

■ Instructional Strategies for Language:

- Analysis of the language of speeches
- Sentence frames for chronology

HELP IS AT HAND: COLORÍN COLORADO

To help English learners master these new standards, Colorín Colorado has developed a resource section (www.colorincolorado.org/educators/common_core) on adapting the standards for ELL stu-

dents, thanks to grants from the AFT, the AFT Innovation Fund and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Here are some of the Colorín Colorado resources:

Articles

Crosswalks to the Common Core and Other State Academic Content Standards. Margo Gottlieb describes how English language proficiency standards will be aligned to the Common Core (www.colorincolorado.org/article/49389).

Introducing the Common Core State Standards in Cleveland.

Mark Baumgartner of the Cleveland Teachers Union describes how that district is building on its existing professional development program to incorporate the Common Core (www.colorincolorado.org/article/49440).

Getting to Know the Common Core State Standards. Susan Lafond of New York State United Teachers introduces the standards through friendly FAQs (www.colorincolorado.org/article/51432).

Key Shifts of the Common Core: English Language Arts and Literacy. Lafond outlines how Common Core standards in

English language arts and literacy differ from the standards states use now (www.colorincolorado.org/article/51433).

Student and Family Engagement. Joaquín Tamayo of the Aspen Institute discusses family roles (www.colorincolorado.org/article/50647).

Standards That Impact English Language Learners. Diane Staehr Fenner and John Segota of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages discuss how language proficiency and professional teaching standards can improve ELL instruction and how they connect to the Common Core (www.colorincolorado.org/article/50848).

Video Interviews

Diane August is an expert on second language acquisition and ELLs. As a senior research scientist at the Center for Applied Linguistics, she discusses professional development for implementing the Common Core with ELLs (www.colorincolorado.org/multimedia/experts/video/august).

Gabriela Uro is manager for English language learner policy and research for the Council of the Great City Schools. Here, she discusses Common Core implementation, especially planning. (www.colorincolorado.org/multimedia/experts/video/uro).

Joanne Urrutia, deputy director of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition, discusses college- and career-ready standards for ELLs as well as her work on a similar standards-based initiative in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (www.colorincolorado.org/multimedia/experts/video/urrutia).

The site also recommends online resources, including reports from Stanford University's Understanding Language project, and resource banks from organizations such as Edutopia, Achieve the Core, and the National Council of La Raza.

Learning is more than a b c d test score

AFT campaign favors in-depth learning over excessive testing



A NATIONWIDE FIXATION on testing has risen to the top of the AFT's agenda, as more and more evidence points to the threat test score mania poses to effective teaching. To keep more learning-inspired best practices from drowning in a sea of standardized tests, the AFT is launching a new campaign, Learning Is More Than a Test Score, which includes collaborative planning, opportunities for activism and a website for sharing research, testimonials and news.

Rote recitation of fill-in-the-bubble information can table the more creative and effective learning tools teachers want to use. Worse, too many standardized tests can rob students of deeper learning opportunities. "Instructional time is lost to overtesting; planning time is lost to data collection," says Janet Bellamy, a teacher in New Mexico. "The richest and most joyous aspects of teaching and learning are lost—investigation, critical thinking, creativity, interpersonal interaction, exposure to good literature and cultural awareness."

Entire subjects fall away as testing subjects are kept front and center: "Social studies is completely gone from the curriculum," says Helen Gym, a parent in Philadelphia. "There's very little science, and laboratory work is almost nonexistent." Physical education and the arts also suffer.

Teaching to the test can discourage young, passionate teachers, too: Eager to use their creativity to reach students in unique ways, these teachers are often buried by the pressure and paperwork test-taking creates, and sometimes leave the profession. In addition, weighting student test scores over other important and multiple measures in teacher evaluations shifts the focus from improvement—which should be everyone's goal—to a "gotcha" culture of blaming teachers.

Changing the paradigm

A resolution, passed at last summer's AFT national convention, sets the tone for the union's commitment to changing the test culture in U.S. schools.

"The inappropriate and punitive use of assessments, which too often are low quality to begin with, has eclipsed teaching in too many

schools," the resolution states. "It is time to restore a proper balance to public education, and to ensure that assessments—as important as they are—inform and not impede teaching and learning."

Not all tests should be thrown aside, however. Appropriate assessments can be an effective way to shape classroom learning. It's just important that teachers have a leading role in developing these assessments, just as they did in developing the Common Core State Standards.



**"It is time to ensure that
assessments inform ...
and not impede
teaching and learning."**

—AFT Resolution

Working together

The AFT is committed to working with all education stakeholders to change the old testing paradigm. Already, parents and administrators have joined the effort. The AFT is urging them and others to sign petitions, talk to school officials, and help inform neighbors, family and friends. And, as part of a series of community town hall meetings, AFT leaders will continue to draw in all those who believe in restoring balance to public education, and prioritizing high-quality instruction and appropriate and useful assessments.

Community members, students and parents nationwide have risen to join the effort. Last summer, thousands signed a petition to

say: "Testing should inform, not impede, teaching and learning." The petition effort continues at the Learning Is More Than a Test Score website. "I believe the growing fixation on high-stakes testing is damaging our public education system," reads the petition. "It's time to make sure that teaching and learning—not testing—drive classroom instruction so that we can give all children the rich, meaningful public education they deserve."

To help advocates articulate a more sensible policy toward testing, the AFT highlights five points:

- The world's top-performing school systems approach learning and testing completely differently than we do.
- American students are taking more tests and learning fewer subjects in school.
- Recess and physical education are being cut to make time for test-focused academics—even though many experts agree these are essential for kids' health and learning.
- When families feel they have a choice, many opt for learning-focused instead of test-obsessed schooling.
- Growing numbers of Americans agree that too much testing is hurting public education.

"Public education should be obsessed with high-quality teaching and learning, not high-stakes testing," says AFT president Randi Weingarten, whose editorials and public testimony have helped bring attention to the issue. "Tests have a role to play, but today's fixation with them is undermining what we need to do to give kids a challenging and well-rounded education and to fairly measure teachers' performance."

Join Us

TO ADD YOUR VOICE to the protest against too much testing, go to www.LearningIsMore.org and sign the petition. Or download resources and information to share with friends and colleagues about how we can change the role testing plays in education—because learning is more than a test score.

Putting arts at the core of the curriculum

New resolution supports the arts; Los Angeles teachers hope funding will follow

ARTS EDUCATION is gaining status in the Los Angeles Unified School District, where the school board has pledged to make it part of the public school core curriculum. That

should be good news for arts educators, but local teachers have their doubts: Budget cuts have axed similar resolutions in the past.

Issued by the LAUSD board of education, the resolution establishes arts education as a core subject, and returns to pre-budget-cut funding levels from 2007. It would hire more elementary arts teachers, support professional development, pay for art productions and supplies, and keep tenured arts teachers safe from future reductions in force (RIFs). That last measure is key for some teachers who have been RIFed, bounced from school to school, and downgraded to substitute teaching positions.

"It's great that they've put out the commitment to restore funding for the arts," says Ginger Rose Fox, an itinerant dance instructor who teaches up to 3,000 students each year in 10 different schools, and serves as chapter chair of the Arts Instructional Program for the United Teachers Los Angeles. But, Fox adds, "since the board has ad-

opted, and then shelved, similar arts resolutions in the past, I can't help but be skeptical this time around."

The arts have been hit hard by state budget cuts: LAUSD has 145 fewer elementary arts teachers, and many secondary programs have been eliminated. A recently passed state tax referendum may help restore some funding; UTLA is working hard to make that happen, and members are collaborating with arts organizations, gathering thousands of petition signatures, letters and postcards to get support from the board of education. And a California Federation of Teachers-sponsored bill could require public reports on arts education progress. But teachers are still worried.

"These kids aren't getting a well-rounded education," says Michael Blasi, a high school visual arts teacher and UTLA member. With up to 45 students in class, he finds himself reducing rigor. "If it gets any worse, it's going to really impact the way we're able to teach."

About funding Arts at the Core, Blasi says, "I'll believe it when I see it."



DEREK HANCH/ARTS FOR ALL

Students learn an African dance.



By teachers, for teachers

Share My Lesson (SML) is an online resource, developed by the AFT and TES Connect, that provides educators a place to collaborate and share their best practices to address many of the pressing challenges confronting our schools and communities.

