OUR MISSION

The American Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.
As the AFT’s secretary-treasurer, I’m deeply involved in—and very proud of—our international program. The AFT’s officers and vice presidents, led by President Randi Weingarten, see our union’s longtime commitment to international human and labor rights, democratic freedoms, humanitarian relief and equal opportunity for all as an extension of our work at home. President Weingarten has personally spearheaded efforts to use best educational practices from around the world to strategically inform our members and advocate for increased equity in American classrooms. Our international program also amplifies the voice of educators in global policy forums, spreading the AFT’s belief that every child deserves access to a high-quality public education, regardless of geopolitical circumstances.

Today, more than ever, working people around the world face challenges that demand our attention. The global economic crisis exposed the fast-tracked Global Education Reform Movement, or GERM, a series of education reforms that have increased privatization of schools worldwide. The AFT, in alliance with Education International and Public Services International, is fighting back against that agenda and fighting for:

- **Educational excellence and equity:** Our union has sent study teams across the globe—from Finland to Singapore—to explore the best practices of high-performing education systems and to investigate how these systems strive to ensure high-quality teaching and learning. The primary purpose of this study mission, as well as our participation in international education conferences, is to inform and inspire policy and practice in the United States, which has one of the most inequitable education systems among industrialized countries.

- **Keeping public education and public services public:** Our study teams have also visited countries—such as Chile—where privatization has only reinforced glaring class inequities. The AFT not only combats the rush to school privatization in the United States but also supports unions in other nations, such as Australia, England and Honduras, in their fight against privatized, inequitable education systems.

- **The right of every child to a high-quality education—and a childhood free from fear and discrimination:** The AFT supports the global movement for universal high-quality public education and an end to child labor.

- **The rights of workers in the public sector:** The AFT helped launch the Teachers Advancing a Rights Culture initiative, a project with education unions in Egypt, Georgia, Honduras and Zimbabwe to empower teachers to become advocates for human and workers’ rights. The AFT also actively participates in global campaigns to demand better working conditions and living wages for workers around the world, from teachers in Ukraine to garment workers in Bangladesh and Cambodia. We’ve joined the international outcry for the release of imprisoned union leaders in Bahrain, Cambodia and Iraq. And we champion whistle-blower protections and bargaining rights for United Nations staff.

The AFT will never shirk our commitment to challenge the ills and injustices that are so devastating to children and working families. But we’re not just determined to fight back—we’re fighting forward. I’ve seen firsthand the hope and possibility born out of our international efforts. I’ve visited a clinic in Haiti, where many union families who had been without medical care now receive it. I’ve watched as the cause of education for all girls—a cause the AFT has long advocated—captured the world in the spirit of one brave child named Malala Yousafzai. And years after starting my career as a school support worker, I had the honor of leading a delegation to a Public Services International conference in Argentina that launched a global network of education support staff unions—a step in a larger process of uniting to share ideas and experiences with counterparts and build even more-effective unions.

These are just a few examples of the transformative nature of our international work. The AFT will continue to carry our values and mission out into the world, to reclaim the promise of high-quality public education and public services, everywhere our efforts can reach. I am confident you will find the details on our international program in the following pages illuminating and motivational. Please let me know what you think.

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**LORRETTA JOHNSON, AFT Secretary-Treasurer**

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**INTERNATIONAL UPDATE | 2012-2014**
Every three years, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) releases the results from its Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), a test of 15-year-olds across nations. When the 2012 PISA results were released, the United States, once again, landed in the middle of the pack on reading and science, and below average in math, which U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan called “a picture of educational stagnation.” However, students in more-affluent schools in the United States (where the poverty rate is less than 10 percent) actually surpassed many of the highest-rated countries. The results raised questions about whether American educational policy is on the right track. As AFT President Randi Weingarten put it, “The crucial question we face now is whether we have the political will to move away from the failed policies and embrace what works in high-performing countries so that we can reclaim the promise of public education.”

The AFT unpacked the 2012 PISA data to find out what it really says about the challenges facing American schools, and the steps we can take to ensure that every child receives a high-quality education. This effort wove in lessons learned from study missions led by Weingarten and other AFT leaders from around the country after the 2009 PISA results were released. The study teams visited nations with top-performing educational systems, including Japan, China, Singapore, Finland, Canada and New Zealand. They talked extensively with teachers, principals, students and government officials about what makes their systems work for students.

