



A Union of Professionals

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From grief to action

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

SINCE THE HEART-WRENCHING, senseless acts of violence at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., this past December, more than 1,600 Americans have lost their lives due to gun violence.

More than 100 were in their teens, and 26 were children 12 years old or younger.

One was an honor student gunned down just a week after performing in President Obama's inaugural parade.

When violence robs children of their lives, and when it invades our schools, which should always be safe havens, the sobering effects are only magnified.

Even those who had grown numb to the everyday carnage were shaken by the unthinkable murders of the most innocent of innocents in Newtown. Out of this tragedy must come real action to make our schools and communities safer.

Communities and schools have unique needs and should have discretion as to how they choose to meet these needs. Some require assistance to increase access to mental health services. Many schools desperately need caring professionals like guidance counselors and social workers to ensure students' emotional, social and educational needs are met. A number of schools have opted to utilize security personnel as part of their safety plans—others soon may follow suit. However, proposals to arm teachers are irresponsible and dangerous. As educators, our role is to teach and nurture our children, not to be armed guards.

The AFT has focused on ways to make schools safer for students, teachers and school-related personnel, including our "See

a Bully, Stop a Bully: Make a Difference" campaign to raise awareness on the problem of bullying and to offer resources to students, parents and educators to help combat it.

We also have suggested ways to reduce gun violence while respecting the Second Amendment. Unfortunately, in the wake of the shooting deaths at Sandy Hook Elementary School, the gun lobby—which is not synonymous with

responsible gun owners—has vigorously fought virtually every attempt to reduce gun violence. While the gun lobby may be doubling down, there is widespread public support for many gun safety measures, even among gun owners.

There is a recognition that Second Amendment rights, like First Amendment and other rights, come with responsibilities and limitations. There is no reason both sides of the gun debate can't support policies that not only protect the right to legally own guns for sport and safety, but also reduce the likelihood of mass fatalities.

Many people who have been tragically affected by gun violence are leading the way. For example, Sandy Hook Promise, a group of Newtown residents, including some who lost family members in the school shooting rampage, has called for a national dialogue on guns, mental health and public safety. The group's mission statement includes a promise to do everything in its power to be remem-

bered not as a town filled with grief and victims, but as a place where real change began.

I have been privileged to spend time with educators who were in Sandy Hook Elementary School that tragic day. They, and their colleagues who died or were injured protecting their students, are remarkable heroes. President Obama rightly plans to posthumously honor with the Presidential Citizens

We owe it to **our children** and those who care for them to **ensure** our schools and communities are **safe havens**.

Medal the six educators who perished. I think about the teacher who sheltered her students in a closet with only her body and a thin door between them and the shooter. And of the teacher and guidance counselor who in another school shooting in January bravely talked an armed student into putting his weapon down. That's who teachers and school staff are, and we owe it to our children and those who care for them to ensure our schools and communities are safe havens.

The real change we seek must come swiftly, and we need your help. Please spread the word to family and friends—we must call, write, e-mail, tweet, or use Facebook, to reach our respective members of Congress and ask them to pass legislation to curb gun violence and to increase access to mental health services. The status quo is unacceptable, and we all must play a part in seeking to make America a safer place.

Join the movement at <http://go.aft.org/safeschools>.



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Rankings of top states support value of collaboration

Creating safe, nurturing environments is crucial to teaching and learning

THIS YEAR'S Quality Counts rankings from *Education Week* offer further proof that focusing on collaborative, evidence-based strategies; teaching over testing; and investing in rather than destabilizing public schools is essential to helping all children learn, grow and succeed in life, AFT president Randi Weingarten says. That's what the top-ranked states—Maryland and Massachusetts—and the nations that lead the world in student achievement focus on, and it's what we should be building on.

"These rankings also stand in sharp contrast to StudentsFirst rankings," Weingarten says, "which prioritized politics and ideology over improved teaching and learning—giving the top-ranked state of Maryland a D+ for failing to embrace the Students-First agenda of testing, sanctioning teachers and divesting from public schools."

The new report, "Quality Counts 2013: The Code of Conduct—Safety, Discipline, and School Climate," also makes clear that creating safe, nurturing learning environments is critical to ensuring that teachers can teach and students can learn. And it highlights the dangers of discriminatory discipline practices that disproportionately impact African-American and Latino students and students with disabilities—children cannot learn if they are not in the classroom.

The report highlights that educators say they do not have the support of administrators and parents to effectively deal with disciplinary problems.

Creating safe and nurturing learning environments requires a comprehensive and balanced approach, including interventions that have track records and buy-in from edu-

cators, administrators, parents, students and others in the community, Weingarten says. "Our experience in Cleveland offers one road map to improve safety, order and learning



conditions for educators and students. Cleveland implemented a districtwide approach focused on a social and emotional learning program that helps elementary students understand, regulate and express emotions; student support teams for students who exhibit early warning signs, including a referral process to respond to student needs in a timely, coordinated, and effective manner;

and planning centers, which replaced in-school suspension with a learning-focused approach that focuses on student needs, helps students learn self-discipline, and aligns with the student support teams and the social and emotional learning programs."

Over the course of four years, the Cleveland school district reported improved teacher ratings of student attentiveness; improved student attendance; improved student behavior with reductions in disobedient and disruptive behavior, fighting, harassment and injuries; and reduced use of out-of-school suspensions as a disciplinary action.

"Investing in wraparound services and community schools is another effective solution to creating rich, supportive learning environments and improving neighborhoods," Weingarten says.

The AFT remains committed to confronting problems associated with out-of-school suspension, particularly its disproportionate effect on some students, and to building school environments that help all students succeed.

Abuses in immigrant recruitment

THE AFT JOINED with other members of the International Labor Recruitment Working Group coalition in February to release a report detailing abusive and exploitative practices by those who recruit immigrant workers for jobs in the United States. "The American Dream Up for Sale: A Blueprint for Ending International Labor Recruitment Abuse," calls for a comprehensive immigration reform plan to include measures to protect the rights of those who come here under various work visa programs. "The outrageous practices cataloged in this report cry out for justice, and we have an obligation to reform the systems that are allowing them to happen," AFT president Randi Weingarten says.

Three years ago, the AFT brought to light the abuses of nearly 350 Filipino teachers recruited to work in Louisiana. These teachers borrowed money to pay massive fees, had their documents seized, and faced threats and extortion. Their story was a shock to our union—and a call to action. One of them, Ingrid Cruz, is profiled in the new report. Through a federal lawsuit pursued by the AFT and the Southern Poverty Law Center, the recruitment agency and its owner were ordered to pay \$4.5 million to these teachers last December.

"The AFT and others in this coalition have outlined a set of core principles for the kind of treatment that any worker in our nation should be able to expect," Weingarten says.

"As our nation begins the essential work of comprehensive immigration reform, we must roll up our sleeves and put all the important issues on the table. It is imperative that the agenda include reasonable regulation of the international recruitment process."

AFT VOICES



Schools should be safe havens for students and staff. What steps would you take to make your school safer?

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

Do timed tests hurt deep math learning?


YES

Timed tests don't spark deep understanding

BY JOSHUA LERNER

LET'S START with a premise: Timed tests do not help kids learn math facts. These tests may be used to help students recall facts faster and with more automaticity. Even this benefit, however, is only relevant for the small number of students who already have the number sense to understand and reason through all of the facts. Giving timed tests only serves to "reward the few" while punishing the majority of students, who still need time to develop sensible strategies for understanding facts.

Recent research recommends that teachers avoid even untimed rote drills for math facts until students have developed the substantial mathematical reasoning needed to understand those facts. Until students have come to the realization, for example, that 6×8 can be deduced by finding a known fact ($6 \times 4 = 24$) and then doubling ($24 + 24 = 48$), they will not see a benefit from simply having to recall 6×8 multiple times on a sheet of paper.

Yet that is not the path that timed tests pressure students to take. Instead, these tests promote simple recall, divorced from understanding; and students stand a great chance of being harmed by this very activity.

Think about what students might do to produce an answer in the above example. They might count on their fingers or draw six groups of eight tally marks in the margin of their papers. They are not only likely to produce an incorrect product, they also are doing something far more damaging: reinforcing for themselves a system that is both inefficient and prone to error.

There is an alternative. A teacher dedicates a small period of time each day, not to timed tests that help some, but to math opportunities that help all students find meaningful ways to find their facts. In this manner, students develop their own strategies, share their thinking with their peers using mathematical reasoning, and then practice these methods often—and in meaningful ways. In the age of the Common Core, those are the math practices that foster deep learning.

Joshua Lerner is a third-grade bilingual education teacher in Chicago and a member of the Chicago Teachers Union's Common Core unit development team.


NO

It's how you use them that is the key

BY ANDREW FRIESEMA

ASSUMING THAT ALL teaching choices are made with some goal for student learning in mind, what is a reasonable goal for a teacher to have when giving students a timed test?

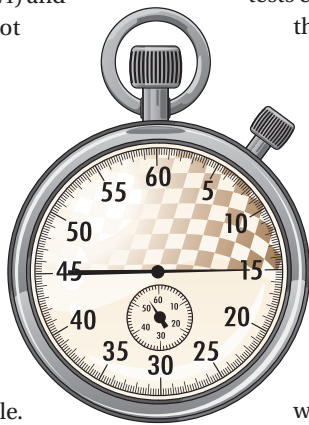
If the goal is to engage students in deep mathematical thinking and learning, I do not think that a timed test is an effective activity for developing any deep understanding of mathematical content. If the goal is to have students develop fluency in mental computation or automaticity in recalling math facts, then timed tests may be one of many activities used.