Elementary Students

PICTURE CARDS You can use this great collection of picture cards to teach your students receptive and expressive vocabulary, or have the kids visually match non-identical examples of the same item. It's also useful for students with learning disabilities or English language learners.

<http://tinyurl.com/SMLpicturecards>

"THE FISHERMAN AND HIS WIFE" This tale from the Brothers Grimm addresses several learning styles and asks late-elementary students to make text-to-text connections to uncover and analyze the story's moral and themes. Art, drama, and pantomime provide a deeper understanding and chance for

discovery, while discussion and a short writing exercise help students synthesize what they have learned. Graphic organizers and a kinesthetic extension activity are included.

Contributed by **Student Achievement Partners**, this resource is aligned with the third-grade Common Core State Standards for literature, writing and language.

<http://tinyurl.com/SMLfisherman>

Middle School Students

THE ROMEO AND JULIET CURRICULUM

GUIDE Is appropriate for middle school students and beyond. The comprehensive resource, contributed by the **Folger Shakespeare Library**, includes tips for teaching Shakespeare, a brief synopsis of the play, two lesson plans, famous quotes from the play, prompts for teachers, links to podcasts and videos, and a list of suggested additional resources.

<http://tinyurl.com/SMLromeo>

THE HUNGER GAMES: EYEWITNESS

REPORT OF THE REAPING After reading the first two chapters in *The Hunger Games*, students will be required to act as journalists and present an eyewitness report of the Reaping. To build background information, students have

two days to give an eyewitness report of what goes on in the cafeteria during lunchtime.

<http://tinyurl.com/SMLhungergames>

High School Students

PEOPLE POWER: HOW ENGAGED CITIZENS

CHANGE THE WORLD is an interactive, multimedia resource designed to guide high school students down a path toward civic engagement. In this section, students gain a conceptual understanding of civic engagement as well as a personal understanding of how individuals around the world made the decision to act on their beliefs. Contributed by **Civic Voices**, this resource is aligned with the Common Core standards.

<http://tinyurl.com/SMLpeoplepower>

INTEGRATION JEOPARDY—A POWERPOINT

REVIEW GAME This high school game patterned after the popular TV game show, "Jeopardy," is a great review for calculus students; they work together in small groups to solve problems and win the most points.

<http://tinyurl.com/SMLjeopardy>

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A look at why most school reforms have failed

Success will be elusive until we deal with poverty and inequality, researcher says



NOTHING IN DAVID BERLINER'S new essay on the effects that poverty and inequality have on education in the United States is especially surprising or groundbreaking. But few people lately have articulated his thesis—that most school reform policies won't succeed until we deal with our country's growing income inequality—in quite such blunt terms.

Berliner, a noted researcher on education policy and professor at Arizona State University, begins his essay by challenging a couple favorite beliefs of politicians, as well as the general public: that people who try can “pull themselves up by their bootstraps,” and that teachers are the most important factor in turning around students' lives.

“Presidents and politicians of both parties are quick to point out the wonderful but *occasional* story of a child's rise from poverty to success and riches,” he writes. “They also often proudly recite the heroic, remarkable but *occasional* impact of a teacher or a school on a child.” While these stories of triumph and success are worth studying and celebrating, he adds, “the *general* case is that poor people stay poor and that teachers and schools serving impoverished youth do not often succeed in changing the life chances for their students.”

Why is this the case? Because, Berliner argues, the sources of America's educational problems are outside school, primarily a result of income inequality. “Targeted economic and social policies have more potential to improve the nation's schools than almost anything cur-

rently being proposed by either political party at federal, state or local levels.”

Put more quantitatively, Berliner notes that research has shown that about 20 percent of the variation in achievement scores among students is due to schools (and teachers are only one part of the school variable), while about 60 percent of the variation comes from out-of-school factors such as income, availability of healthcare, level of food insecurity, number of times the child moves, access to high-quality early education and more. Nevertheless, politi-

current reforms, such as more rigorous coursework, higher standards for students, removing poor teachers, and higher standards in teacher education. But he outlines approaches clearly aimed at reducing poverty and inequality, many of which the AFT has long supported. Those policies include increasing the minimum wage to more of a living wage that can lift families out of poverty; higher taxes devoted to a range of public services, from education and public safety to infrastructure and healthcare; expanded access to high-quality preschool;

“Ignoring the powerful and causal role of inequality and poverty on so many social outcomes that we value ... is easily as shameful as having educators use poverty as an excuse to limit what they do to help students and families. ...”

—DAVID BERLINER, Researcher

cians and others now castigating teachers and public schools ignore this simple fact of social science, he adds.

“Ignoring the powerful and causal role of inequality and poverty on so many social outcomes that we value, not merely school achievement, is easily as shameful as having educators use poverty as an excuse to limit what they do to help the students and families that their schools serve,” he writes.

Given this clear assessment of why school reform fails so often because of non-educational factors, Berliner's prescription for change is not hard to guess. He does agree with many

smaller classes for disadvantaged students, especially in the early grades; summer learning opportunities; expanded tutoring after school and during the summer; reduced teacher turnover in low-income schools; and wraparound services to serve low-income families.

“Both logic and research suggest that economic policies that reduce income inequality throughout the United States are quite likely to improve education a lot,” Berliner says, “but even more than that, such policies might once again establish this nation as a beacon on a hill, and not merely a light that shines for some but not for all of our citizens.”



'It's all about the kids'

Unions launch early literacy program in Baltimore with support of First Book, others



MICHAEL CAMPBELL

MORE THAN 180 pre-K, kindergarten and first-grade students at Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School recently took a new book home as part of an early reading project launched by two teachers unions working with administrators, parents and community partners.

The new effort is called the Clara Floyd "It's All About the Kids" Early Literacy Program, in honor of Floyd, the first African-American woman to serve as president of the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA). Throughout her career, Floyd constantly pointed out that everything educators do is "all about the kids."

The project will distribute more than 8,000 books to young readers across Baltimore, helping them start their own book collections at home. It is a joint effort organized by the Baltimore Teachers Union, MSEA and First Book, a national nonprofit organization that has distributed more than 90 million new, high-quality books to kids throughout the country. The program is launching in Baltimore with the support of a grant from MSEA in recognition of Floyd's service.

"This is a great opportunity for our children," says BTU president Marietta English, who also is an AFT vice president. "We are proud to be a part of this program that will help build home libraries for our children. It is just

the beginning of a relationship that will help our children become lifelong readers and learners."

At the project launch at Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School, English was joined by current MSEA president Betty Weller, school principal Harold Barber, parents and community partners for an assembly that included children's author Erica Perl reading to the students from her book *Dotty*. Each student received a copy of the book to take home.

"Clara Floyd spent more than 40 years as an educator working to make sure every child had the chance to be successful, and we are pleased to honor her work with the launch of the Clara Floyd Early Literacy program," says Weller. "It is significant that we have joined together to partner with the BTU and the AFT because we are all committed to student success and, like Ms. Floyd, understand that all we do is all about the kids."

Each of the school's pre-K, kindergarten and first-grade children will receive three books through this project, which also will include several other Baltimore elementary schools. At Coleridge-Taylor, an ongoing renovation of the school library will also make many additional books and other resources available to students.

Baltimore Teachers Union president Marietta English, left, helps hand out books.

Lights, camera, action!

AFT joins film project that will help Miami's youth

THE AFT and the United Teachers of Dade are working with members of the Miami community, including the Overtown Youth Center and the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, to partner with Hollywood filmmaker Robert Townsend and NBA Hall of Famer Isiah Thomas in a film production designed to engage young adults and teach them the art of filmmaking.

The upcoming film "Playin' for Love" is part of a community film initiative that includes a movie production and student training program in which Hollywood artists will teach and mentor young people in Miami's historic Overtown neighborhood. Local kids will appear as actors in the movie and be trained in all aspects of making a small independent film, including editing, directing, sound design, wardrobe, cinematography and production. Auditions for the film were held in November.

The film centers around an arrogant, celebrated high school basketball coach, whose life is turned upside down when a superstar player transfers to his school and the boy's mother tries to take over the team.

"The entire community has a shared responsibility to provide positive opportunities for our young people," says AFT president Randi Weingarten. "Those behind this project understand the importance of linking this work to the teachers and schools that are such a vital part of our students' lives. This is a wonderful example of a community working together for the good of its kids. We are very happy to be on board."