Here are the conclusions drawn from PISA data, OECD recommendations based on that data, and best practices in high-achieving educational systems around the world:

- **Poverty matters.** U.S. schools perform near the top when compared with schools with similar poverty rates in other countries. But, shamefully, the United States has one of the highest child poverty rates among industrialized countries. Nearly 1 in 4 U.S. children lives in poverty, and nearly half of U.S. public school students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. According to the OECD’s 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), 64.5 percent of U.S. middle school teachers work in schools where more than 30 percent of the students come from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes. This is the highest rate among all 34 TALIS participants.

- **The AFT sees child poverty as an impetus, not an excuse.** OECD research demonstrates that the most important factor in score variation for American students is socioeconomic background. Our educational system must counter the devastating effects of poverty by actively promoting educational equity.

- **Raw education spending figures don’t tell the whole story.** PISA and other international comparisons usually point out that U.S. spending on education is among the highest in the world. However, it is the high cost of college in the United States—not spending on K-12 schools—that makes U.S. education expenditures higher than most other nations.

- **Child poverty is compounded by a glaring lack of resources for the children who need them most.** Equity is the issue—and it’s a serious issue in the United States. The United States has a problem directing tools and resources to the students and schools with the greatest need. Factors affecting educational equity in the United States include not only the impact of poverty on students’ academic performance but the wide funding disparities from district to district and school to school. In fact, a recent PISA report found that the United States is the second-least equitable OECD country in its allocation of educational resources.

PISA offers evidence that top-down “reforms” have not improved American education. The 2012 results clearly indicate that the last decade of top-down, test-based schooling created by the federal No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top policies—a decade focused on hyper-testing students, sanctioning teachers and closing schools—has failed to improve the quality of American public education. PISA results also show that some of the most commonly proposed reform “fixes” in the United States—such as longer instructional days, a fixation on standardized testing, nonunion schools, and “firing to success” by the wholesale replacing of teachers in low-performing schools—simply aren’t found in high-achieving education systems in other nations.
The 2013 TALIS asked principals in lower secondary education (roughly the equivalent of middle school in the United States) about various characteristics of their schools, including the percentage of students from disadvantaged homes. As shown in the map below, 64.5 percent of middle school teachers in the United States work in schools where principals report that more than 30 percent of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged—the highest reported percentage among all TALIS participants. The TALIS global average is 19.6 percent.

**U.S. CHILD POVERTY MOVING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION**

The stark changes in state child poverty rates from 2000 to 2012, as shown below, illustrate the widening income gap between affluent and poor households. This trend is especially troublesome in light of the OECD’s finding that no other factor matters more to student achievement than socioeconomic conditions. For child poverty rates in your county, see go.aft.org/pisa.
High-performing nations point the way for American schools

We can “import” the inspiration for educational equity and success. The AFT’s study missions to high-performing education systems in other countries, plus a wealth of research, have given us a clear road map for the best practices around the world and how to make these concepts work in an American context. Common themes that emerge from these systems include:

**HIGH-PERFORMING EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN OTHER COUNTRIES DEEPLY RESPECT PUBLIC EDUCATION AND TEACHERS.**

These systems intensively prepare new teachers, provide continuous development to help them hone their craft, and thoughtfully and consistently align standards with a strong and deep curriculum. For example, the Finnish school system gets its strength from Finland’s overarching belief in its educators. Teachers are well-respected, principals are seen as instructional and institutional leaders—not enforcers—and the government plays an appropriate and supportive role. All of the important instructional, structural and curricular decisions are made at the school site by collaborative leadership teams. In Finland, teaching is a highly respected and desirable profession. Teacher training is rigorous, inspiring parental and societal trust in teachers’ professional judgment. Teachers and schools have an enormous degree of professional autonomy.

**SUCCESSFUL EDUCATION SYSTEMS UNDERSTAND THAT IT TAKES MORE THAN JUST GREAT EDUCATORS.**

Embedded in the culture of the countries with strong educational results is a shared responsibility for learning. Not just teachers but parents, students, school administrators and government officials all do their part to make sure learning happens. School systems work with teachers and their unions, and parents and students are engaged and share responsibility as well. For example, Japan’s success is grounded in a first-rate teaching force, strong family support for learning, and high incentives for educational achievement. Accountability is woven into the system. In contrast to the West, students in Japan are accountable for their own learning. Teachers visit their students’ families and maintain constant communication with parents. The school-home connection in Japan reflects a deep belief that student learning is everyone’s responsibility. In Shanghai, there is a civic sense that improving education is a citywide mission. Shanghai, which out-ranked all its competitors on the 2012 PISA, emphasizes shared, collaborative support for struggling schools, as opposed to the United States, where struggling schools are often closed.