In a recent commentary appearing in *Education Week*, Jo Boaler of the Stanford School of Education cites several studies that raise concerns about how timed tests elevate anxiety levels in students and how that stress may negatively impact students' performance in mathematics. In my own experience working with teachers, I have observed very positive math attitudes in classrooms where students spend the majority of their time engaged in mathematics designed to deepen understanding; the Common Core State Standards for Mathematical Practice are cultivated in these classrooms; and teachers in these classrooms incorporate weekly timed tests in order to develop and track mental math-fact recall.

These teachers have worked together with their students to make their math classroom communities safe places for students to deepen their understanding of mathematics and develop automaticity with number facts. The students look forward to these timed tests, regarding them as a race, as a game; students understand that these tests are distinctly different from the mathematics they engage in as a part of their typical inquiry-based math lessons.

My experience in these classrooms has led me to believe that timed tests can be used in a classroom without raising math anxiety levels in a way that negatively impacts deep learning in mathematics.

Andrew Friesema is a math and science teacher at Dr. Jorge Prieto Math and Science Academy, a public school in Chicago, and a member of the Chicago Teachers Union.



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 schools spend more on healthier, sustainably grown food?

ONLINE POLL RESULTS

84% YES

16% NO

"If you don't have a healthy, nutritious lunch, you might as well throw the math and language arts lesson out the window. What better investment than to spend our money on feeding our children healthy food."

VICTORIA GRANT

 United Federation of Teachers
(New York City)

"All schools and institutions serving the public should offer healthier food choices for people. They should provide nutritional information as well—especially calorie, fat, salt and cholesterol content. America will never be a healthy nation until this becomes the standard for school cafeterias and public restaurants all over the United States. This is urgent."

BEATRICE Y. RICE

 Philadelphia Federation
of Teachers

"One in five American children is hungry. School meals may be the only good food they get each day."

THERESA NOBLE

Aloha, Ore.

AFT members join their communities
in tightening up school security

Safeguarding our children



CHRIS GRAAMANS

YOU MIGHT IMAGINE that AFT members who work in school safety jobs would be thinking a lot about guns these days. If so, you'd be half right. School security workers are thinking about all the ways to keep students safe so they can learn and thrive.

Take AFT member Sue Graves, safety coordinator for the Lincoln County public schools on the Oregon coast.

"It's easy to get fixated on one hazard—right now, that's guns—and one approach," says Graves, a member of the Oregon School Employees Association. "But there are hurricanes, earthquakes and tornadoes, too," not to mention aggressive dogs, bomb threats and hazards along school bus routes.

Right after the tragedy in Newtown, the U.S. Education Department called on Graves to fly to Connecticut and speak at a symposium for about 850 educators who wanted to strengthen their emergency plans. In a nutshell, here's what she told them.

First, every school is unique and needs its own emergency plan. "You can't just give a school a plan and say, 'Let's go.' You can't even give a school a lockdown plan," Graves says. "It should be customized."

Second, each plan needs to be developed together with the broader community. School

safety workers in Lincoln County collaborate with five local governments, nine fire districts and five police forces, to agree on procedures: Window blinds up or down? Doors open or locked? Fences, gates or open campuses? Safety workers also collaborate with hospitals, parents, public health officials and public works departments on what to do in emergencies.

"They all have a stake and they all play a role," says Graves. "Those community partners are so important when you make your emergency plan. There are so many agencies to coordinate with that it takes a lot of hard work, but everyone here has agreed upon every single thing we do."

Finally, she says, each school needs to schedule regular training and drills so that its plan doesn't sit on a shelf.

Cared for, cherished and safe

Schools are still by far the safest places in America. But the events in Newtown have swayed public opinion in ways that earlier shootings did not, and the AFT stands with President Obama, who said in his second inaugural address that "our journey is not complete until all our children, from the streets of Detroit to the hills of Appalachia to

the quiet lanes of Newtown, know that they are cared for, and cherished, and always safe from harm."

Sue Graves flew from Oregon to share safety procedures with educators in Connecticut.

Knowing that our schools will never be safe as long as it remains easy for criminals or the mentally ill to acquire guns, AFT president Randi Weingarten, at the White House Jan. 16, commended President Obama and Vice President Biden for their plan to reduce gun violence and promote safety, including:

- Banning sales of large ammunition clips;
- Expanding background checks before gun purchases and cracking down on those who lie on background checks;
- Stopping illegal gun trafficking;
- Banning assault weapons;
- Enforcing gun laws and investing in research on stopping gun violence; and
- Investing in mental health services.

"Schools across our country are in desperate need of resources to create safe, secure and nurturing learning environments, and we are glad the president has recognized that need," Weingarten says. "Some schools may decide that appropriately trained police officers are necessary. Other schools may decide that more school guidance counselors, social workers and psychologists are needed. These decisions should be made by individual school communities."


Weingarten also emphasizes that under no circumstances should educators have the responsibility of carrying weapons. "The role of educators is to teach and nurture our children, not to be armed guards," she says.

Karen Arthmann, a security worker at Rush-Henrietta High School near Rochester, N.Y., and president of the paraprofessional chapter of the Rush-Henrietta Employees Association, agrees. "Schools should not be

Stand for safe schools and communities

AMERICA'S DUTY is to provide secure schools and communities for everyone. Now that the president and vice president have proposed commonsense proposals to reduce gun violence and make our neighborhoods safer, the AFT is pledging to do everything in our power to make sure schools and communities are safe.

The tragic events in Tucson, Ariz., Aurora, Colo., and Newtown, Conn., and the countless acts of gun violence that occur every day, must serve as a call to action. We all have a role to play. Join the movement at <http://go.aft.org/safeschools>.

 See President Obama's plan to reduce gun violence: http://go.aft.org/wh_time.

armed fortresses. I want to protect kids, but I don't want to be an armed guard. That's not what I signed up for."

Arthmann's job is to patrol the halls, making sure students get to class and stay out of trouble. It's the same goal for all safety workers, like fellow union members Patti Marshall, a greeter, and Donna Carlton, who runs the senior study hall. Ears to the ground is how they help keep peace. The building has 64 video cameras, but "they don't take the place of locking down the hall, checking doors, or talking to the kids to find out what's going on," says Arthmann. "Physical presence means the most of anything."

Addressing the underlying problem

While school employees are doing their jobs, society needs to do its job and control the sale of guns and ammunition, says school safety officer Robert Chacanaca, president of the Santa Cruz (Calif.) Council of Classified Employees. If you can control ammunition, you can control guns, he says, noting that Sen. Dianne Feinstein has introduced a bill in Congress that would ban assault weapons.

Also important are mental health services, which have been cut dramatically. There used



JIM LARAGY

to be a counselor at the district office. "It was an important position," he says. "Sure, you can put armed guards in schools, but you're not addressing the underlying problem."

Indeed, two school counselors who are AFT members would agree. Mindy Willard, a counselor in Glendale, Ariz., and Shelby Wyatt, a counselor at a public high school in Chicago, build supportive school cultures as early as possible. Willard begins teaching social skills in kindergarten. Wyatt has been putting teens on the road to college.

For their efforts, Willard was named 2013 counselor of the year by the American School Counselor Association, and Wyatt was named a finalist. Professional counselors can



MICHAEL CAMPBELL

make a difference in school culture and safety when they have enough time to use their expertise, Wyatt said during a recent Capitol Hill briefing in Washington, D.C.

Until the day when our communities become safer, AFT members are doing what it takes to secure their schools and campuses.

"If you develop a plan for all possible disasters, then you can be prepared for anything that happens," Graves says. "When kids feel safe in their school and there's that positive climate, they feel more secure and ready to learn."

—ANNETTE LICITRA

School security worker Karen Arthmann, left, says "physical presence means the most."

Counselor Shelby Wyatt, above, reaches kids through mentoring.

sharemylesson

SHARE MY LESSON IS AN ONLINE RESOURCE, DEVELOPED BY THE AFT AND TES CONNECT, THAT PROVIDES EDUCATORS A PLACE TO COLLABORATE AND SHARE THEIR BEST PRACTICES.

Elementary Students

GARDENING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Are you eager to take your class outside? This resource contains a multitude of standards-based ideas for incorporating gardening into science, math, social studies and English language arts. Pick one that fits your curricular needs and comfort level.

<http://tinyurl.com/GardenCurriculum>

POLISHING PENNIES As we all know, the shine of a penny fades over time. Students will enjoy exposing pennies to various liquids, while applying the scientific method, in an attempt to return old pennies to their original luster. Nurture students' natural inquisitiveness with this resource from the American Chemical Society.

<http://tinyurl.com/PolishingPennies>

LETTER CONFUSION Help students remember the difference between "b" and "d" with this simple but effective teaching aid, which reminds students that "the bat is before the ball" and "the doorknob is before the door."

<http://tinyurl.com/LetterConfusion>

Middle School Students

CALIBRATING THERMOMETERS Introduce students to concepts of heat transfer by having them calibrate thermometers with guidance, but without specific instructions. This resource, contributed by the U.S. Department of Energy, is a great way to help students develop critical thinking skills and consider the nature of scientific inquiry.

<http://tinyurl.com/CalibratingThermometer>

SHOW, DON'T TELL This resource provides a clear explanation on the how (and why) of using more detail in writing; it provides an overview of strategies, coupled with examples, that students can use to be more descriptive. It's a great way to address the

"show, don't tell" comments on papers.
<http://tinyurl.com/ShowDontTellWriting>

High School Students

JOHN LEWIS AND NONVIOLENT ACTIVISM

This detailed and thought-provoking lesson on John Lewis and his role in the civil rights movement has students examine primary sources on the capacity of nonviolent tactics to produce social change. This resource, a collaboration between NYSUT and the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, aligns with the Common Core.