UTD president Karen Aronowitz, who is an AFT vice president, notes that the project "is really an extension of the work our members do every single day on behalf of the children and young adults in our community."



Teacher inclusion key to school turnaround

Students at Massachusetts school benefit from spirit of collaboration

THREE YEARS AGO, the E.J. Harrington Elementary School in Lynn, Mass., was declared “underperforming,” and state education officials issued an ultimatum: Turn the school around or risk closure.

The transformation is particularly impressive given the school’s demographic challenges, says Francine Lawrence, AFT executive vice president, who visited Harrington in October. Set in what historically has been a resettlement community for refugees, students speak more than 25 different languages, and nearly 90 percent receive free or reduced-price lunch. “That makes the success at Harrington even more remarkable,” says Lawrence.

Teachers and administrators credit a spirit of collaboration for the turnaround. “The leadership at every level is basically sending the same message: We have confidence in our teachers, and we’re going to give you the tools and support you need to help your kids thrive,” says John Laubner, a Harrington English teacher for three decades.

New and veteran teachers alike say collaborative planning time has been key. Teachers, support staff and specialists meet for 40 minutes each week for professional development specifically targeted to the challenges they face. Every other week, teachers in grade-level

teams meet for an hour and 20 minutes to review data and address student needs.

“As one teacher, it’s so easy to feel isolated and overwhelmed,” says principal Debra Ruggiero. “Giving people the time to work together has been essential to breaking down that isolation.”

Ruggiero also thinks less about state tests and more about the social and emotional needs of students. “We’ve learned over time that no matter how great you are, your students can’t access what you’re teaching if they are hurting or hungry,” says Ruggiero. “Our main measure here is growth: Where do our students start, and how much do they progress while we have them?”

As a result of improvements, Harrington is likely to move out of a low-level evaluation status that qualified the school for extra resources for improvement, and staff worry some of those improvements will be lost. An on-site health clinic recently was opened, and social workers are available to assist students—part of a menu of wraparound services intended to help students thrive. Those extras will be difficult to sustain should state funding shrink.

“They’ve accomplished so much at this school,” says Lawrence. “Now the challenge is going to be how they [can] continue to progress.”

AFT executive vice president Francine Lawrence chats with students at E.J. Harrington Elementary School.

MARILYN HUMPHRIES



Educators' conference in Montana

IN OCTOBER, AFT president Randi Weingarten was a keynote speaker at the MEA-MFT Educators' Conference in Billings. Attended by more than 3,000 Montana educators, the conference featured workshops and speakers on a range of topics, including the Common Core State Standards and teacher evaluation.

PHOTO BY DAVID GRUBBS



Going back to the future to keep kids healthy

School nutrition program jointly designed by Denver union and school district

HEALTHY EATING is on the menu at Cole Arts and Science Academy in Denver. Back to the Future with Scratch Cooking, a program supported by the AFT Innovation Fund, motivates nutrition service employees to work together on improving nutrition and the food services in Denver's schools. The employees are represented by the Denver Federation for Paraprofessionals and Nutrition Service Employees.

Jointly designed by the union and the school district, the program at the K-8 school includes an incentive-pay program that provides additional training in nutrition and wellness for school staff, as well as additional compensation for participating in efforts to combat obesity and promote wellness among the students.

In October, AFT president Randi Weingarten visited Cole to get a firsthand look at its innovative school nutrition program. In addition to helping out on the lunch line serving Cole students, Weingarten enjoyed one of their low-fat, made-from-scratch meals with members and other educators and administrators.



President Weingarten takes her turn serving lunch to Cole students.

Throughout her career, Weingarten told the group over lunch, she's seen that "teamwork and collabora-

tion always work. What's hard is to create the climate" for collaboration, but it's been accomplished at Cole and at many other schools and colleges.

The food service workers told Weingarten that parents and students alike have praised the new food offerings and extra choices, which have led to less wasted food and more participation in the meals program. "This is the connection that people don't always understand: the connection between the other services we provide, such as nutrition, and kids being ready to learn," the AFT president said.

Reconnecting
McDOWELL

Student group donates backpacks for McDowell County families

'It's about students helping students'

RECONNECTING McDOWELL has received an impressive list of financial contributions, services and programs since the public-private partnership was launched nearly a year ago to revitalize McDowell County schools and communities, but one of the most surprising and heartfelt gifts came out of the blue in October.

After Bob Brown, Reconnecting McDowell's project manager, gave a routine presentation about the partnership to the West Virginia Association of Student Councils, the student leaders asked him to step into a separate room, where they presented him with about 120 backpacks filled with school supplies, clothing and other personal items for McDowell students and their families.

"This could well be the most heartwarming gift of all because it's about students helping students. Nothing could be more moving. The compassionate and generous character of these young people personifies the West Virginia spirit," Brown says.

Isabella Leon, the student president of the West Virginia Association of Student Councils,

says the group heard about Reconnecting McDowell and knew right away it wanted to help. "We chose this project to give back to people less fortunate in our area. WVASC is a family and we want to share that bond throughout the state," Leon says.

In addition to donating backpacks for McDowell students, the student council association announced it will host a one-week summer camp at each of the two county high schools. With few recreational options for most students in the isolated Appalachian hollows, the summer camps will be a welcome opportunity for students and their families. In addition, the group plans to help develop a student council structure for McDowell.

Reconnecting McDowell has made much progress in the 10 months since it was launched to bring together government, nonprofits, labor unions, corporations and foundations to collaborate on ways to improve the county's low-performing schools and reinvigorate a region that has fallen on extremely hard times since the coal industry went bust in McDowell County more than 30 years ago.



School food doesn't have to be gross

AFT MEMBER Julie Holbrook is a school food service manager who uses locally grown foods for student meals at Keene Central School.

Many of the vegetables that find their way onto kids' plates are grown by the students themselves in the relatively cold and rugged conditions of the Adirondack Mountains in northern New York. As of this school year, the beef in their burgers comes from locally raised grass-fed cattle, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture has allowed the cafeteria workers at Keene to grow their own vegetables, make their own bread, and use local farms for eggs and supplemental produce.

Holbrook is co-president of the Keene Central School District Support Staff Association, an affiliate of New York State United Teachers and the AFT. Her wholesome story has been embraced by her community and featured on the AFT's Web page, Making a Difference Every Day. Read about Holbrook's experience, in her own words, at <http://go.aft.org/keene>.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JULIE HOLBROOK

common SENSE

Thinking Math helps schools make a smooth transition to the Common Core State Standards

THE EXCITEMENT OVER Thinking Mathematics runs deep in Volusia County, Fla., especially at Pathways and Pine Trail elementary schools where teachers say the AFT program is making math fun and concrete for students, and helping the two schools make a seamless transition to the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics.

Becky Pittard, a fifth-grade teacher at Pathways, may be Thinking Math's biggest cheerleader. The strategies embedded in the program, she says, "light up the joy of teaching mathematics."

Pittard, a national trainer for the AFT's Thinking Math program, says it "has completely changed my approach to teaching math."

Conceived more than 20 years ago, Thinking Mathematics is a professional development program for K-8 math teachers. It was one of the first teacher/researcher partnerships, bringing together AFT members and the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh.

The center provided a library of solid research, access to experts and lively discussions about their findings. It was a team of AFT teachers, however, that decided which elements of the research would be most useful for teaching, testing the ideas in their classrooms, and combining knowledge from both the research and practitioner communities to create the Thinking Math program.

Today, Pittard gives Thinking Math high marks. The link between the program and the Common Core math standards is, she says,

probably the best reason to consider implementing the program. Its approach to teaching math, she adds, "perfectly aligns" with the stated goals of the standards.

Stephanie Hajdin, who teaches at Pine Trail, agrees. The 10 principles of Thinking Math dovetail with the Common Core standards, she says. "I know that when I'm using Thinking Math, I'm covering everything that I need to cover."

Thinking Math's popularity extends to administrators like Pathways principal Joe Ronca, who says the program has really helped "as we make the shift toward Common Core standards and higher-order thinking skills."

Under the leadership of Volusia Teachers Organization president Andrew Spar, the union and the district have collaborated on the expansion of Thinking Math.

At one county school, Cypress Creek Elementary, teachers and the administration have focused on introducing parents to the new math standards. The school hosted family nights where parents were told what they can expect to see their children learning and why.

Building kids' math confidence

In recent years, Thinking Math courses have been adapted to include an introduction to the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics.