**HIGH-ACHIEVING COUNTRIES OFFER RICH, MULTIDISCIPLINARY CURRICULA AS THE NORM, NOT AS A LUXURY.**

AFT study mission teams saw a music teacher in Shanghai integrate math and geography into her lesson, and a math teacher in Finland take children outdoors to see how math concepts are reflected in nature. Singapore is renowned for the solid math and science foundation it gives students, featuring its “model method,” which uses visualization and concepts like project-based learning and higher-order thinking skills and demonstrations to help students understand mathematics concepts. (This interdisciplinary creativity is something that some American schools also do well, but that quality is threatened by our national obsession with standardized testing and the narrowing of the curriculum that comes with it.)

**HIGH-PERFORMING COUNTRIES SYSTEMATICALLY PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY.**

The top-performing countries offset the effects of poverty by targeting resources where they are most needed through wraparound services—comprehensive services that create the conditions for students to learn in the classroom by meeting the social, emotional and health needs of children and their families. In high-performing countries, schools and the larger society devote the necessary resources to ensure that every child is ready to learn, from on-site medical and dental vehicles in Japan, to supplementary classes for immigrant children in Canada, to free, intensive preschools, on-site health services, and nutritious, free meals in Finland. South Korea provides increased pay, smaller class sizes and more time for collaboration for teachers working in hard-to-staff schools. Singapore has substantially reduced the achievement gap between its Chinese population and its Tamil and Malay populations through a strong focus on systematic intervention, learning support programs and social supports. Canada, which has one of the highest rates of immigration per capita in the world, has been particularly successful in providing intensive support to further the academic success of immigrant students.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IS KEY.**

Countries such as Brazil, China and India are dramatically expanding access to preschool, reflecting a growing consensus that skills development starts at birth and lays the foundation for achievement in school, college, career and life. Finland offers early childhood care, free preschool programs and preventive measures to identify possible learning and developmental issues before children start school.

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Steps we must take to reclaim the promise of public education

Following the release of the 2009 PISA results, the AFT began major efforts to integrate international best practices into schools in the United States, including extensive outreach to AFT members, community allies and the education community, as well as a nationwide campaign to debunk myths connected with international data.

Driving the union’s policy agenda have been two major forces: the OECD’s education research and the U.S. Department of Education’s *For Each and Every Child: A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence*, a report of the congressionally appointed Equity and Excellence Commission, of which AFT President Randi Weingarten was a member. The commission’s charge was to provide advice to U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan on the disparities in meaningful educational opportunities in the United States, and to recommend ways in which federal policies can address such disparities. Weingarten called the report “the closest thing we have had to a blueprint—crafted by people from across the ideological spectrum—for laying out the necessary programs and policies that the United States can take to close its shameful equity gap between the haves and have-nots.”

Drawing on the recommendations from these reports, and from best practices documented by AFT study missions abroad, the AFT has outlined its vision for reclaiming the promise of public education and fulfilling our collective obligation to ensure that every person has the opportunity to succeed and live a productive life. It is about providing:

- High-quality public education for all children that nurtures a joy of teaching and learning;
- Access to early childhood care and education for all families, including the supports they need;
- Access to affordable and excellent higher education;
- Neighborhood public schools that are safe, welcoming places for teaching and learning;
- Teachers and school staff who are well-prepared, are supported, have manageable class sizes and have time to collaborate so they can meet the individual needs of every child; and
- Access to wraparound services for children and their families to meet their social, emotional and health needs.

“No other developed nation has inequities nearly as deep or systemic; no other developed nation has, despite some efforts to the contrary, so thoroughly stacked the odds against so many of its children. Sadly, what feels so very un-American turns out to be distinctly American.”


“We owe this to all our children,” Weingarten said. “We strongly urge leaders to do at long last what is not only morally right but necessary to ensure a healthy democratic society with a thriving economy.”

A question of equity

**The United States is the second-least equitable OECD country in allocating educational resources—and the difference shows in student performance**

One can’t have an excellent school system without an equitable one. An October 2014 PISA report, “How Is Equity in Resource Allocation Related to Student Performance?,” concludes that how educational resources are allocated is just as important as the amount of resources available. Fairness in resource allocation, the report found, is clearly related to the performance of a country’s education system as a whole.

Meanwhile, in many countries, including the United States, educational resources are not allocated equitably across many aspects of schooling, the report noted. Across OECD countries, disadvantaged schools, on average, do tend to have smaller classes. But they also tend to be more likely than advantaged schools to suffer from teacher shortages and from shortages or inadequacy of educational materials and physical infrastructure.