<http://tinyurl.com/JohnLewisNonViolence>

TRIANGLE EXPLORATION Students work in small groups to explore and discover for themselves how, and why, triangle congruence shortcuts work. This set of activities is a nice way to informally introduce the reasoning and math behind this geometry topic without simply providing rules for rote memorization.

<http://tinyurl.com/TriangleExploration>

www.ShareMyLesson.com

Register today for free access to more than 250,000 classroom resources.

A best practice for creating instructional opportunities for all

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING is a best-practice framework and set of principles that can equalize students' opportunities to learn, including those with disabilities or who are not proficient in English. Using UDL in the general classroom makes education accessible and engaging for everybody.

This kind of access to content, curriculum and instruction are analogous to access in a building. In fact, the name Universal Design for Learning, like universal design in architecture, comes from the concept of barrier-free spaces in which buildings are designed from the start with wheelchair access in mind—from wide doors to roll-in shower stalls.

When students can't enter a building because it has narrow doorways and no ramps or elevators, they are denied access. When students hit barriers because no one speaks their first language, and there are no symbol representations, recordings or other ways into the material, they are denied access to the curriculum. UDL embeds flexibility into teaching methods, materials and assessments. UDL allows all learners to make connections and use their skills and interests to fully engage in learning. And UDL raises educators' awareness about what students need.

Like the first curb ramps that set a pattern for universal design—the concept of designing products and environments usable by all—UDL originated as a framework for students with disabilities but gives everyone opportunities to learn.

Putting UDL in practice

Here are two examples:

- Using video captioning for students with hearing impairments also helps struggling readers, students with attention deficits, students learning English, and even students trying to work in a noisy classroom.
- Providing digital text of a novel with built-in comprehension supports is one way to apply the principle of multiple means of presentation to instructional materials. A student who has difficulty reading printed text could use symbols or the text reader feature, while a kid who needs help with reading comprehension could use embedded definitions of words, highlighted abstract literary concepts, foreign language

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

LIGHT-TECH TOOLS

Sticky notes; pencils; grips; highlighters; schedules; charts; checklists; communication books



MID-TECH TOOLS

Software; FM systems; headphones; microphones; alarms and watches; single-switch voice output devices



HIGH-TECH TOOLS

Computers; scribing pens; interactive white boards; touch windows; voice output communication devices



translations, or animated coaches who help answer comprehension questions.

In both examples, UDL transforms instruction from a passive receipt of information into a dynamic and interactive learning experience. The table above provides further examples of assistive technology. These tools help students access the curriculum. Additional examples are available at <http://udleditions.cast.org>.

Where we go from here

To provide optimal flexibility and support for all learners, UDL calls for more than just providing assistive technology. It also requires creating curricula—with instructional materials, methods, assessments and goals—that offer multiple means of presenting content (the “what” of learning), multiple means of engagement (the “why”) and multiple means of action and expression (the “how”).

PRESENTATION

Educators must present classroom materials and instruction in various ways.

Presentation methods

VISUAL

- Text, symbols, animations, movies, closed captioning

AUDITORY

- Descriptions of onscreen activities, spoken feedback, alarms, music, reading aloud

PRINTED TEXT

- Text in first language, text in second language, printed definitions of vocabulary

OUTLINED TEXT

- Use of first/next organization, scope and sequence, content outline, outline with page number references or Internet links

NOTE-TAKING

- Highlighting, summarizing, main idea notations

ENGAGEMENT

Educators must involve students in instruction in a variety of ways.

Engagement methods

INDIVIDUAL ENGAGEMENT

- Activity choice, graphic organizers as tools, recorded presentations

SMALL GROUP ENGAGEMENT

- Interactive simulations, lab experiences, group projects



LARGE GROUP ENGAGEMENT

- Game show or quiz show simulations

HOMOGENEOUS STUDENT GROUPS

- Groups with similar skill sets, ages or interests

HETEROGENEOUS STUDENT GROUPS

- Mixed reading instruction, cooperative science groups, peer tutoring or pairing

Teacher-parent communication boosts homework completion

Study shows how a simple, inexpensive approach yields positive results

MIDDLE SCHOOL can be the time when students become less reliable in their homework habits—failing both to complete assignments and to turn them in. A new study from an administrator in New York shows that an approach requiring students to get homework help from parents, and which includes extra outreach from the teacher to the home, is an inexpensive way to boost parent involvement and increase homework completion rates.

In a study published in the fall/winter 2012 issue of *School Community Journal*, Waveline Bennett-Conroy, the director of pupil personnel for the Mount Vernon (N.Y.) City School District, writes about research she conducted with eighth-grade students in Mt. Vernon, a low-income district with large numbers of minority and immigrant students.

While the stereotype of such a student population is one of low or no formal parent involvement, Bennett-Conroy's initial research, which included interviews with parents, found that they were actually more involved in school activities than teachers or other school staff had thought. Parents did indicate that their involvement was limited at times by factors such as difficulty with the subject matter, lack of reference materials, scheduling and transportation issues, lack of information about school events, and little time and energy due to other responsibilities (such as multiple jobs).

The second phase of her research involved a seven-week trial with eighth-graders in which they were given assignments using the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork program, or TIPS. Students are given structured, curriculum-based worksheets that they complete with a family member; these assignments are not supposed to require reference materials or deep knowledge of the subject matter. Half of the teachers in the study also were asked to contact their students' parents via telephone.

As expected, submission rates for the TIPS assignments from the group that received extra contact from teachers was higher than for those just doing the assignments, 64 percent to 45 percent. Bennett-Conroy notes that even those higher rates are lower than what school officials would hope for, but they are better than the norm

for the district. One challenge teachers discovered when they tried to call parents was that a small but significant number—typically immigrants and often single parents—couldn't be reached because they work multiple jobs, sometimes totaling 80 hours a week, and some work as live-in home health aides five days a week.

The study also found a number of unanticipated benefits aside from the increased rates of homework assignments being turned in. Many parents in the intervention group ended up having longer and more frequent conversations with the teachers that continued beyond the seven-week study period. Some teachers kept using the TIPS assignments after the study period. And, at parents' night events in the spring, teachers reported meeting parents they had never seen before. In addition, some parents who weren't comfortable working with their own children because of limited English or reading abilities ended up arranging for someone else to help out.

The bottom line from Bennett-Conroy's research is that "a low-cost intervention in a low-income, high-minority school district to increase

middle school parent involvement at home and at school is feasible, acceptable and effective," she writes. "School staff often underestimate the willingness of parents to be involved and are likely to find a much greater response than they might anticipate by initiating outreach for parent-teacher bidirectional communication."



"A low-cost intervention to increase middle school parent involvement in a low-income, high-minority school district ... is feasible, acceptable and effective."

—WAVELINE BENNETT-CONROY,
researcher and school administrator





WORKING TOGETHER *to create* BETTER SCHOOLS

Town hall meetings give voice to the community



EVERY VOICE COUNTS. That's the mantra at a series of town hall-style meetings co-sponsored by AFT locals and their community partners in cities across the country. And, it will be the overlying principle of a report on those meetings, amplifying the voices of myriad stakeholders working to improve education—from individual students to members of the NAACP, parent-led advocacy groups and educators.

The meetings bring together essential stakeholders around issues that are most important to their particular community, strengthening everyone's ability to address these issues together. The town hall participants, who are enthusiastically embracing their new alliance with labor, include locally based neighborhood alliances, social justice advocates, social service providers and education scholars.

One of the primary goals of the meetings is to help shape the local and national education discourse with the most authentic resource available: the voices of parents, teachers and students.

For example, at a Chicago Teachers Union-sponsored Education Summit in December, 25 years of mayoral control inspired a workshop focused on fighting for an elected school board. The overall event, which drew nearly 400 teachers, unionists, parents, students, neighborhood activists and policymakers, also covered school closings, charter schools, wraparound services, "test mania" and other locally relevant issues.

The AFT's ability to share a national perspective and strategies helps lift up local groups, said Albany Park Neighborhood Council's Raul Botello, who ran the Chicago event's youth organizing workshops. "We hope that this is the beginning of a movement to really strengthen that network of folks who are pushing an agenda that's equitable and just."

In St. Paul, Minn., two parent-teacher-community book clubs and a series of listening sessions have explored teaching, equity, testing culture, class size, technology and enrichment, all with a focus on shifting the paradigm to put parents' voices at the center of education reform.

Members of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers, which has sponsored the sessions, are so committed to including parent voices that they intend to embed the issues in their contract where possible.

Defining its contract as a teaching and learning document, says Mary Cathryn Ricker, president of the St. Paul Federation of Teachers, is a major step. "You have heard that a teacher's working conditions are a student's learning conditions," she says. "But unless we have contract language that actually acknowledges that, then it's not the teaching and learning document that it could be."

At meetings, Ricker, an AFT vice president, has found much common ground with



PHOTOS BY SIMONE BONDE

Top: Community members listen during a town hall meeting in Chicago. A Chicago high school student, middle photo, led a discussion with his peers. Above: Parents and others plot out plans for improving schools in the Windy City.

Below: The town hall meeting in St. Paul, Minn., brought together a cross-section of that city's educators, parents and community activists.



JANET HOSTETTER

"There is so much agreement between parents and teachers about what our students need, it's just a matter of [finding] the smartest way to work together to guarantee that for students."

—MARY CATHRYN RICKER, president, Saint Paul (Minn.) Federation of Teachers



JANET HOSTETTER

Watch of a video of the town hall meetings at <http://go.aft.org/townhall>.