Thanks to trainers like Pittard, teachers at Pathways and other schools in Volusia County receive regular training in the principles of Thinking Math.

Maybe the best way for teachers to learn how to incorporate Thinking Math into their lessons is to observe another teacher using it in the classroom, says Heather Williams, a teacher at Pathways and the union's building representative. "Teachers new to Thinking Math need to see it in action."

Several teachers say their own excitement about the program pales in comparison with their students' enthusiasm. The kids are "completely engaged" in their lessons because of Thinking Math, says Williams. "I see a great amount of growth in kids who were previously struggling in math" because the program "makes math more concrete for them."

Thinking Math introduces students to "those real, practical concepts that our stu-



dents are going to need later in life," says Pathways teacher Cynthia Cosio.

Student achievement data collected at the school show that math scores have gone up since the introduction of Thinking Math.

Diane LeJeune, a third-grade teacher at Pine Trail, says her students are "a lot more confident in their math skills" as a result of Thinking Math, and she believes the program yields long-term benefits. "These kids are going to grow up in a society that requires them to be critical thinkers, to solve problems for themselves," she says. "Thinking Math requires them to think deeply about any given problem or scenario that we're working on."

For Thinking Math really to take root, teachers need to be given the time to develop their lessons and, if possible, participate in lesson study groups where they can get together and talk about the research, Williams says.

Trainers need to be available to go into classrooms to support and advise teachers new to Thinking Math, adds LeJeune, who says the program has opened her eyes to "how valuable and empowering" the AFT and the resources it provides can be.

Thinking Math has "shown me how the union can play a critical role in the dissemination of information that can help teachers become better at their craft."

Top: Pathways Elementary teacher and Thinking Math trainer Becky Pittard. Teacher Diane LeJeune, above.

A student in Stephanie Hajdin's class at Pine Trail Elementary works on a math problem.



PHOTOS BY GREGG MATTHEWS

Answering the call

Superstorm Sandy highlights the essential role of AFT members and other public employees

NOT SURPRISINGLY, AFT members along the Eastern Seaboard felt the impact of Superstorm Sandy—both professionally and personally. Preparing for the storm and dealing with its aftermath highlighted the essential services provided by healthcare professionals, educators, state workers and other public employees. These workers stepped up to help with the rescue and relief activities, often mounting heroic efforts in the face of difficult circumstances.

In many parts of the storm-ravaged region, power outages and the loss of phone and Internet service complicated the recovery efforts and forced affiliates like the New York State Public Employees Federation (PEF) and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) to close their offices for several days.

New York City public schools were closed the week following the storm. Some schools became evacuation centers to host displaced families and even pets that had been rescued from floodwaters and areas without power. In the weeks following the storm, hundreds of UFT members volunteered to help their union brothers and sisters as well as their neighbors recover from the storm.

The Health Professionals and Allied Employees (HPAE) in New Jersey represents nurses and other health professionals, many of whom worked around the clock to care for patients, in addition to dealing with the impact of the storm on their own lives.

The hardest-hit area was the Jersey Shore, where the AFT affiliate has members employed at the Jersey Shore University Medical Center and Southern Ocean County Medical Center. Thanks to generators, the hospitals managed to remain operational. However, the winds and flooding completely destroyed the homes of some HPAE members.

An article in the Nov. 1 edition of the *New York Times* chronicled the work of nurses and health professionals represented by the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, an affiliate of the Federation of Nurses/UFT. Allison Chisholm, who works for the VNS, pressed her way through the difficult challenges created by the storm to take care of her patients. “It was treacherous driving during the hurricane. But it’s just something you do as a nurse,” Chisholm told the *Times*. “That continuity of care helps the healing. I don’t see this as being heroic. I have a conscience. I need to get to sleep at night.”

Stepping up to help colleagues, storm victims

Superstorm Sandy flooded the Long Island, N.Y., home of PEF vice president Wayne Spence, forcing his family to find other accommodations. “I came home to find my freezer, washing machine and dryer floating in five feet of water,” says Spence, who had recently



MILLER PHOTOGRAPHY



MILLER PHOTOGRAPHY



AFT AND UFT PHOTOS



finished repairing his home from the damage caused by Hurricane Irene in August 2011.

One of the first groups to step up on behalf of their PEF colleagues were retired parole officers, Spence says. In addition to collecting money and supplies for those affected by the storm, the retired parole officers showed up to help their colleagues remove debris and begin rebuilding their homes. "The retired members didn't forget their friends. That's the spirit of the union," Spence says.

The PEF leader says one of his primary concerns was for the parole officers who work at Bayview Correctional Center in Queens, N.Y., and the PEF-represented doctors, nurses, psychiatrists and social workers employed at the South Beach Psychiatric Center on Staten Is-

weather event. Here in the [Student Union] building, we began the process on Friday [Oct. 26] by bringing in all outdoor furnishings and other objects that in a high wind condition could become a missile causing significant damage. We also cleared the roof drains and downspouts to prevent water collecting and possibly penetrating into the building."

In Ocean City, Md., city employees braced for the storm days before Sandy hit the coastal community, and followed that up with damage assessment so that city facilities could be reopened. Emergency personnel not only responded to calls during the storm, but also assisted residents and visitors upon their return to Ocean City, working with the Maryland State Highway Association, the Maryland State



UFT PHOTO

land. Both groups were called into work to help transfer inmates and residents to safer locations—and many of them returned home to find their cars covered by water, Spence says. "They were not given the opportunity to move their cars to higher ground." The union is fighting to get these workers compensated for their losses.

The superstorm presented several challenges for members of the University of Connecticut Professional Employees Association, reports UCPEA member Chuck Morrell, the university's associate director for operations. He says that during an emergency like this one, the Student Union serves as a gathering place for the campus, providing not only the food court options but also charging stations for cell phones, laptops and other electronic devices.

The key is advance planning, Morrell says. "It always will come back to planning and the preparations that are made in advance of the

Police and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Public Works staff assisted in picking up debris, transporting citizens to and from shelters, and cleaning up the beach. Countless other employees worked around the clock monitoring the storm, staffing the Emergency Operations Center, and meeting the needs of city residents, businesses and visitors before, during and after the storm.

Volunteers from AFT Connecticut in Brooklyn's Coney Island neighborhood.

SUPERSTORM SANDY DISASTER RELIEF

Your contribution will help AFT members struggling from the devastation of Superstorm Sandy rebuild their lives. Go to <http://go.aft.org/superstormsandy> relief to make a donation.



AFT members help with relief effort

HUNDREDS OF AFT members and staff took part in a "Day of Action" on Nov. 10 to help with Superstorm Sandy relief efforts. AFT members from Connecticut, Maryland and Pennsylvania traveled by bus to New York to volunteer with members of the United Federation of Teachers to distribute much-needed supplies, food and clothing to members in affected areas in New York.

Members from AFT Pennsylvania and the Baltimore Teachers Union were at the United Federation of Teachers headquarters in New York City. They stuffed 30,000 backpacks with school supplies and other necessities. The backpacks were given to elementary and secondary school students who had been relocated because of the storm. The UFT also collected coats, hats and gloves donated by AFT Pennsylvania members.

Volunteers from AFT Connecticut and AFT national headquarters in Washington, D.C., were also on hand. They spent the day in the Rockaways and on Coney Island, where they distributed toiletries, water and batteries to members and others in the community. Volunteers also took part in cleaning up beach areas, parks and schoolyards. Members of the New York State United Teachers were on Long Island to help at recovery sites as well.

A group of volunteer members from upstate New York, who had gotten help from the UFT and others when Hurricane Irene hit last year, decided to return the favor. Martin Messner, president of the Schoharie (N.Y.) Teachers Association, who was named an AFT Everyday Hero for his local's efforts to help in the aftermath of Irene, mobilized his members to help rebuild homes on Staten Island.

In addition, the AFT delivered cleaning supplies, gas cans, batteries, blankets and other items to the AFT-affiliated Health Professionals and Allied Employees in New Jersey. The donated items were distributed to locals where members have been hit the hardest.



Top: AFT secretary-treasurer Lorretta Johnson in the Rockaways in Queens, N.Y. **Above:** UFT members distribute food.

MILLER PHOTOGRAPHY

Share My Lesson gaining momentum

Popular online resource offers rich bank of teaching ideas

"SHARE MY LESSON is our Dream Team," says Jamie Gant, a technology teacher at Ronald Reagan-Doral Senior High School in Doral, Fla. He is comparing the AFT's online teaching resource to the Dream Team of NBA greats who dominated the 1992 Olympics basketball games. "It allows us to put our best teachers together across the country to share their lessons," he says, and makes the U.S. a competitive force in the world of education.