The report concluded that these stark differences in resource allocation can account in part for “a large proportion of the overall differences in performance observed across countries, particularly among OECD countries.” For example, 30 percent of the variation in math performance across OECD countries can be explained by how equitably resources are allocated across all schools.

Fourth annual International Summit on the Teaching Profession

FOCUSING ON THE TWIN GOALS OF EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY

Research has shown that teachers are the single most important in-school influence on student achievement and thus are central to the success of high-performing education systems worldwide. But many countries, including the United States, face challenges in training, supporting and nurturing good teachers, and grapple with the issue of how to prepare students for the rapidly changing 21st-century global economy. As the United States was attempting to address these issues, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and the leaders of the two largest U.S. teachers unions (the AFT and the National Education Association) agreed that sharing best practices from the world’s high-performing education systems would be key to meeting the challenges of quality and equity. Thus, in March 2011, ministers of education and leaders of teachers unions from 16 countries came together for the first International Summit on the Teaching Profession.

Four years later, the international summit has become a landmark annual event and has translated into new policy and action in numerous participating countries, from efforts in Germany to raise the quality of teacher training and in-service education, to the enhancement of professional learning networks among teachers in Poland, to expanded coaching for new teachers in the Netherlands.

The AFT sent a delegation led by President Randi Weingarten to the 2014 summit, convened March 28-29 in Wellington, New Zealand. Delegations attended from Australia, Brazil, Canada, China (Hong Kong), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Scotland, Singapore, Sweden, Vietnam and the United States. With the theme of “Excellence, Equity and Inclusiveness: High-Quality Teaching for All,” the 2014 summit focused on how education systems can achieve both excellence and equity. Summit speakers and discussions shared emerging best practices around the goals of:

- Attracting high-quality teachers and leaders to the schools with the greatest needs;
- Overcoming the challenge of achieving equity in increasingly devolved (or decentralized) education systems (those in which state, province or local governments play a central role); and
- Creating learning environments that address the needs of all children.

Weingarten remarked that there was a broad consensus among participants that ensuring there are high-quality...
teachers for schools and students with the greatest needs means providing intensive support—not sanctions or monetary incentives—for teachers: “Almost everyone at the table, both union leaders and ministers, agreed that the most important thing a school system can do is provide support and resources (including professional development) for teachers who teach in schools with the greatest need. Many participants told of failed efforts to overcome the challenges faced in these schools by simply paying a larger salary or bonus. The consensus was clear: Teachers who teach in these schools will only be successful if they have the tools and resources they need to do their job. The problem is not that the teachers in these schools are bad; they just need extra help to meet the needs of their students. In a word, it is all about support.”

Summit participants recognized that in too many countries, education systems simply mirror and reinforce socioeconomic patterns and achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students. To change this status quo, many noted, will take concerted action in specific, vital areas: supporting teachers with resources, training, mentoring, professional development and professional networks; making schools centers for social and educational services (the community schools approach); and engaging and empowering parents. Also crucial is creating the right balance of centralized and local responsibility for funding, quality and access.

These goals sound daunting. Yet, as several speakers noted, equity and excellence are not mutually exclusive goals. In her in-depth account of the 2014 summit, Vivien Stewart, the Asia Society’s senior advisor for education, points out: “In recent years, a number of countries have shown that combining excellence and equity is possible. The PISA assessment of mathematics in 2012, for example, showed that Australia, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Hong Kong-China, Japan, Korea, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands and Macao-China have all combined high educational performance with greater equity in educational opportunities. While there is still a long way to go in all these systems, they illustrate why more and more countries are looking beyond their borders, and to opportunities like the summit, for evidence of the world’s most promising policies and practices.”

Education leaders set to meet in Canada

AFT President Randi Weingarten will lead a delegation of leaders from the AFT’s program and policy council to the fifth International Summit on the Teaching Profession in March 2015. The conference will be held in Alberta, Canada, and address themes on teacher leadership, recognition and efficacy, as well as innovation strategies. Summit hosts include the Learning Partnership and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, in cooperation with the OECD and Education International.
In study missions to **Australia** and **New Zealand**, the AFT explores a common struggle to achieve educational equity and quality.

In Australia and New Zealand, declining scores on the Program for International Student Assessment have led to national debates, just as in the United States, over the most effective ways to improve education. The Australian Education Union and the New Zealand Educational Institute, just like the AFT, have embraced the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s endorsed policy direction of ensuring that educational resources are targeted to the children and schools that need them most (as high-performing education systems do).