PHOTOS BY NIKIE RINALDI NUN

Sharing ideas, addressing problems

The Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers and the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network co-sponsored a town hall in Pittsburgh for about 200 people in November.

"People need to know their voice is important," said parent Lenelle Reid, who helped facilitate discussions about parent and teacher priorities there. "That makes a huge difference."

In Houston, town hall participants tackled school closings.

"When you close down a school in a community, you close down a community," said Reginald Lillie, president of the Houston NAACP. To prevent that, the community must command the attention of legislators—with voters. "It's going to take multiple agencies," noted Lillie, who has invited AFT representatives to attend his education committee meetings. "It affects all of us: the whole city, the whole state, the whole country. Everybody has a stake in this."

School closings are an issue for New Orleans high school senior Myron Miller, as well. He joined a fired-up group of students at a town hall meeting to protest the threat to public schools, and to help educators, parents and others understand what schools are really like from a student's perspective.

Miller attends Sarah T. Reed Senior High School, which already shares a building with KIPP charter school, and he is fighting to keep the district from phasing out his school entirely. Miller wants his little sister to attend Reed when she is old enough.

"I'm sitting there every day watching my

school lose resources and watching students leave," he says. Last year, students waited two to three weeks before they even got a teacher; no one checked attendance, and students learned very little, Miller says. Other students described a lack of counselors, and a curriculum that failed to prepare them for college.

Instead of giving up, Miller started a student organization, Reed Renaissance Initiative, and polled students about the change they'd like to see. The town hall meeting gave them an opportunity to share their ideas.

That's key, says Winnifred Anderson Magee, who recently retired after teaching social studies for 35 years. "The most serious issue facing schools in New Orleans is the lack of community input," she says. "Families have become disenfranchised due to the fractured school system."

The result: unequal distribution of resources.

"Working together as a group will bring more attention to the problems in education," Magee says.

Representatives from the town hall events (also held in Cincinnati; Cleveland; Hillsborough County, Fla.; Minneapolis; New York City; Philadelphia and San Francisco), will gather in the coming months to synthesize participants' ideas and begin to create a set of national principles for community guidance in education.

That work will culminate in a report from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, which has followed and participated in the meetings from the beginning. The report is expected within the year.



Clockwise from above left: High school student Myron Miller reports on one of the small group sessions held during January's town hall meeting in New Orleans. Parent Nikkisha Napoleon speaks up during the town hall, while retired New Orleans teacher Winnifred Anderson Magee emphasizes the importance of involving the community in the effort to address the problems impacting the city's public schools.

An international audience

Finnish Embassy hosts AFT's Share My Lesson showcase

SHARE MY LESSON, the AFT's online resource for teachers and other educators, is getting high marks from many in the international community, including Finnish Ambassador Ritva Koukku-Ronde.

Koukku-Ronde welcomed the AFT and international guests to the Finnish Embassy in December, where she praised Share My Lesson, the AFT's online collection of curriculum and lesson plans, as reminiscent of Finland's own renowned commitment to teacher training and support.

One of the primary reasons the Finnish education system is so successful, Koukku-Ronde said, is teacher training: Teachers there are trained in universities and must hold master's degrees. Training "is at the same level as that of doctors or lawyers," the ambassador said. Teachers in Finland "are so highly valued and respected," she added, the profession is "a kind of dream job."

Koukku-Ronde gave high marks to the AFT's commitment to rigorous teacher training. Share My Lesson can be an extension of that training, a tool for new teachers to continue their professional development: "Sharing is caring," said Koukku-Ronde, and giving teachers the tools to share their best lesson plans and activities is another way of valuing their work, while at the same time supporting their professional growth.

Because it is an online system, Share My

Lesson serves international populations particularly well. Marie Sainz-Funaro, president of the Overseas Federation of Teachers-AFT, described it as invaluable for students who have to move to another country in the middle of the school year, because it allows teachers to continue to support them as they finish their work. It also allows teachers who work thousands of miles apart to collaborate, an especially important point for members of AFT locals spread across several nations.

The embassy event underscores the relationship between

the AFT and Finland: A delegation of AFT leaders has visited Finland several times to study the success of the education system there, and the embassy here has welcomed the AFT and its president Randi Weingarten twice before.

"You have shown the world that there is a way, through public education, of helping all children succeed," Weingarten told Koukku-Ronde. "Finland prepares teachers like we



The Share My Lesson website is tried out during the event at the embassy.



prepare our doctors. Education of the next generation is as important to Finns as life is to us."

AFT secretary-treasurer Lorretta Johnson, right, and Finnish Ambassador Ritva Koukku-Ronde.

Weingarten noted that new teachers are far too often "expected to figure things out and left to see if they and their students sink or swim." More rigorous teacher preparation could help remedy that.

"Share My Lesson can help as well, filling the gaps and preparing teachers for the classroom," Weingarten said—"both as new teachers, and on an ongoing basis."

A victory for children and the public schools

Louisiana's voucher program violates the state constitution

IN WHAT THE LOUISIANA Federation of Teachers called "a victory for the constitution and the rule of law," a judge has declared that Gov. Bobby Jindal's statewide voucher program for private and religious schools violates the Louisiana Constitution.

State District Judge Tim Kelley in late November agreed with LFT and other plaintiffs—including the Louisiana Association of Educators, the Louisiana School Boards Association and 43 local school districts—that the state cannot use public funds from the Minimum Foundation Program to pay for school choices, including nonpublic schools, early graduation college scholarships, nonpublic online education or individual courses created by private providers.

"It is also a victory for the nearly 700,000 children who depend on public schools for an education, and for local citizens who do not want their tax dollars diverted away from the uses they intended," says LFT president Steve Monaghan.

Monaghan says he expects the voucher case will ultimately be decided by the state Supreme Court, but he is confident the union's position will prevail. "We hope that we can quickly resolve this issue and then get to work in collaboration with the Legislature and the administration on true education reforms that will create excellent schools for all of the children of our state."

Judge Kelley ruled that the legislation unconstitutionally diverted funds raised by local school districts to pay for the vouchers.

In pushing the voucher scheme, Monaghan says, Gov. Jindal and his allies did a disservice to the 4,900 children who are now attending nonpublic schools on vouchers. It is unclear where those voucher recipients will attend school. "But that is the fault of the governor and his allies," he says. "Not only was the voucher program patently unconstitutional, but it placed children into schools without adequate oversight and with no assurance of quality instruction."



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL CAMPBELL

AFT executive vice president Francine Lawrence, left, with other guests at the Finnish Embassy.

Their brilliant careers

AFT highlights schools that connect learning and careers

AFT PRESIDENT Randi Weingarten took time in January to visit staff, students and partners at three Chicago high schools that are tailored to a basic truth: Students are more apt to stay engaged in learning when they draw the connection between their studies and the successful careers and lives they dream of having down the road.

Three career-themed schools welcomed the AFT president through their doors. Austin Polytechnical Academy is a five-year old public high school that takes an economic priority—strengthening the nation’s competitive advantage in a global economy based on

Healthcare student Elizabeth Cruz takes the pulse of the union during the AFT’s school visit.

advanced manufacturing—and translates that national goal into personal opportunities for students. The Instituto Health Sciences Career Academy is a two-year-old



charter high school that seeks to prepare Chicago youth for success in another growing sector, the healthcare fields. Its sister school, the Instituto Justice and Leadership Academy, features studies that allow students to play meaningful roles in community revitalization.

All of these schools serve low-income neighborhoods and draw many students who either are at risk of dropping out or are returning to studies after having left school before graduating. The Chicago Teachers Union represents staff at Austin Polytechnical and helped to design the school, while the AFT Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff represents teachers at the two Instituto schools.

At Austin Polytechnical, Weingarten got a chance to whet her whistle—grinding a precise, down-to-the-micrometer metal cast of a trainer’s whistle using some of the most advanced fabrication equipment around.

Moments before the visit, Thomas O’Brien, who teaches engineering and machining at the school, was circulating among students who were putting Autodesk’s computer-aided design software through its tracks, and the teacher spoke about how engaged students get in the classroom. “When they’re doing good work, we don’t hear anything” inside the room except questions and comments for the instructors, he said.

Weingarten also met with several manufacturers on Chicago’s West Side who have contributed time, talents and resources to strengthening Austin Polytech. She congratulated the school-community partnership members for putting their dedication into action—in ways that place the winds of a changing global economy at the backs of Chicago students and neighborhoods.

For students like Desiree Wordlaw, Austin Polytech also has provided a strong connection with options for her adult life. The senior was all smiles on the day of the visit. Just hours before, she learned that she had earned her fourth advanced industry credential, which will put her in the driver’s seat for an



excellent position right out of school or for continuing her education in college. Recently, she learned she has been accepted at the University of Iowa for next year.

Junior Kenny Plymouth lathes it on as he explains hi-tech machining to AFT president Randi Weingarten.

Weingarten later toured the two charter schools, established by the Instituto del Progreso Latino. They are among the 14 charter schools in the city where teachers and staff are represented by the Chicago Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff. At the Justice and Leadership Academy, Weingarten visited with teachers and students working in teams on a class project to help revitalize the neighborhood by beautifying an empty lot.

At the Health Sciences Career Academy, the AFT president observed classes in both science and the humanities. She even got an on-the-fly check of her pulse by 10th-grader Elizabeth Cruz who is preparing for a career in healthcare.

The schools, located in the heart of one of the city’s largest Latino communities, work to reclaim educational opportunities for older students at risk of leaving school without a diploma. Several students gave poignant voice to the worthiness of that cause when they spoke at a presentation during the tour.