Share My Lesson, an increasingly popular resource designed by teachers, for teachers, and available to all educators, is taking off not only in south Florida, but across the country.

"It's good stuff," says Randy Biro, director of educational policy for the United Teachers of Dade, in Florida, which presented the program to 350 building reps at a stewards retreat in September. "It's what our teachers need."

In Texas, Share My Lesson was the focal point for back-to-school organizing and an integral part of a summer leadership training session in June. Since then, nearly 20 informational events there have attracted hundreds of teachers and paraprofessionals interested in utilizing the program.

The Broward Teachers Union, in Florida, introduced the program to about 250 stewards at back-to-school meetings; and with



ERIC GZIMALOWSKI

New teachers use **Share My Lesson** to kick-start their careers, midcareer teachers use it to align curricula to the **Common Core State Standards**, and experienced veterans use it to refresh their classrooms with **new ideas**.

AFT support, representatives there have visited more than 50 different work sites.

"It's very well-received, teacher to teacher," says Carissa Werder, an eighth-grade math teacher in Broward. "It's really extremely helpful for our new teachers and our young teachers. They have a community of mentors at their fingertips. This is a great way to connect."

Teachers also connected at info sessions in the Virgin Islands, Montana, West Virginia and other states this fall. The program appeals as a go-to source for all sorts of teachers: New-

bies use it to kick-start their budding careers, midcareer teachers use it to align curricula to the Common Core State

Standards (a key component of Share My Lesson), and experienced veterans use it to refresh their classrooms with new ideas.

And there are plenty of ideas to choose from: Share My Lesson offers more than 255,000 materials, including lesson plans, quizzes and interactive resources sorted by grade level and subject; many are aligned with the Common Core standards.

To use Share My lesson, go to www.sharemylesson.com.

Reading Is Fundamental—for science, too

Reading advocacy spans multicultural, STEAM themes

AT READING IS FUNDAMENTAL, the early reading advocacy organization, goals go far beyond reading. RIF is now incorporating science, engineering, technology, mathematics and the arts (STEAM) into its free book distribution and educational programming.

This year, RIF's Multicultural Book Collection focuses on STEAM. Each of the 40 books in the collection for young children knits together literacy, STEM, the arts and early learning. And each comes with an activity guide for expanded learning.

Take, for example, *How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin?* by Margaret McNamara and G. Brian Karas. The story introduces a diverse classroom of students as they guess the number of seeds in each of three pumpkins. The book includes "tier three" vocabulary, presents scientific methods, and validates differ-

ent sorts of thinkers, as well as different ethnicities and body types. In the end, the smallest (and most timid) boy is a leader.

Additional materials outline art activities, experiments and math problems related to the books. The material is in line with the Common Core State Standards, which emphasize reading for content and support connecting literacy and STEM learning.

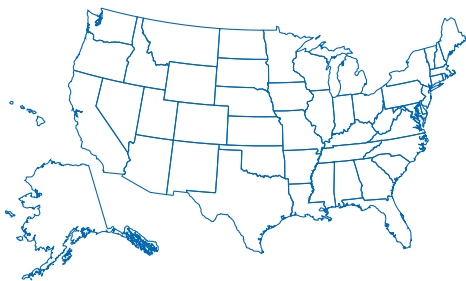
Another book, *Balloons Over Broadway*, describes the career of puppeteer Tony Sarg, who created the mammoth-size balloons for the Macy's Thanksgiving parade in New York City. Creatively illustrated with elements of collage and excerpts from Sarg's own illustrations, the book describes the progression of ideas involved in engineering the balloons. Recalling that the parade was originally designed to honor Macy's immigrant employ-

ees, the book also celebrates ethnicity.

"This initiative is about inspiring the innovators of tomorrow early with engaging books and resources that connect the dots between science, technology and the arts from broad-ranging cultural perspectives," says Carol Rasco, president and CEO of Reading Is Fundamental.

Other books in the collection include *Newton and Me*, exploring the laws of force and motion through a boy and his dog; *The Mangrove Tree*, about planting wildlife habitat in Eritrea; and *10 Things I Can Do to Help My World*.

The STEAM project also includes an art contest, professional development for early childhood educators, and family literacy celebrations with free books for children. To learn more, visit www.rif.org.



FL Education professionals in Broward County, Fla., voted “yes” in early November to a contract that would grant them their first raises in four years. They hope the tentative agreement, approved in a vote by the Broward Teachers Union Education Professional Bargaining Unit, will be finalized by the school board in December.

The union and the Broward County school board reached the tentative agreement on Oct. 16. In the November vote, 29 percent of the county’s 14,233 instructional staff cast ballots; 87 percent voted “yes.”

In addition to the raise, the agreement provides the first step movement provision in three years, retains individual health insurance for teachers at 100 percent and lays the foundation for future contract talks.

“The vote sends a very clear message by the union’s members that they want to continue moving forward in a positive direction,” says BTU president-elect Sharon Glickman. “This agreement is only one step on our way to negotiating additional step and salary increases as the economy improves. ... The negotiations represented a strong collaborative effort between the union and the school district.”

IL Instituto Health Sciences Career Academy has become the latest Chicago charter school to unionize. The Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board certified the Chicago Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff, an AFT affiliate, as the bargaining agent for the 52 teachers, certified paraprofessionals, counselors and social workers at the charter high school.

AFT president Randi Weingarten commended the school’s leader, Juan Salgado, who welcomed the news of the staff’s decision to unionize, helping ensure a speedy certification from the state board. Salgado is CEO of Instituto Progreso Latino, which runs the school.

“By working together with leaders who understand and value the voices and experience of educators, we can create strong

partnerships to develop and drive solutions that help students learn and grow,” Weingarten says. “Together, we have shown that charter schools and unions can collaborate to form high-quality, motivating learning environments.”

Salgado says he has had a positive experience with the unionized staff at Rudy Lozano Leadership Academy, another charter school he operates in Chicago. Teachers and staff at the academy reached a collective bargaining agreement with Salgado last year. “By working together, we can help ensure that our students succeed,” he says.

Now in its third year, Instituto Health Sciences Career Academy is the city’s first charter school specializing in healthcare. The school, which emphasizes math and science, prepares students for health- and science-related college programs and certifies them for positions in the healthcare field.

The Chicago Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff represents more than 300 educators at 14 charter schools.

MD Before, during and after Superstorm Sandy, city employees in Ocean City, Md., worked to keep residents safe and protect their seaside town. Praise for them came from all quarters: the mayor, city council and residents.

But it wasn’t enough for them to win a referendum guaranteeing them the right to collective bargaining.

Despite a weeks-long information campaign that turned out more than 900 “yes” votes on Election Day, a larger-than-expected turnout on Nov. 6 defeated the collective bargaining referendum for Ocean City general employees, 1,723 to 931.

General employees of Ocean City began considering collective bargaining when they learned some City Council members were discussing possible changes to benefits and pay, including converting pensions to a defined-contribution plan and lowering salaries for department managers.

Employees feel that collective bargaining is a natural progression for them: Their city’s police and firefighters already have it. The firefighters won collective bargaining through a direct City Council vote, but police had to go to a public referendum four times before they won the right.

General employees are determined to show the same persistence. And they have a healthy start—900 votes is “nothing to sneeze at,” as one organizer puts it.

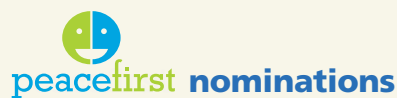
NJ By a healthy margin, members of the Newark Teachers Union ratified a tentative agreement with the Newark Public Schools on Nov. 14 that recognizes the importance of teacher voice, experience and the professional work teachers do.

The ratification vote was originally scheduled for Oct. 29 but delayed due to Superstorm Sandy. “After what we were hearing in schools after they opened, we realized that people understood the contract, and that is reflected in this vote,” says AFT president Randi Weingarten.

The agreement both values experience and changes the way Newark teachers will be compensated. Educators will earn more money earlier in their careers, adding an important component to the pieces that promote recruitment and retention, and can earn more for teaching in low-performing schools and hard-to-staff subjects, and for completing an approved advanced degree. And recognizing that teachers know best what they and their students need to succeed, the contract gives teachers more voice in school decisions than they’ve ever had.