For teachers unions in all three countries, equity in education has emerged as a central focus of the debate, as has the pushback on privatization in education. Recognizing the similarities in the educational challenges that the United States shares with Australia and New Zealand—and the common themes in all three countries’ education policy debates—an AFT study team led by President Randi Weingarten visited Australia and New Zealand in March 2014. The team visited public schools and discussed education and equity issues with teachers, principals, government officials and union leaders.

**Australia’s mandate for educational equity is endangered**

The AFT has long had a strong relationship with Australia’s largest teachers union, the Australian Education Union. Like their colleagues in the United States, Australian educators are fighting off attacks on public schools—including austerity-driven budget cuts, job cuts, crumbling school infrastructure and divisive, ill-conceived pay-for-performance schemes. Meanwhile, the AEU has been front and center in advocating the strategies that will lift all students to better achievement—including its campaign urging Australia’s current Liberal-National coalition government (led by Prime Minister Tony Abbott) to stand by its commitment to implement the funding recommendations of businessman David Gonski’s groundbreaking December 2011 report, **Review of Funding for Schooling**, also known as the Gonski Review.

The landmark report, which the AEU called “the most comprehensive investigation of the way our schools are funded in almost 40 years,” found that too many Australian children were being denied the education they needed due to a lack of resources. The report warned that the achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds were larger than in any comparable nation, and that the situation would worsen without urgent action. It recommended that a funding system be put in place whereby each school would receive a base level of national and state funding, plus additional money (or “loadings”) to take into account the school’s size and location and the individual needs of its students (adjusting funding upward to meet the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and with special needs). Targeted funds would be used on proven strategies for improving student learning, such as more individual attention in the classroom, extra specialist teachers in key areas like literacy and numeracy, greater support for students with special needs, and additional training and classroom support for teachers.

Australia’s former Labor government created a national school funding system based on Gonski’s recommendations, and the legislation passed the Australian Parliament in June 2013. The Labor government also negotiated six-year funding agreements with five states. However, Abbott’s center-right government has announced that it will not deliver the final two years of the Gonski funding or honor the five signed agreements already in place.

Calling on the government to guarantee the Gonski funding, the AEU launched an “I Give a Gonski” campaign in February 2014. Members in four vans covered about 14,000 miles in five weeks, traveling throughout Australia to meet with parents, teachers, principals and support staff to mobilize public support for full funding. The AFT’s study mission team found much common ground with the AEU and the challenges educators in Australia are facing.
New Zealand: The challenges and opportunities of decentralization

The New Zealand hosts of the fourth International Summit on the Teaching Profession in March 2014 described their country to delegates as “a country of open spaces and open minds.” The phrase seems to sum up the potential—and challenges—of ensuring educational quality and equity in a decentralized, highly diverse and geographically far-flung education system.

New Zealand’s population of 4.2 million people is 68 percent of European origin, 15 percent Maori, 10 percent Asian and 7 percent Pacific Islander. New Zealand has historically been a high-performing country, scoring well above the OECD average on PISA. The country invests 7.3 percent of its gross domestic product on education (the seventh-highest percentage among OECD countries), and it invests 20 percent of all public expenditure on education (the second-highest percentage). New Zealand also ranks in the top third of countries for participation in early childhood education (95 percent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in 2011). But the country’s languishing scores on the 2012 PISA have sparked concern. So has the high degree of inequity in its education outcomes, with a persistent and dramatic achievement gap between students of European origin and Maori and Pasifika students.

The AFT’s study mission team examined New Zealand’s decentralized education system and found it to be a mixed blessing. Many education analysts have praised the innovativeness and energy that school autonomy fosters, and the generally vigorous level of community support for education in New Zealand. But as a highly devolved system across such a wide geographic area, the system has deep challenges, making it more difficult to conceive and launch a nationwide effort to improve educational equity for Maori and Pasifika children, and making collaboration and shared services among schools and teachers more difficult.

In 2014, the government announced an attempt to address New Zealand’s collaboration and equity issues with its Investing in Education Success initiative. However, the new initiative was marred by the government’s decision to tie financial incentives for expert teachers to the country’s National Standards, a new set of nationally prescribed expectations that students must meet in reading, writing and mathematics in the first eight years of school. The New Zealand Educational Institute teachers union promptly condemned the move. In a statement, NZEI President Judith Nowotarski wrote that data based on the National Standards are unreliable, citing a survey published in November 2013 that found that only 7 percent of principals thought the standards were robust.

“Linking large pay bonuses for teachers to narrow student outcomes in this way risks ‘teaching to the standard,’ as well as making unfair judgments about teachers of students with special needs or learning difficulties,” Nowotarski wrote.