Books for kids who need them most

WASHINGTON TEACHERS’ UNION supporters Tiffany Johnson, left, and Tenia Pritchard celebrate the dedication of the local’s new Teachers’ Center at Anacostia High School. The center will focus on improving teacher quality in District of Columbia Public Schools. During the ceremony, WTU announced its partnership with First Book to place thousands of new, free and deeply discounted books (via public school librarians and teachers) into the hands of students who need them most.

WTU already has donated more than 2,000 books as well as some e-readers to several low-performing D.C. public schools, and is helping distribute thousands more directly to students whose families can’t afford to provide books at home. In partnership with volunteers from the District of Columbia Daughters of the American Revolution, the Teachers’ Center will facilitate reading groups at schools where students have low reading proficiency.



MICHAEL CAMPBELL



See video coverage of the visit to Austin Polytechnical Academy: <http://go.aft.org/austinPA>.

DISAPPEARING ACT

End the testing fixation before it erases more meaningful education

WHEN IT COMES TO TESTING, teachers, parents and even some students agree on one thing: They have had about all they can take. And for good reason. The fixation on testing is putting undue stress on educators as well as students, and, in many instances, punishing teachers and schools. It's also shortchanging vital parts of the curriculum, including arts, music and physical education.

Bonnie Cunard, who teaches eighth-grade language arts in Fort Myers, Fla., feels the pinch in her classroom, sacrificing hours to test preparation and administration. For seven of the 10 months in the school year, the entire language arts curriculum revolves around the writing portion of standardized tests, says Cunard, a member of the Teachers Association of Lee County. Students sacrifice time they could spend studying literature to

In Chicago, children as young as 4 are lining up for multiple standardized tests. "We're doing it to our babies," protests preschool teacher Kristen Roberts. Chicago preschoolers face a test called the Kindergarten Readiness Tool before they even enter elementary school; kindergartners endure 14 different standardized tests in one year. "I find it very demoralizing," says Roberts. "Testing young children is developmentally inappropriate. This is damaging to teaching and to learning."

Many parents agree.

The pressure's on

Amy Green's daughter, a third-grader, comes home close to tears on test days: Despite teacher assurance that the child might not know many of the answers, the tests make her "feel stupid." For that reason, Green is keeping her younger son out of public schools and will enroll him in a private kindergarten instead. "I won't subject him to 14 tests that are going to absolutely kill his self-esteem about who he is as a learner."

Older students feel the stress, too. Members of Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) joined the Chicago Teachers Union to protest over-testing, carrying chains of more than 12,000 pencils strung together to represent the number of hours students lose to standardized testing in a single year. In addition to swallowing up precious learning time as teachers teach to the test, too many tests are closely tied to school and teacher evaluations. Students object to this. "Our test scores should not be used to jeopardize our teachers' careers," high school junior Victor Alquicira told a large CTU rally last September. Quoted in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, he added, "It's not fair to judge teachers on student test scores when there so many factors beyond their control."

Those sorts of factors can severely affect test scores on any given day, points out Philadelphia English teacher Bonnee Breese. At her high-poverty high school, students may arrive on test days with any number of personal crises that prevent them from performing well. Some are homeless, bouncing from homeless shelters to makeshift arrangements with rela-

tives and friends. Others have parents who are largely unavailable to care for them and their siblings. "Sometimes there has been some sort of traumatic violence in their lives the night before the test, and they come in the next day because school is the only place they had to come," says Breese, a member of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. She's even had students attend school on testing days when "they couldn't keep their heads up off the desk and stop crying because a parent had died the night before."

In New York City, some parents are boycotting test days. "I want my school to use tests to help instruction, to help find out if kids don't know fractions," parent Lori Chajet told the *New York Times*. "I don't want my child to feel like her score will decide if her teacher has a job or not." Chajet kept her daughter home from school to protest a test designed to choose which questions should be included on future state exams.

"We believe education should focus on developing the imagination of a child, not on putting them through stressful and mind-numbing standardized tests, day after day," reads the website for New York's Parent Voices, an advocacy group against high-stakes testing. "We are here to say: Enough is Enough!"

Research shows how extreme the testing culture has become: A superintendent in Monroe County, N.Y., testified that in the first two months of school, more than 20,000 pre-tests were administered to 4,000 students; Florida teachers say their schools have some form of testing 80-90 school days a year; and in Texas, up to 45 days each school year are spent on testing activities.

A tool that doesn't work

Many who follow education policy assert that intensive testing does not help students advance. In fact, some studies show that more students drop out when faced with an exit exam, which they must pass to graduate from high school. That would be the opposite of our goal: to educate every student.

Too many tests can erode the quality of education for students who stay in school as well: Teachers feel compelled to produce high

"Our test scores should not be used to jeopardize our teachers' careers." —VICTOR ALQUICIRA, high school junior, Chicago



JOHN RANDOLPH, COURTESY VOYCE

practice persuasive and expository writing, because if they don't do well the school could lose its Title I status and the corresponding resources it needs to serve these children.

The system destroys holistic learning, says Cunard, noting also that it adds a lot of pressure. "The school is depending on me for the writing scores." Meanwhile, her personal evaluations (based on the value-added model) depend on reading scores—and she doesn't even teach reading; that's another teacher's responsibility. "It's frustrating," says Cunard. "I feel like I have no control."

scores, to protect their jobs and to keep their schools open, so they focus on rote learning and memorization, test-taking techniques and shallow approaches to material that could otherwise be presented in more creative, enriching ways. By emphasizing test success, critical-thinking skills and deeper learning are ignored. In fact, entire subject areas are abandoned, as testing focuses pri-

day—the tests need to be supplemented with other measures. Classroom observation, student portfolios and performance-based assessment are some options.

Equity and fairness

The accepted intention of testing is to improve performance for all students, in all schools. But many would argue that the op-

“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.”

—RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT president



ENRIQUE MOREIRO

marily on English and math. Science, music, art and physical education are often lost, programs downsized or even eliminated.

This is not to say that all testing is detrimental. But as the AFT’s resolution against high-stakes testing states, testing should inform, not impede, teaching and learning. “Public education should be obsessed with high-quality teaching and learning, not high-stakes testing,” AFT president Randi Weingarten says. “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.”

Testing is particularly problematic when it becomes the sole determinant of success—or failure. When many factors can skew test results—student absences, large numbers of English language learners, and the personal traumas and stresses that may influence an individual student’s ability to focus on a test

posite is true. When poor test scores result in school closings, tests can take away the very institutions our neediest students rely upon to improve: their neighborhood schools.

“There’s a huge impact,” says Monique Redoe, a member of the Chicago Teachers Union, co-chair of the Chicago Black Teachers Caucus, and a seventh- and eighth-grade social studies teacher. “We know we have biased tests,” she explains, citing the subjective nature of creating test questions that reflect the cultural background of the majority population, and not the life experience of minorities. The result: Low-income, minority students fail at disproportionate rates. “Because of that,” she says, “8 percent of the school closures have been in black communities.”

Once those public schools close, private schools move in. “I believe testing is a weapon,” says Redoe. “It’s being used as a weapon to privatize education.”

—VIRGINIA MYERS

Learning is more than
test score



What you can do

ADD YOUR VOICE to the effort to end the fixation on testing by joining the AFT campaign, Learning Is More Than a Test Score. Our campaign emphasizes the importance of instruction in all subject areas, as well as approaches that encourage critical thinking and deep learning.

The AFT is committed to helping teachers provide the best learning environment possible for their students—and that means rejecting the stress of high-stakes testing.

Visit the website, www.LearningIsMore.org, and sign the petition. Learn how you can become directly involved in the campaign to end this fixation on testing that is hurting our students and our schools.

Thousands of people already have signed the AFT petition calling for a more balanced approach to public education. This effort will continue in the coming months, as AFT staff work with other education advocates to tame the testing beast.

The AFT believes that tests are an important tool to diagnose students’ strengths and weaknesses and that, when used correctly, they can help teachers identify kids who are falling behind and those who need more challenging work.

“As we push for better, higher standards in education, we must ensure that teaching to high standards doesn’t devolve into teaching to low-level tests,” AFT president Randi Weingarten says.

AFT staff are working with affiliates on state legislation concerning the appropriate use of tests, and continuing to collect and analyze data that show the amount of time and money spent on testing and test preparation.

An impressive 870 school districts in Texas (or 85 percent of all districts in the state) have passed a resolution saying that high-stakes standardized tests are “strangling” public schools.

And the Florida School Boards Association and dozens of Florida school districts have passed resolutions calling for an end to high-stakes tests as the primary factor in evaluating student, teacher, school and district achievement.

To add your voice to the protest against too much testing, visit www.LearningIsMore.org and sign the petition.



Mary Ellen Riordan, left, fought for fair class sizes in Detroit. Veronica Hill, center, is honored for her work in New Orleans. Layle Lane, inset and far right with the AFT Human Rights Committee, earned a place in American history.

PHOTOS FROM AFT ARCHIVES

Pioneering women helped secure equal rights for students, educators

A Women's History Month salute to three outstanding AFT leaders

LIKE THE FICTIONAL character Zelig, who popped up everywhere in the great events of his day, teacher and AFT vice president Layle Lane showed up again and again during landmark events of the 20th century: in forcing open jobs for African-Americans during World War II, in desegregating schools and labor unions, and in the March on Washington for civil rights—from its origins in the 1930s to its culmination in 1963—which led to national laws ensuring civil rights and voting rights.

There's one big difference between Lane and Zelig. Instead of merely making an appearance in these monumental events, Lane helped drive each of them.

During Women's History Month in March, Layle Lane deserves to take her place not only in labor history but also among the leading figures in American history.