“This contract demonstrates the willingness of Newark’s teachers and the school district to find innovative ways to ensure that quality and experience are recognized and rewarded, making it a full, professional compensation system,” Weingarten says.

Newark can now be added to the growing list of districts nationwide that are using collective bargaining as a vehicle for education reform, including the ABC Unified School District (in Los Angeles County); Baltimore; Boston; Cincinnati; Cleveland; Hillsborough County, Fla.; and New Haven, Conn.



THE AFT is partnering with Peace First to launch the Peace First Prize, a national campaign to identify and celebrate young peacemakers. Peace First is looking for five young people who are making a difference in their communities—by launching initiatives to stop bullying, reclaim green spaces, end gang violence or similar projects. Each will receive \$50,000 and a two-year fellowship to further their peacemaking work. To nominate students (ages 8 to 22) or to have them apply, go to www.peacefirst.org/prize.



The AFT's Election 2012 bus tour received a rousing welcome in Ohio.

BOB PERKOSKI

A vote for shared responsibility

Unions conduct massive get-out-the-vote campaign as polls show that members solidly backed the Obama-Biden ticket

IN 2011, THE CLOUT of the labor movement was on full display when it led the fight to repeal a bill that would gut collective bargaining for public employees in Ohio. The strength of organized labor was reaffirmed this year on Nov. 6 when its ground game was pivotal to President Obama's victory in the Midwestern battleground state and elsewhere in the country.

The re-election of President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden was a declaration by the American people that to rebuild a strong and vibrant middle class and ensure a voice for all, we must be in this to-

gether, AFT president Randi Weingarten says. "The importance of this election was far greater than casting a ballot for one candidate over another—as important as that exercise in democracy is," she notes. "The American people voted to create opportunity and shared prosperity by sharing responsibility, and to reject the cynical 'you're on your own' philosophy."

Throughout the country, unions were instrumental in educating members about the issues and getting voters to the polls in support of Obama and other union-endorsed candidates. "Thousands upon thousands of our members made phone calls, knocked on doors, and reached out in every way they could to get their families, friends and neigh-

bors to the polls on Election Day—an effort that contributed not only to President Obama's re-election, but also to victories in key Senate, House and gubernatorial races," Weingarten adds.

AFT bus tour builds excitement

Weingarten and AFT secretary-treasurer Lorretta Johnson and executive vice president Francine Lawrence participated in these get-out-the-vote activities during the AFT's "Your Vote—Your Right—Their Futures" bus tour, which took them to Florida, New York, Ohio and several other states.

This election comes down to "money power versus people power," Weingarten told members of the Volusia Teachers Organiza-



AP/GETTY IMAGES

tion in Daytona Beach, Fla. “They have a lot of money and ads. We have the people.”

In Orlando, Johnson urged members of the Orange County Classroom Teachers Association to “talk to your family, your friends, your neighbors. Let them know what’s at stake” in the election.

The bus tour also made stops in Dade and Broward counties. In Fort Lauderdale, the bus was greeted by a large and boisterous crowd in the parking lot of the Broward Teachers Union headquarters. In President Obama, Weingarten told the gathering, the nation has a leader “who believes that ‘union’ is a good word, not a bad word.”

The final stop in Florida was West Palm Beach for a luncheon with members of the Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association as well as members of the retiree chapter of New York City’s United Federation of Teachers. Johnson, noting that she was “preaching to the choir,” said issues such as high-quality schools, healthcare and Social Security should be foremost in people’s minds when they cast their ballots.

The AFT secretary-treasurer praised the retirees in attendance for their ongoing political activism, which she noted extends well beyond the presidential election.

The AFL-CIO reports that its labor election program made more than 80 million phone calls to union members and working-class households, knocked on more than 14 million doors, had conversations with more than 3 million workers at their job sites and sent more than 75 million pieces of mail.

A national election night survey conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates showed that union members voted for Obama over Mitt Romney by 65 percent to 33 percent. The labor movement was especially important in battleground states like Nevada, Ohio and Wisconsin—where union members voted for Obama over Romney 70 percent to 29 percent. The work of AFT members and other unionists was critical in these and other battleground states such as Colorado, Florida, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Virginia, all of which were won by President Obama.



Across Florida, members were excited and motivated to get out the vote.

PRO-WORKER CANDIDATES ELECTED

Voters in several states back investment in schools and public services

IN RACES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, from electing a pro-working-family majority in the U.S. Senate and pro-worker governors to passing the Dream Act in Maryland, Americans went to the polls in November and voted decisively for shared responsibility and a fair shot at success.

There were several notable Senate victories, including the race in Massachusetts where **Elizabeth Warren** bested incumbent Scott Brown; in Montana, where the MEA-MFT-endorsed **Jon Tester** won re-election; and in Ohio, where **Sherrod Brown**, an outspoken advocate for working men and women, easily won re-election.

“Because of union members’ efforts over the past two years in places like Ohio and Wisconsin to fight against attacks on working people, voters sided with the candidates who understand that good jobs—jobs that enable a middle-class life, many of which are unionized—are key to rebuilding our economy,” AFT president **Randi Weingarten** says.

In several states, including California and Ohio, voters took a stand to say that investing in public schools and public services is a critical priority. California voters backed an initiative that is expected to increase state



revenue by as much as \$9 billion. Supported by the California Federation of Teachers and Gov. Jerry Brown, **Proposition 30** increases taxes on those making more than \$250,000 a year and modestly increases the state sales tax.

“The decisive victory of Prop 30 reveals an important shift in California’s orientation,” says CFT president and AFT vice president

Elizabeth Warren was elected to the U.S. Senate.

Joshua Pechthalt. “For more than 30 years, it has been common wisdom that ‘Californians don’t like taxes.’ No longer. Proposition 30 shows voters once more understand what Oliver Wendell Holmes said a century ago: ‘Taxes are the price we pay for a civilized society.’ Prop 30 is a sign we can create a fair tax system to accomplish California’s priorities.”

California voters also rejected **Proposition 32**, a measure designed to silence the voices of working people. “The members of the CFT worked hard alongside our sisters and brothers in other unions to reveal the hidden agenda of Prop 32 and to defeat it. Fair-minded individuals and institutions from all corners of California recognized the threat 32 posed to the ability of workers to participate in the political process,” Pechthalt says.

In Michigan, voters rejected **Proposition 1**, denying the governor the right to appoint emergency managers who cancel contracts and abrogate constitutionally guaranteed rights.

Greening their worlds

Teachers promote a more natural approach to education, from basic to applied science

SHE'LL TELL YOU flat out: Nancy Hussong hates to throw anything away. The special education teacher had a vision in the 1980s to start a recycling program in which her students, ages 15-21, would learn job skills by keeping valuable resources out of the waste stream.

Within a decade, Hussong's project to recycle phones and printer cartridges had grown into a full-blown industrial program at the Edison Tech campus in Rochester, N.Y.

Meeting ever higher standards for quality and safety, the students recycled X-ray film for Eastman Kodak, built up their paper recycling in earnest, and began sorting metal, wires, foams and plastic, working hand in glove with local businesses to make treasure out of trash.

Each day, Hussong leads a group of students wearing embroidered work jackets through the school on their recycling run.

levatti. "In every single project we work on, we are able to use materials from Nancy's well-sorted supplies."

Hussong laughs. "The art teacher just asked me for 1,000 manila file folders to cut up for a project," she says. "I have more than 10,000."

"We have fabulous, fabulous kids," Hussong brags. "They work very hard at recycling, and they really make me proud—let me tell you. They love what they're doing."

Hussong credits her union, the Rochester Teachers Association and New York State United Teachers, with publicizing the skills program. As its coordinator, Hussong has been nominated for statewide environmental awards, and her program won \$5,000 from the city and another business partner, Waste Management. District officials credit Hussong with keeping up on environmental science by at-

teachers Mary Draves and Christa Myers have created a program of outdoor education. Their students ride bikes to four outdoor classrooms in a wildlife refuge they built at Coe Lake, where every year, the older children teach science to more than 1,000 third- and fifth-graders, and students with multiple disabilities.

Along with other members of the Berea Federation of Teachers, Draves and Myers have led the way in developing the wildlife area. Besides outdoor classrooms, projects there include a walking trail with student-designed learning stations, bird-feeding areas, a native prairie that's a test site for synthetic soil, and a footbridge for wheelchair access.