The NZEI has put forward its own initiative, A Better Plan, urging the government to invest the $359 million pegged for Investing in Education Success to frontline services rather than to pay raises for a select group of principals and teachers based on standardized testing. The union has also called for a far greater national investment in educating children with special needs. Thousands of teachers, principals and supporters have rallied in support of A Better Plan and the union’s vision for an education reform plan that directly benefits children, and members of the AFT’s delegation participated in such a protest during their visit.

New Zealand’s extensive school autonomy also contributes to the system’s vulnerability to privatization and fragmentation. “The most pressing issue, and New Zealand knows it, is the push to bring privatization to their schools,” Quolke said. “The autonomous nature of their schools is a real plus, but it also provides an invitation for privatizers.”

New Zealand teachers union leaders are well aware of the risks of privatization, including the lack of accountability that often accompanies privatization and charterization, the danger of the profit motive in education, and the failure of private providers to improve educational outcomes in a consistently measurable or replicable way.
Privatization: A global threat to education demands a global response

Education systems around the world are increasingly being opened to profit-making and trade by private, commercial interests. As Stephen Ball wrote in his book Global Education Inc., “Policy ideas such as school choice, competition, [and] accountability, as well as standardised tests and curricula, pedagogy and teacher evaluation, are increasingly being promoted and ‘sold’ to governments by international institutions, education corporations and foundations, among other private actors.”

There are few countries that have been untouched by the push to privatize public education and public services. The for-profit Global Education Reform Movement, for example, encompasses virtually every aspect of educational systems and services, and manifests itself in many troubling forms—from the social stratification of Chile’s increasingly privatized education system, to the expansion of supposedly “low-fee” private, for-profit schools that sell dubious educational hope to poor families in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America, to the increasing dominance of commercial testing firms over what children learn and how teachers are evaluated in the United States. The United Kingdom, too, has seen an increasing use of organizations outside of the public sector to run schools.

Unfortunately, there is a clear and inherent contradiction in profit-making corporations steering education agendas around the world: The best interests of students, families, schools and communities often don’t match the best interests of corporations and their shareholders.

FIGHTING PRIVATIZATION OF EDUCATION— IN THE UNITED STATES AND AROUND THE WORLD

The AFT has long recognized and fought the threat that privatization poses, not just to public education but also to quality public services, quality healthcare and a thriving American economy. The AFT has helped lead the battle against privatization and outsourcing in the United States by questioning the quality of education and other public services provided by privatizers, and by decrying the resulting loss of public accountability, transparency and community control. Today, the AFT is fighting back in city after city where American schools and public services are being starved of funding and resources under the rubric of the “new austerity,” often while billions in public funds once used directly for education, public services and healthcare are being diverted to private corporations.

On the international front, the AFT expresses this commitment by partnering with trade unions around the world to fight the austerity and privatization agenda and to demand transparency and accountability on the part of privatizers and corporations. For example, the AFT joined Education International’s 2013 Unite for Quality Education campaign, a mobilization of EI’s member organizations and partners around the world, calling for the equitable provision and funding of a free, quality public education for all. The AFT has undertaken these partnerships in the strong belief that the global attack on education and public services is a coordinated and consistent attack that demands a unified global response.
In the past, many Honduran immigrants came to New Orleans as dockyard laborers in the banana trade, and many wealthy Hondurans sent their children to study at New Orleans Catholic schools. Now, New Orleans and Honduras share another bond: the struggle of teachers against the wholesale privatization of schools and vicious attacks on teachers unions.

In Honduras, the military regime of former president Porfirio Lobo Sosa imposed mass firings on teachers, gutted the teacher pension system, tear-gassed teacher protests and passed a law clearing the way for privatizing the country’s entire school system. Dana Frank, a professor of history at the University of California, Santa Cruz, described the situation as an “open season” on Honduran teachers.

While New Orleans teachers may not have it as bad, they have also faced years of politically motivated attacks on their profession and livelihood, and on public education and their union, the United Teachers of New Orleans. After Hurricane Katrina, the state of Louisiana seized control of New Orleans schools, establishing a so-called Recovery School District. Soon after, the new district terminated most of its employees. As the organization Labor Notes reported: “Before the 2005 storm, the city oversaw 128 public schools. After Katrina … control of 107 schools deemed low-performing was given to the state-run Recovery School District, which in turn handed the majority to private charter operators. The Orleans Parish School Board canceled UTNO’s contract nine months after the flood. … Thus the great experiment in New Orleans—watched closely by corporate-inspired school ‘reformers’ nationally—was born. More than 80 percent of New Orleans students now attend charter schools.”