Lane was born in 1894 in Georgia. Her career as an activist began when she moved to New York City in 1916 and joined a march by thousands protesting the massacre of 100 blacks in Missouri.

The young woman wanted a teaching job in public schools, so she added a bachelor's degree from Hunter College to her undergraduate degree from Howard University, and enrolled at Columbia for a master's. She was hired, first as a history teacher in the Bronx, and later as the only black teacher at Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem.

Lane was a great organizer. In the 1920s, she helped A. Philip Randolph organize black railroad employees into a union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Ever a fierce

proponent of education and desegregation, Lane nonetheless recognized that jobs—basic economic justice—had to come first. “Neither education nor race equality butter any bread or pay rent,” she said. “Only an opportunity to work at decent wages will do that.”

Lane's union work made labor history, too. As chair of the AFT Human Rights Committee, she fought for an amendment to the AFT constitution that outlawed segregated locals in 1953, and she spearheaded the union's fight against public school segregation.

As the AFT's first black female vice president, she advocated for small class sizes and African-American studies. And she headed a writing team that helped craft the AFT's three friend-of-the-court briefs over the long course of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the case that led the U.S. Supreme Court to ban school segregation in 1954.

Pioneers in their locals

Two other AFT women who made history were Mary Ellen Riordan, the first full-time president of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, and Veronica Hill, who became president of the United Teachers of New Orleans and was elected an AFT vice president in 1948, at a time when many local teachers unions were still segregated, and the AFT was pushing hard to integrate our locals nationwide.

Hill, in fact, had two mammoth tasks in founding the AFT local in New Orleans. First, she had to fight for equal treatment of black educators and integrate two segregated locals. Members of the city's black teachers union in

1937 had to climb a fire escape on the school board building to get inside and, assisted by a friendly custodian, slip their petition for equal compensation under the right door.

Second, Hill had to persuade UTNO members to use the power of the union in their drive for better school funding, salaries and working conditions. “We had to educate the teachers, who knew very little about collective bargaining,” she said.

Riordan became a union leader in Detroit, a city with a history of women in union leadership. She joined the AFT in 1945. Faced with “not enough books, not enough chairs, not enough time, not enough anything,” Riordan had to overcome her moral dilemma over leaving the classroom to strike for better conditions in the classroom. But strike she did, and went on to lead several more strikes in her role as Detroit Federation of Teachers president for more than 20 years.

Riordan helped persuade Michigan lawmakers to let teachers bargain collectively. As a member of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, she practiced a brand of unionism closely linked with social justice.

“One of the big battles fought year after year was to get a fair distribution of textbooks and materials to the schools in the neighborhoods that were predominantly black,” she said. “Class size was smaller in white neighborhood schools than in black schools. We fought that and didn't succeed until we finally got class size in our collective bargaining agreement.”

—ANNETTE LICITRA



Philly fights back

Independence Mall rally highlights plan to save schools

AFT PRESIDENT Randi Weingarten recently stood shoulder to shoulder with Philadelphians fighting to preserve vital public services, to maintain worker bargaining rights and to keep the doors of the city's public schools open in the face of reckless calls for wholesale closings.

The AFT president participated in a rally sponsored by labor and civic groups that called on Mayor Michael Nutter to negotiate in good faith with city unions. Participants at the rally also highlighted the urgency of keeping neighborhood schools open. Late last year, the Philadelphia School Reform Commission hatched a plan to save money by closing 38 public schools, sparking a backlash from families and communities across the city that would be hurt by the plan.

"Have a moratorium on closing schools," Weingarten told the crowd gathered at Philadelphia's Independence Mall on the weekend leading up to the observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. "Let's fix schools and let's make



PHOTOS BY LAURIE BECK



Philadelphia Federation of Teachers president Jerry Jordan, above, fires up a large AFT contingent fighting to save neighborhood schools.

sure we invest in kids rather than de-invest."

The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, one of the co-organizers of the rally, has joined with the Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools to advance an alternative proposal. Instead of shuttering buildings, the community-generated strategy championed by the coalition wants to ensure that every child can attend a great neighborhood school.

Five days after the rally, the Philadelphia City Council weighed in with a nonbinding resolution calling for a one-year moratorium on public school closures. The measure was

approved in a landslide 14-2 vote.

"The resolution leaves no doubt that our elected officials hear the voice of educators, parents and community loud and clear," said PFT president Jerry Jordan, who is also an AFT vice president. "While this is still very much an uphill battle, the fact that our position is shared gives us every reason to believe that our fight to save Philadelphia's neighborhood schools is winnable."

AFSCME and the Philadelphia AFL-CIO central labor council were also rally co-organizers.



Communities speak out against school closures

IN LATE JANUARY, parents, students and community activists from cities nationwide headed to the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., to express their concerns about harmful school-closing policies. They sent a clear message: It's time to fix, not close, schools. "The current fixation on

closing neighborhood public schools destabilizes neighborhoods, creates instability for our children, disproportionately affects children of color and undermines public education," AFT president Randi Weingarten said in a statement supporting those who spoke out against the school closures.



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL CAMPBELL

Stepping up to revitalize a community and create jobs

NYC teacher pension fund to invest in Sandy reconstruction

IN THE WAKE OF Superstorm Sandy, the Teachers' Retirement System of the City of New York has pledged \$1 billion to new investments in infrastructure projects, including improvements to transportation, power, water, communications and housing in New York, Connecticut and New Jersey.

While all proposed projects will be rated on the basis of their return and the fund's fiduciary

The Teachers' Retirement System of the City of New York is pledging \$1 billion to strengthen infrastructure.

standards, potential investments could range from repairing bridges to rebuilding housing destroyed by the storm. In addition to repairing and upgrading facilities used by hun-

dreds of thousands of New Yorkers, the infrastructure fund could create thousands of jobs.

This pledge is part of a multiyear Clinton Global Initiative Commitment to Action made by the AFL-CIO, the AFT and partners at the inaugural CGI America meeting in June 2011.

The Commitment to Action will finance the construction and repair of quality public infrastructure, which will result in at least \$10 billion in workers' capital invested in the area within five years. The CGI Commitment also includes a pledge to invest \$10 million to \$20 million in energy-efficient retrofits and an effort to train 40,000 new apprentices and 100,000 mid-career construction workers in the skills necessary to work on 21st-century infrastructure projects.

At a December press conference, President Bill Clinton, Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan, UFT president and AFT vice president Michael Mulgrew, Comptroller for the City of New York John Liu, and AFT president Randi Weingarten announced the \$1 billion allocation, which not only will create jobs, but also strengthen infrastructure so New York is better prepared to protect vulnerable populations from the rising sea levels, droughts and



increased frequency of storms that coincide with climate change.

"Together, the work will benefit our future not only in terms of more efficient buildings and reducing the threat of climate change, but also in the lives of teachers, construction workers, and in lowering energy costs for people all over America," said President Clinton.

"This investment is another example of America's educators stepping up not only to educate and care for our children but also to revitalize our communities, create jobs and strengthen our economy," said Weingarten.



A collaborative approach

Affiliate works with community to win approval for new charter school

EDUCATORS IN AUSTIN, Texas, have won approval for their "in-district" charter—a by-the-community, for-the-community endeavor—created with support from an AFT Innovation Fund grant.

At the same time, the school's polar opposite, created by a 28-school Texas charter chain, was virtually shut out and its partnership with the school district dissolved.

This is truly the tale of two charters.

The failed charter, an IDEA school that swooped in with a preordained program it foisted upon a community that had no input, is losing the support of the school board after just one semester. The other charter—a collaboration that has included the voices of teachers, parents, district personnel and members of the community from the beginning—won unanimous approval from the school board.

The new school will remain part of the dis-

trict, but will have greater autonomy over its programs under the state's "in-district charter" law. "This is the right way to innovate, together, rather than being dictated to," says Ken Zarifis, president of Education Austin, the AFT affiliate that initiated the more collaborative school.

Education Austin, along with partner Austin Interfaith, has been developing this unique project for two years. Approved by the nine-member school board in December, it takes the charter concept back to the grass roots, basing the program on what community members have said they need most: dual-language programming, service learning, and a strong technology and digital element. The school, Travis Heights Elementary, will be run by a board of community members, teachers, administrators and representatives from Education Austin and Austin Interfaith, with buy-in from the school's current teachers and administrators.

Inclusion has been a key element of the

school from its very inception, says Zarifis. "We made a concerted effort to make sure that everybody was involved in the process: parents, teachers, the superintendent, her upper-level team, school board members. We were constantly talking to everyone." Advocates reached 600 households in the community, and 99 percent of them approved of the idea; 97 percent of teachers, administrators and staff at the school were also on board.

"They're saying 'yes' because they're part of the creation of this innovative school," says Zarifis.

The success of Education Austin's charter is in contrast to the failure of the school district's partnership with the IDEA charter school, which was approved a year ago. The same night the school board approved Education Austin's program, it dissolved the partnership with IDEA. That charter bulldozed its way into the community, rather than working with it.



For more information on the AFT Innovation Fund, go to www.aft.org/innovate.

There in a time of need

Retirees help colleagues recover from Superstorm Sandy

WHEN SUPERSTORM SANDY had finished ravaging the East Coast, members of the United Federation of Teachers retiree chapter took action. UFT retiree chapter members were running an Election 2012 phone bank when Sandy struck in late October, but the devastation that affected New Yorkers prompted the union to turn the phone bank into a call center for UFT members in need.