"We're nature nuts," says Myers.

"Christa and I feel strongly that there's a disconnect between kids and nature," adds



PHOTOS BY JAMIE GERMANO



Each room is a stop for anything that can be reused or recycled.

One of the school's business partners, Sunnking, buys dismantled cardboard, metal and plastic, crediting Hussong with stressing not only recycling but proper recycling. Empire Plastics has the students disassemble items such as foil liners from plastic jar lids, so they can be reprocessed. It hires students at minimum wage to sort bottles, cartridges and phones. Other partners include a farm and two animal hospitals.

Some materials find a place right at school, from art to engineering classes. "We discuss going green and the importance of eliminating waste," says technology teacher Kristina Car-

tending seminars, reading journals and combining the Internet for new partners and ways to recycle.

Recycling is not the only green work going on at Edison. An energy conservation program run by the head custodian saved \$12,000 last year, half of which the school got to keep. And teacher Mieke Smythe runs a greenhouse, gardening and composting operation where students sell seedlings at huge events.

Greening science

AFT members across the country are building green schools, too—also from the ground up and also linked to the curriculum.

At Berea High School in Ohio, science

Draves. "This gives them the opportunity to get out in nature and increase their environmental literacy."

Mentoring from a former teacher who became mayor of Berea helped the two teachers learn how to raise money and volunteers. Now, under the umbrella of a nonprofit community development corporation, Draves and Myers have marshalled the school district, foundations and business community to keep enhancing the site.

For instance, students and staff built an osprey nesting platform. No birds have moved in yet, but the great blue heron like it, and Draves says, "The kids love it. They built it!"

Students in Rochester, N.Y., grow strawberries, left, and recycle just about everything imaginable, above.



Common Core webinar loops parents into the rollout

WHEN TEACHERS SAY “Common Core,” some parents are confused. Another system of learning? How is it different? And what can we do to help? Plenty.

As the Common Core State Standards are rolled out in 46 states, aligning class content more clearly and consistently than ever before, teachers are eager to educate parents about how to interface with the new system and support their children’s learning at home. To help them, the AFT has partnered with the National PTA, presenting a webinar and other materials including a PowerPoint about communicating to parents, a synopsis of key shifts in curriculum brought on by the Common Core standards, videos and articles about how the standards can serve English language learners, and specific tools like the PTA’s Common Core video, another video on math fractions and a sample letter to share with parents.

Teachers know that support at home is fundamental to students’ love of learning, and that is especially true when new material is introduced in the classroom. To help parents understand the Common Core approach to learning, the AFT and PTA are pushing out materials that describe changes in classroom practices. Among them is the “less is more” approach to math—tackling fewer concepts, but engaging students more deeply in each concept—and, in English language arts, reading more nonfiction and reading for content.

“The three things parents need to know are what are you teaching my child, what is my child’s progress and how can I support my child,” says Sarah Johnson, a 17-year classroom teacher, the parent of school-age children, a member of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers in Minnesota and an active participant in educating parents about Common Core. When parents have those basic facts, she says, “They can give better support.”

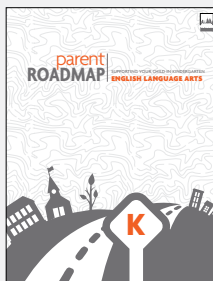
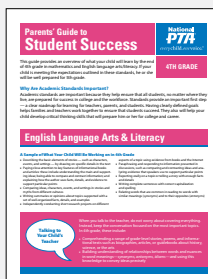
Alice Gill, the AFT staff expert in Common Core math, says the AFT is helping teachers connect with parents who may be fearful that children are not learning what they learned themselves, parents who are eager to understand and help with homework, or parents who are anxious about how to talk to a teacher about new course content. To that end, the AFT has developed letters to send to parents that explain content in detail.

The PTA’s “Parents’ Guide to Student Success” (www.pta.org/4446.htm), developed in consultation with Common Core creators, provides a grade-by-grade explanation of learning goals, suggestions about how to talk to the teacher about class content, and activities parents can use to supplement children’s learning at home—like discussing the news, or ensuring that children see adults in the household reading.

A “Parent Road Map” (www.cgcs.org/domain/36) from the Council of the Great City Schools offers similar guidelines.

Even something as simple as a parent making sure a child gets to school on time makes an enormous difference in student success, says Johnson. That’s true regardless of the curriculum, but with changes like Common Core, communicating with parents is even more important.

And when those lines of communication are open, parents are very much on board, says Chrystal Jones, senior state advocacy strategist for the National PTA. Once they understand Common Core concepts, parents’ reactions are “overwhelmingly positive.”



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Globe-trotting teacher brings worldwide lessons to life

Popular blogs explore the intersection of travel and teaching

DIPPING INTO Lillie Marshall's world is like standing on the prow of the Titanic: wind in your hair, adventure on the horizon, a world full of possibility. The difference? This ship doesn't sink.

Boston teacher Lillie Marshall walks the Great Wall of China.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LILLIE MARSHALL

Marshall, a seventh-grade humanities teacher at Boston Latin Academy and a member of the Boston Teachers Union, is a force of nature when it comes to wanderlust. She maintains two travel blogs that bubble over with enthusiasm: One catalogs her trips, from petting tigers in Thailand to indulging in local chocolate tours of Boston (www.AroundTheWorldL.com), and from the com-

ments posted by her students, it is clear her enthusiasm is infectious. The other blog features traveler interviews about teaching abroad, overseas educational opportunities and the value of career-break travel (www.TeachingTraveling.com).

Marshall took her own career break in 2009-10. She'd begun teaching right after college (at Brown University), but after five years in Boston public schools, she says, "I always had this feeling that I was preparing students for the world, but I didn't know what that world was like."

She took a nine-month leave of absence to find out, and went to Japan, Southeast Asia, Portugal, Spain and Ghana, where she taught for three months. "I was like Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, she says, explaining that she had set out looking for another place to live, but discovered that, "teaching back home in Boston was something that could fulfill me." She returned refreshed, full of confidence as a teacher, and brimming with stories to tell her students.

Although firmly settled in Boston, Marshall continues to travel during breaks, recently visiting Spain, Greece, Belize and India. In February 2012, she went to Beijing with 42 public school students and three teachers (for an account, see <http://huff.to/zFMt4L>).

"Teaching and traveling go perfectly together," says Marshall, a notion that applies



Marshall's students visit Tiananmen Square.

to personal travel as well as field trips. When her class studied Greek history, for example, she brought the lesson alive with photos of herself and another teacher on the Parthenon steps—and a story about other tourists dressed as the Blues Brothers at the same historic site. And when students were writing an essay on whether the Great Wall of China was worth building, Marshall shared the written impressions (and photos) of the students who climbed it with her last year.

"The world is interdisciplinary," says Marshall, who is convinced that travel enhances any classroom, and any subject. "Wherever we educators travel, we discover lessons to share."

To see what Marshall has to share, see her websites, her Facebook pages, or her Twitter account, @WorldLillie.

Union pas de deux

Dance impresario choreographs contracts, too

FOR BRIAN BROOKS, dance is all about shared experience and broadened perspectives—much like teaching.

Brooks is a choreographer, dancer, teacher and union leader whose schedule involves so many moving parts he admits he must be "married to his iPhone" to keep up. He teaches at two colleges and various dance studios in New York City, runs a dance company and is chapter leader of the Lincoln Center Institute Teaching Artists, a United Federation of Teachers local of 80 artist professionals who teach at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. And he is a visiting artist/part-time faculty member at Rutgers University and a member of the university's AFT affiliate.



© DAVID BAZEMORE

At Lincoln Center Institute, teaching artists like Brooks use workshops to bring techniques and concepts for arts-enriched education to K-12 teachers and teacher educators. Because the material comes directly from practicing professional artists, it makes a lasting impact.

Brooks presents dance and artistry as a form of communication that should be accessible to everyone. His own art incorporates dance, video, animation, visual art, music and sound; it is distinguished by a committed physicality, wit, whimsy and an almost scientific curiosity about time and space. To experience some of Brooks' work, sample "Rapid Still," a stop-motion video in which the dancer appears to be flying (<http://bit.ly/brg4bg>).

Helping grieving children

Unions and school district collaborate on training for school staff

TEACHERS AND SUPPORT STAFF in the Charlotte County (Fla.) Public Schools, along with principals, counselors, psychologists and representatives of community agencies and organizations, recently came together to learn more about helping grieving children.