The war being waged on public education in New Orleans was not lost on the Honduran military regime. In an April 2011 posting on the education news blog EdWize, Leo Casey (now director of the Albert Shanker Institute) reported:

Last fall, current Honduran strongman Porfirio “Pepe” Lobo Sosa visited New Orleans to investigate solutions to his regime’s teacher union “problem.” New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, Tulane University President Scott Cowen and Lobo signed a memorandum of understanding on how they would work together on a number of issues, most prominently public education. … “We have a lot of experience in rebuilding public school systems here in New Orleans,” said Tulane’s Cowen, speaking of the evisceration of the New Orleans public school system and the attempted elimination of the local union, United Teachers of New Orleans, after Hurricane Katrina. “We’ll figure out what will work for them in terms of building their public education system … and serve as advisers for them.”

The leaders of teachers unions in Honduras knew that members of the UTNO had their own experiences to share. Praised as “fighting for teachers and students through a grassroots, social justice approach to unionism,” the UTNO has drawn on its close ties with the New Orleans community to maintain its relevance, its voice and its ability to organize. While Honduran teachers face a more difficult and dangerous battle, they invited leaders of the UTNO to assist them in developing a strategy to confront so-called reformers interested in privatizing public education systems in their country. Jim Randels, a UTNO activist, led a delegation of union members to Honduras to inform Honduran teachers about the short-term and long-term impact of privatization “reforms” on public education in New Orleans. The information was used by the Honduran unions to develop a strategy in opposing the Honduran government’s move to privatize public education and crush the teachers unions.

Honduran teacher unionists also welcomed the insights of leaders from the Chicago Teachers Union, which drew worldwide attention in 2012 with a successful strike that won unprecedented community support. From June 27 to July 10, 2013, a delegation of CTU teachers traveled around Honduras, meeting teachers, youth and activists in the Honduran resistance, and sharing lessons in community outreach and mobilization strategy.
Chile: A dictator’s privatized education system persists—but hope for reform is rising

In May 2013, AFT President Randi Weingarten led a delegation of AFT leaders on a study mission to Chile to explore the features of one of the most inequitable education systems in the world. Chile aggressively privatized its education system in the 1980s, under the regime of dictator Augusto Pinochet. Since then, Chile has exemplified educational inequity, with its dramatic class stratifications mirrored by its free-market educational system.

Pinochet’s Legacy: Educational Apartheid

In 1973, a military coup overthrew the democratically elected government of Chilean President Salvador Allende and put Army General Augusto Pinochet in power. In the years that followed, Pinochet’s government instituted a set of Friedmanite “neoliberal” economic policies: opening Chile’s markets to global trade, restricting labor unions, and privatizing social security and previously state-controlled industries, including electric utilities and mining.

The nationwide school choice system Pinochet imposed on Chile was founded on the free-market economic philosophies of the “Chicago Boys”—a group of Chilean economists who studied under Milton Friedman, Arnold Harberger and other members of the University of Chicago economics faculty beginning in the late 1950s. This radical free-market philosophy included a wide-reaching voucher program in which private and religious schools received per-pupil vouchers from the state, directly based on student attendance.

Prior to the privatization “reforms,” approximately 80 percent of Chilean students attended public schools. Today, nearly half of Chile’s students attend private schools. Even though Chile has returned to a democratic government, successive administrations have been unable to change the education system because of the constitutional supermajority in Parliament. Today, about 94 percent of all Chile’s schools (including public, religious and secular private schools) are funded by state-provided vouchers. The exception is a small cadre of private schools that rely solely on parent tuition and fees.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has determined that no other factor matters more to student achievement than socioeconomic conditions, and in Chile, 20 percent of the variation in score performance on the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment can be explained by a student’s socioeconomic background.

Instead of producing quality through competition, the market-incentivized system has produced class segregation—and “choice” has proven illusory for many Chilean families. A recent study revealed that 80.9 percent of Chile’s primary public school students and 72.1 percent of its secondary public school students were from the lowest five income deciles in the country. A 2011 Columbia Political Review article noted that “Chile has developed one of the world’s most unequal education systems. … Due to the increasingly disproportionate distribution of educational resources … the rich attend the finest private institutions while a majority of students are relegated to under-funded, stagnant schools.”

By visiting schools and meeting with teachers, students, activists and labor leaders, the AFT’s study team saw repeatedly that in Chile’s free-market system—in which education is a commodity, not a right—families spend huge portions of their incomes on children’s education, and many cannot afford the extra tuition and “top-off” fees some schools charge. One Chilean parent matter-of-factly told the team, “We have to pay 50,000 pesos per month [about $85] for our son’s education, and even more. In reality, it’s a lot—and it’s difficult. But you know you have to pay for education.”