Sheila Fishbane, who lives just outside of Coney Island, was among the first to volunteer. The storm left her own house untouched, but she was devastated by the destruction she saw nearby. Fishbane, a recent retiree who taught English as a second language, couldn't help others rebuild—but she could make phone calls. "I was so happy there was something I could do," she says.

For several weeks following the storm, the volunteers returned calls from members who requested help with all sorts of things, ranging from getting their paychecks to locating supplies. Some members of the retiree chapter received training from the Federal Emergency Management Agency so they could help members whose homes had been damaged

file applications for federal aid.

"Most retirees understand the ins and outs of phone banking; so when FEMA came in, we picked things up quickly and were able to assist members with their problems and help them move forward," says retiree Joyce Magnus. She lives on Staten Island, but her home weathered the storm. Magnus, a retired elementary education teacher, is active in the retiree chapter and got involved because she wanted to help. "The UFT is always doing these kinds of things. It's who we are. It's what we do."

Some of the stories members had to tell were painful to hear, but the retirees gave them a sympathetic ear, says retiree Betty Gottfried. "I don't know how people we spoke to were in such good spirits. It amazed me." Gottfried, who taught adult education, is a regular volunteer for the retiree chapter. She was particularly pleased to take part in the Superstorm Sandy relief effort. "I have many friends who were affected by the storm, and it was good to see everyone pull together. This was a very collegial effort."

The retirees continued their involvement



DAVID GROSSMAN

by joining union members from Baltimore, Philadelphia, Connecticut and other parts of New York state who gathered in New York City to lend a hand with stuffing 30,000 backpacks for students in need. They also participated in a program they named "Adopt a Class" during the December holidays. The retiree chapter collaborated with several organizations to provide 548 children at Public School 188 with gifts.

From left, retirees Betty Gottfried, Joyce Magnus and Sheila Fishbane helped AFT members affected by Superstorm Sandy move forward in the aftermath.

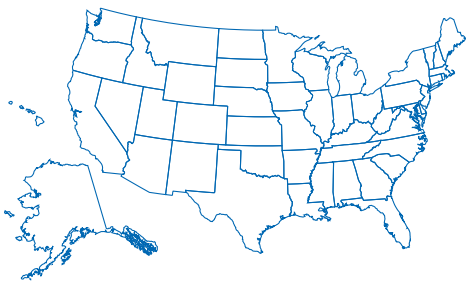


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CT Healthcare workers at Community Health Services Inc. in Hartford, Conn., voted on Feb. 1 to join AFT Connecticut. “As the largest representative of acute care hospital workers in Connecticut, we believe that the healthcare workers at CHS fit perfectly within our union,” says Melodie Peters, president of AFT Connecticut.

The new local has 37 employees with a variety of titles, including diabetes coordinator, registered dietitian, physician assistant, registered nurse, psychiatrist, dentist, pediatrician, dental hygienist and licensed practical nurse.

“The courage and determination of the providers at CHS Hartford to provide care and access for the impoverished and afflicted of our community will be enhanced through our union empowerment,” says podiatrist Irving Buchbinder.

“I appreciate having a union now because it strengthens our voice,” says Phyllis Schling, an advanced practice registered nurse. “Having a stronger voice means we will be better able to advocate for our patients.”

LA The Iberia Federation of Teachers and Support Personnel, with more than 500 members, has become an AFT affiliate five years after the chapter started with just 12 members.

“Our overall goals are that we’re able to have a voice for our profession and to work with the district in order to make decisions that affect not only the teachers, but the students and the other staff members,” local president Trasima Richard told the *Daily Iberian*.

One reason for chartering the local, Richard notes, is to have a local voice in addition to being part of the Louisiana Federation of Teachers.

In addition to teachers, the Iberia affiliate includes clerical, food service and transportation workers. “With this local chapter, we’re hoping to advocate the best education opportunities for the



PHOTOS BY SUSAN RUGGLES/SLR IMAGES

students in Iberia Parish,” Richard told the newspaper. “Not only that, we also want to advocate for the rights of the teachers and other service workers in the parish.”

“When teachers and school employees can share their expertise and voice their concerns, they are better able to serve the children.”

ND In historic votes on Feb. 2, the North Dakota Public Employees Association and the North Dakota Education Association approved a merger of the two organizations.

The combination, which will be known as North Dakota United, will become the state’s largest public employee union with more than 10,000 members. The NDPEA is affiliated with the AFT, while the NDEA is affiliated with the National Education Association. Delegates from both organizations voted overwhelmingly in favor of the merged union, which will affiliate with both national unions and is slated to begin operations in September.

“The creation of North Dakota United is a terrific outcome for the employees represented by this new organization and for all North Dakotans, who rely on the public services they deliver every day,” AFT president Randi Weingarten says.

WI In an effort to get bilingual books into the hands of Milwaukee’s Latino children, members from the AFT’s higher education and healthcare locals partnered with a low-wage workers and immigrants rights organization to launch its own First Book campaign.



Latino children in Milwaukee get bilingual books thanks to a First Book partnership with AFT locals and the community.



AFT Local 212 at the Milwaukee Area Technical College, the Wisconsin Federation of Nurses & Health Professionals, and Voces de la Frontera kicked off their campaign on Jan. 6, with an event at St. Hyacinth Church in Milwaukee.

After morning mass at the church, children were treated to a reading of a Curious George story in English and Spanish. One hundred gift-wrapped books, provided through AFT’s partnership with First Book, then were distributed to the children. A nonprofit organization, First Book has distributed more than 90 million new, high-quality books to kids across the country who otherwise could not afford them.

“We understand that investing in early childhood education is really the most important investment any community can make. We want to give every child in Milwaukee the opportunity to succeed,” says Michael Rosen, president of AFT Local 212.

A respite, not a resolution

‘Fiscal cliff’ deal is a temporary Band-Aid

THE FEDERAL BUDGET battle entered the New Year with the nation off the cliff but not out of the woods.

Congress closed the books on 2012 with an eleventh-hour agreement on the so-called fiscal cliff, a deal that many economists believe prevented the nation’s brittle-but-healing economy from tipping into recession. It brought progressive changes to the tax code, maintained unemployment insurance for struggling families, and preserved purchasing power for millions of low- and middle-income Americans by extending tax credits. Equally important, the last-minute deal stayed a round of savage across-the-board cuts to education, public safety and other vital services that would have triggered automatically had Congress again failed to act.

The reprieve was short-lived, however. The ink was barely dry on the legislation when a new round of fighting broke out—this one focused squarely on levels of public service rather than on tax rates.

“As important as this relief is right now to the majority of Americans,” it is a “temporary Band-Aid solution,” AFT president Randi Weingarten said shortly before the legislation moved through the full Congress at the beginning of 2013. She stressed that the final agreement, while necessary, only postponed for a short time the tough decisions about whether to trigger automatic spending cuts of \$1.2 trillion in government programs through a process called “sequestration.” A final decision on that front was pending as *American Teacher* went to press.

Same bomb, longer fuse

“Kicking the can down the road for a few months means we still face the possibility of staggering and debilitating cuts to public schools, healthcare and services that our kids and their communities count on,” the AFT president warned.

Weeks after the fiscal cliff agreement was reached, the seeds of policy brinkmanship with the nation’s finances remained in place—alive, well and reckless as ever. The House of Representatives was the center of action, with many in the Republican majority looking at ways to use the nation’s creditworthiness in the form of the federal debt ceiling as leverage in the budget battle, a political threat that prompted at least one major credit rating agency to issue downgrade warnings on U.S. bonds and other obligations.

President Obama sharply criticized politicians willing to play games with the full faith and credit of the United States. “The issue here is whether or not America pays its bills,” and that is something that no responsible party would ever allow to be called into question, the president reminded legislators.

AFT applauds immigration reform plan

PRESIDENT OBAMA in January proposed an immigration reform plan that provides a compassionate, comprehensive pathway to citizenship for 11 million undocumented residents of the United States, AFT president Randi Weingarten says.

“The president’s blueprint for reform and the U.S. Senate bipartisan framework show an understanding that our nation has always been enriched by immigrants and strengthened by the diversity they bring,” Weingarten says. Obama’s “proposal strengthens our borders, ensures immigrant children can go to school without fear, keeps families together, and promotes safe and secure jobs for all workers.”

Take action by signing our petition at <http://go.aft.org/immigrationreform>.

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Acts of remembrance

Newtown teacher and union activist named to safety panel

PEOPLE, NOT POLICY, drove the decision.

That's how Newtown teacher Ron Chivinski remembers it, the dinner-time phone conversation around Christmas, the one from AFT Connecticut asking if he would be willing to work on a commission set up by the governor to craft safety recommendations following the killings at Sandy Hook Elementary School.



THOMAS GIROIR

CHIVINSKI

Chivinski's decision to accept the union's nomination for the panel was prompted in large measure by one of the 26 lost: Dawn Hochsprung, the school's principal who was shot and killed trying

to protect children at Sandy Hook. Few people in Newtown schools could say they either didn't know her or know of her—certainly not Chivinski, a middle school history teacher and former president of his local, the Newtown Federation of Teachers.

The union activist remembers Hochsprung

as someone very human, not a cardboard cut-out who was all one thing.

Chivinski had worked across the table from her when a few scrapes cropped up in the building. Hardly surprising. Because the principal was driven to do her best, she could at times be very demanding, and worked with a passion that would occasionally ruffle feathers. Chivinski also had worked alongside her, and it left no question in his mind that Dawn Hochsprung was something more than just a principal with high expectations, something very special. She was the type of building leader whose work could be so good, so infectious, that everyone around her seemed to reconnect with what first brought them into teaching. "Dawn was extraordinarily talented, gifted. Everybody saw it. She could have been anything she decided to be," he remembers.