For two days, teams from each of the district's schools, centers and support departments participated in training led by Dr. David J. Schonfeld, an authority on children's needs during times of loss and director of the Cincinnati-based National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement.

The Charlotte County training is the first of three programs around the country planned by the AFT and the NCSCB as they launch a two-year project to extend the reach of techniques developed by Schonfeld to support children adjusting to a death in the family and other personal losses.

"We know that children facing such a crisis often turn to their teachers and other school staff for support," says Patrick Keegan, president of the Charlotte Florida Education Association (CFEA). "Most educators have very

limited training and experience in helping grieving children. This program is a great opportunity to be better prepared to assist the kids in our classrooms."

The training program was organized by the CFEA, which represents the district's teachers, and the Charlotte County Support Personnel Association (CCSPA), the support staff union.

The two AFT affiliates collaborated with the school district to schedule the program and arrange for substitutes to fill in for those in training.

"We're trying to involve everyone in the school system who works with students. Classroom assistants, bus drivers, food service staff can all be part of the support network for children trying to cope with personal loss," says Bonnie Bistarkey, president of the CCSPA.

During the training, teams of principals, counselors, teachers and staff from each

school attended sessions led by Schonfeld, who heads developmental and behavioral pediatrics at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center in Ohio, where NCSCB is located.

"The goal of this project is to create a culture of understanding in schools, where addressing the needs of grieving students is seen

"We know that children facing such a crisis often turn to their teachers and other school staff for support."

—PATRICK KEEGAN, president, Charlotte Florida Education Association

as part of the professional role of educators and other school personnel," Schonfeld says. The center, he adds, is collaborating with the AFT to enhance the professional development of every member of all the schools' staff so they can better support children dealing with personal loss.

The project between the AFT and the school crisis center has won the backing of the New York Life Foundation, which is active in supporting programs to help grieving children.

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More about 'economic ecology'

BY DON KUEHN

IN MY LAST COLUMN, I coined the term "economic ecology"—how to make money, how to conserve it, how to grow it, and how and when to harvest it. This topic is too big to fully tackle here, so I'll spotlight some key points and urge you to go to the expanded online version (see box) to read more.

How to make it. It's not just about going to work and collecting a paycheck. It also means budgeting and controlling expenses, living below your means and making wise choices about spending. An old axiom puts it like this: "It's not how much you make that matters, it's how much you keep."

How to conserve it. There is a difference between saving and investing. You save in very low-risk accounts for short-term expenses. You invest to grow your assets over the long term.

Investing has some inherent risks. To cushion the effect of the swings in the market, diver-

sify your assets so that some investments will be cycling up when others might be declining. Conservation also includes rebalancing your portfolio as market conditions or your personal situation changes. As you near retirement, that balance shifts toward more safety and less risk.

How to grow it. I am a strong advocate of no-load, low-cost mutual funds. A mutual fund is a basket of stocks or bonds. By selecting funds in various categories, over time you can build a portfolio that is diversified and balanced.

By late October 2012, the average stock mutual fund had gained 11.4 percent for the year and 124 percent from the "bottom" of the market plunge in 2009, according to Lipper Analytical Services. And the average general obligation U.S. bond fund is up 32 percent since September 2007.

How and when to harvest it. You should be able to withdraw 4 percent each year from a well-diversified portfolio without fear of running out of assets before you die. The problem is, 4 percent isn't very much money.

A recent study by pension consultant Aon

Hewitt revealed that the average defined-contribution account, like a 403(b) or 401(k), has a balance of \$74,380. While that may seem like a fair sum, at 4 percent it represents a withdrawal rate of less than \$3,000 per year.

Knowing when to harvest your retirement assets is a different issue. Americans have long held the notion that retirement is supposed to happen at age 65. But retirement can't be triggered by an arbitrary date or age. If you have a mortgage, car loans or credit card bills, you need to work that debt off before you retire, or you'll deplete your nest egg faster than you planned.

Whether you are nearing retirement or just beginning your career, it's incumbent on you to master your own "economic ecology." It's *your money*. Now is the time to get it together, so one day you can enjoy the kind of retirement you deserve.

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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|------|-------|---|
| | ✓ | "I'm covered by my employer." |
| | ✓ | "I have enough sick days to see me through." |
| | ✓ | "Social Security will take care of me." |
| | ✓ | "My pension will take care of me." |
| | ✓ | "My family can go a long time without my paycheck." |

Q#2: Which statements about the AFT Disability Income Insurance Program are correct?

| True | False | |
|------|-------|--|
| ✓ | | "Protects up to 60% of my income for just a few dollars a week." |
| ✓ | | "Provides coverage on and off the job." |
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BLACK HISTORY MONTH Search “Black History” on Share My Lesson (the AFT resource for teachers and educators, by teachers and educators), and you’ll find more than 40 lesson plans and activities to bring significant African-American events and individuals to life in the classroom. Among our favorites: a study of the movie, “Glory,” about African-American participation in the Civil War; audio clips of art historians reflecting on the inspiration of the Harlem Renaissance; a peek into the history of the Negro Baseball League; and an analysis of Alvin Ailey’s dance, “Revelation.” Go to sharemylesson.com.

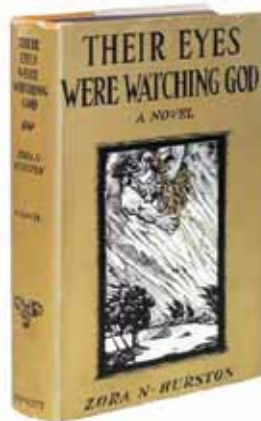


PROS AND CONS Sometimes it seems young people are so prone to contradict their teachers they’ll jump at any chance to argue. **ProCon.org** gives them plenty of positive opportunities to do just that. The nonprofit organization, designed to promote critical thinking, education and informed citizenship, presents free, nonpartisan research on everything from drug use in sports to standardized tests, gay marriage to climate change, and gives both sides to every argument. Everybody wins.

POETRY AND PETS Students in grades 3-8 can submit poems about their pets to the Pets Add Life Children’s Poetry Contest through **Jan. 31**. Prizes include a \$250 gift certificate for pet products and a place in a nationally circulated publication; and there are \$1,000 scholarships for pet-related education or to support a pet in the classroom, for six winning students’ classrooms. Go to www.petsaddlife.org.



90 YEARS OF GREAT ART Since 1923, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards have recognized outstanding young artists and writers, filmmakers and photographers, who submit their work to a judge’s panel of luminaries in visual and literary arts. The contest, for teens in grades 7-12, has distributed \$25 million in scholarships and awards over the last five years. Deadlines for submissions are **Dec. 15 to Jan. 15**, depending on region. Visit www.artandwriting.org.



GOT STATS? We are all bombarded with percentages and charts associated with opinion polls, trends and the economy, but what do they really mean? You can teach your students how to use and interpret statistics with ideas from the U.S. Census Bureau. See its website, www.census.gov/schools/for_teachers, for lesson plans that cover every-



thing from quirky facts tied to census numbers, to lessons on history, graphing, and collecting and understanding data; you’ll also find maps, facts about people, business and geography, as well as photos and videos.

KNOWMANIA This website is full of short-lesson videos that can fill in the blanks or supplement teacher lesson plans with

new personalities presenting fresh content. Material varies, from cartoon avatars to study-group re-enactments, pumped-up PowerPoints and funny lectures; there also are lessons for teachers, for example, one on how to create a great teaching video yourself. Check out www.knowmania.com.

FAB VOCAB Building vocabulary can be a rote learning chore, but at www.vocabulary.com, it’s a game. The site not only allows students to literally play with words as a way to learn them, it also includes an ad-free dictionary with real-world examples from leading news publications, and more than 50,000 word lists in categories that include literary texts (like *Beowulf* and *Fahrenheit 451*), political speeches, offbeat subjects like bicycle parts, or custom-made lists you create. *Time* magazine named it one of the 50 best websites of 2012.

EAT WELL, WRITE WELL

Sustainable food journalist Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, among other books, is challenging student journalists to submit their best work, previously published in their school newspapers, about the importance of healthy, sustainable school food. Deadline for the Healthy and Sustainable School Food Journalism Competition is **Feb. 28**. Prizes include website publication, cash awards from \$300 to \$1,500, and cash for journalism classes. See www.earthday.org/journalismaward.






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