'This one, you can't just tuck away'

Chivinski accepted AFT Connecticut's nomination, and it's safe to say that many teachers in Newtown would have done the same. They would have understood how important it was to keep the voice of teachers and staff in any discussion of school and public safety. And, like

the middle school teacher, they almost certainly would have said "yes" with a heavy heart.

Serving on the new commission meant living with Sandy Hook every day. Serving on the panel meant new duties just days after the shootings, at a time when life in Newtown sometimes felt like a strange and fraying thing, disorienting and painful, a period when "you attend a friend's wake in the afternoon and rush home to take your kids to see Santa Claus that night," he remembers.

Other teachers almost certainly would have agreed to serve because they, too, would have known someone, someone like Dawn Hochsprung, the person who snapped into focus the moment Chivinski fielded the call.

"I said 'yes,' and I haven't lost an ounce of sleep over it," Chivinski said a few days before the commission was set to convene. He will be joined by former high school teacher Patricia Keavney-Maruca, the AFT Connecticut appointee to the state board of education.

Gun violence, Chivinski said, has called into question something as basic as the right to send 6-year-olds to school each morning and expect their safe return each night, and "this one you can't just tuck away."

Correcting course

Economics professor helps inmates re-enter society and rebuild their lives

IN THE WORLD, America has the highest percentage of its population incarcerated but is only sixth among developed countries when it comes to college degree attainment. And New Jersey has among the worst ratios of corrections-to-higher ed spending in the United States: It spends almost twice as much on prisons as it does on colleges and universities.

Nancy Wolff does not cite any of these statistics when she talks about her work with the women of the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women in Clinton, N.J. She talks about people.

She is an economist, a professor and the director of the Center for Behavioral Health Services & Criminal Justice Research at Rutgers University. Her curriculum vitae shows the prolific work of a prodigious scholar, but she doesn't talk about that either.

She talks, instead, about programs she has



BRUCE GILBERT

developed that encourage female prison inmates to focus on healing their minds and bodies as they prepare to re-enter society and live productive lives. While her research agenda has her at the prison four days

Rutgers economist Nancy Wolff learns from the inmates she works with and gives them hope for re-entry.

a week this year, she spends another two days volunteering there as well.

Wolff, who is a member of the Rutgers Council of AAUP Chapters (AAUP-AFT), views this work as a reciprocal process. She does research on offenders to learn what helps people deeply troubled by their pasts, mental illness and the deeds they have done. Then she asks them, "What do you need?" Their answers have resulted in the creation of programs and resources used by hundreds of inmates. Books Behind Bars, for example, encourages reading and discussion in a book club format. Wolff uses her own funds to pay for all the books. Recently, she liquidated her home and used the proceeds from the sale of her artwork and possessions to buy more books.

"When you get people to stop all the negative self-talk, to feel supported, to see what their strengths are—when you build off that perspective—you can see people flourish."

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You really could save more

BY DON KUEHN

WHEN WALL STREET closed the books on 2012, every domestic stock market index showed significant gains for the year. The Standard & Poor's 500 was up 13.4 percent, the NASDAQ composite topped the list at 15.9, the Russell 2000 small-company index gained 14.6 and the benchmark Dow rose 7.3 percent.

All of this in spite of the lingering recession, crises in Europe, the "fiscal cliff" debate, a stubborn unemployment picture and the day-to-day calamities fabricated by the 24-hour newsmongers.

Over the years, I have urged you to get involved in no-load, low-cost mutual funds. But you may be among those who say, "Sure, easy for you to say, but where am I going to get the money to do that?"

Take inventory. You can save by buying electronic accessories online rather than retail, or not using dry cleaners when other options would be as effective. Programmable thermostats, multipolicy insurance dis-

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



counts—small potatoes. Here are a few other ways to save:

Cigarettes and alcohol are on many people's saving agendas, as are cell phone contracts with too-large data plans and premium cable channels. Rent movies, keep your tires fully inflated, mow your own lawn, and turn down the thermostat on the water heater. Save on stamps by paying bills online. Sign up online at sites like Groupon or LivingSocial to save on restaurants, entertainment and other services.

My mother used to love getting her hair done at the beauty school. It was inexpensive, the students were closely monitored, and she felt like a queen when she left. By the way, there are similar places where you can get your pet groomed.

But the biggies are saving your next salary

increase before you get used to having it, paying off your mortgage early, paying cash for your next car, saving until you can pay cash rather than using a credit card. If you must borrow, shop around for the lowest rates. Try the credit union or online banks. Never—I repeat, never—use payday loans or title loans to meet short-term needs.

If you haven't taken steps to make your death easier for your heirs, be sure to have a living will, medical and durable powers of attorney, and an estate plan. You should consider a living trust if you have significant assets (or a family tree that looks more like a bush). And consider a prearranged funeral or cremation.

The point? It's *your money*. Saving a little bit each week or month can put you in a position to open your first no-load mutual fund. Developing good spending and saving habits can put you on the road toward an investment portfolio of funds that yields returns like we saw in 2012.

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.

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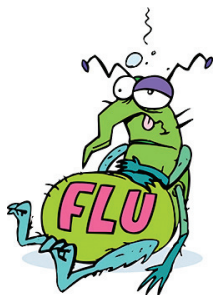
While widely available, not all programs are available in all locations or in both online and on-campus formats. Please check with a University Enrollment Advisor.

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**WANTED: WORLD-SHAKERS**

The AFT is partnering with Peace First to launch a national campaign to identify and celebrate young peacemakers who are making a difference in their communities. The Peace First Prize honors five young people who are going the extra civic mile—launching initiatives to stop bullying, to reclaim green spaces, to end gang violence or similar public-spirited projects. The students each will receive \$50,000 and a two-year fellowship to further their peacemaking work. The Peace First website has information on applying for the prize or nominating students (ages 8-22). Application deadline is **April 12**. Visit www.peacefirst.org.



... AND IN FLEW ENZA The flu season has been brutal this year, and it's showing up in schools with a vengeance—sending students and teachers running for the box of tissues and, all too frequently, the local emergency room. When it comes to containing the outbreak, a little knowledge and prevention can go a long way, and the AFT offers valuable materials to help. Go to www.aft.org/issues/healthsafety/influenza/index.cfm for a printable fact sheet, filled with information on all things influenza—from hand-washing and cough-covering to locations where free or low-cost flu shots are available.

WHAT 'POOR' FEELS LIKE "Poor Kids," produced by the award-winning PBS news series "Frontline," examines poverty through a memorable lens: the eyes of children who live it. The show is available online, along with supporting information on the more than 16 million American children who are growing up in poverty. Go to www.pbs.org/frontline and select "Poor Kids" under the "Watch" tab.

GOING (M)AI WEIWEI? The website artsy.net is a fun, easy, and, yes, cool way for students to dip their toes into the world of fine art. More than 21,000 artworks and 3,000 artists are featured on the site. It is powered by the Art Genome Project, a study of characteristics that distinguish and connect works of art in a variety of ways—subject matter, for example, or geography and historical movements. That means visitors to the site not only can explore and learn more about their favorite artists, they also can get leads on new artists they might enjoy, based on their searches.

MOVING BEYOND SANDY

Communities across New England and the Mid-Atlantic are still struggling to put their lives back together and recover from the devastating effects of Superstorm Sandy. To aid in this effort, the AFT has compiled a variety of online resources and avenues for members to help the recovery. To find out how you, too, can help, simply type "Superstorm Sandy resource guide" into the search field at www.aft.org.



30 DAYS, 30 POETS April is National Poetry month, and the Academy of American Poets is planning a variety of activities tied to the event. Returning for this year's celebration is "30 Days, 30 Poets," an online

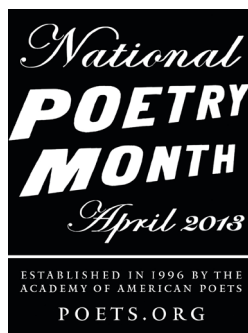
Between 13.4 and 16.5 MILLION

"... roughly one in five [children], were living in poverty in 2011, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's official poverty measure. That is higher than any other age group."

SOURCE: WWW.PBS.ORG/WGBH/PAGES/Frontline/SOCIAL-ISSUES/POOR-KIDS/BY-THE-NUMBERS-CHILDHOOD-POVERTY-IN-THE-U-S/



marathon in which 30 acclaimed poets take over curation of the academy's Tumblr site. Each poet has 24 hours to post text, images, audio and video before passing the baton to the next writer. For details about this and other activities to engage students, visit www.poets.org.

**BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND**

One of the items that was on the bubble in the "fiscal cliff" battle was the longstanding federal tax deduction for up to \$250 in educators' out-of-pocket costs for school and classroom supplies. The break for teachers was set to expire, but the final settlement between the White House and Congress restored the deduction for 2012 and extended it for 2013. The deduction is as much as \$500 for married couples filing jointly, if both spouses are educators. For rules on claiming the deduction, visit the Internal Revenue Service online at www.irs.gov and enter "Topic 458" in the search field.



NOT IN OUR SCHOOL

Resources to help curb bullying

THE NONPROFIT GROUP Not in Our Schools is offering free resources to help middle and high school teachers begin anti-bullying initiatives. The organization's website features lesson plans on topics such as engaging students in discussions of prejudice and discrimination, and organizing student-led assemblies to shatter stereotypes. There are also case studies that detail successful efforts in the field, and a number of streaming videos tied to the topic of bullying and discrimination.

NIOS also connects teachers who have used the group's resources and activities, and a monthly electronic newsletter keeps educators abreast of new materials and best practices. Visit www.notinourschool.org.

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