Chilean Students Mobilize Against Inequities in For-Profit Education System

University students in Chile have drawn worldwide attention and galvanized public opinion by marching and mobilizing to demand reform to the country’s education system. Students have sharply criticized the Chilean government for failing to enact reforms eliminating the profit motive from education, and have criticized banks and universities for their exorbitant student loan rates and high student fees.

Joined by the Chilean Teachers Association and the United Confederation of Workers (Chile’s main labor federation), students are calling for:

- Increased state spending on education;
- Free and quality public education for all, with an end to profiteering in education;
- More-equitable admissions procedures for the country’s prestigious universities, with less emphasis on Chile’s class-influenced standardized admissions test; and
- Higher pay for teachers and a national plan to attract quality teachers to the profession.

Chile’s education system has reinforced the gap between wealthy and poor Chileans, creating what one observer described to the AFT’s study team as a “map of ignorance.” As a teacher told the team, “The Chilean case is dramatic, because when privatization leads to stratification, education is no longer a tool that creates equality. Instead, it reproduces existing conditions. A child who is born poor will grow up poor—and will continue to be poor.”
The AFT has joined with Education International and Public Services International in advocating for transparency and accountability in the negotiation of global trade agreements, and to warn of the potentially steep price of “free trade” in terms of good jobs and quality public services worldwide. In September 2014, the Teamsters union hosted a trade policy summit with PSI and leaders of public sector unions (including the AFT) to highlight growing concerns about trade agreements and raise these issues on Capitol Hill. At the summit, labor leaders spoke about the threat such agreements pose to good jobs, quality services and democracies’ ability to police corporate abuses.

“The American Federation of Teachers isn’t against trade or trade agreements, but we need to ensure these agreements will not weaken the democratic process, the ability to have shared and growing prosperity for all, and the will of the community, including the voice of the frontline worker,” said AFT President Randi Weingarten. “This is why they must be negotiated with transparency and knowing both the benefits and costs.”

The handful of trade agreements that the United States is currently negotiating all include chapters on trade in services, but the Trade in Services Agreement is of particular concern to public services. A central controversy surrounding TISA is the excessively broad way in which the agreement would define “services”: TISA fails to exempt public services from liberalization, so public services can be open to foreign market competition.

Concerned by the lack of a public services “ carve out” in the agreement, and by the secrecy in which it’s being negotiated, labor unions and watchdog groups are sounding the alarm, warning that TISA may have the unintended consequences of promoting and locking in future privatization of public services around the world. The AFL-CIO warns, “Instead of benefiting the public interest, this agreement seems positioned to serve the interests of private, for-profit corporations.”

The AFT will continue to work with EI, PSI, the AFL-CIO and other allies in the United States and abroad to fight global trade agreements that put corporations’ interests ahead of the interests of working families and strong democracies. At the AFT’s 2014 convention in Los Angeles, delegates overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for U.S. trade policy that does more to protect working families and less to defend corporations and investors. The resolution:

- Denounced the “outdated and failed” North American Free Trade Agreement model and cautioned that free trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, and the Trade in Services Agreement seem likely to follow the same model;
- Opposed undemocratic, nontransparent “fast track” approval of trade agreements;
- Called on the U.S. trade representative to strengthen the labor and environmental standards of all future trade agreements by insisting that all signatories agree to the International Labor Organization conventions—with enforcement mechanisms;
- Called for reforms to the dispute resolution process (corporate courts) enabled by trade agreements;
- Pledged that the AFT will work toward trade policy solutions that enhance labor rights and worker voice on the job; and
- Pledged that the AFT will work with community partners and the AFL-CIO to pressure the U.S. trade representative to allow labor, environment, human rights and other public-interest groups access to trade agreement negotiations.

Speaking in support of the resolution, Candice Owley, president of the Wisconsin Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals and an AFT vice president, said, “We are poised to ensure that future trade policy advances shared prosperity for workers around the world.”

A brave new corporate world? Potential trade agreements threaten our public services, justice system and democracy

Since 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement has severely affected our economy, our environment and workers’ access to jobs. The United States is currently in quiet and secretive negotiations to establish more free trade agreements across the globe, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, and the Trade in Services Agreement.

These agreements could give international corporations carte blanche to privatize our public services and natural resources, and they could compromise worker, consumer and environmental protections. They could also lock in future market control and undermine the democratic process, which should be at the heart of local decision-making, by establishing “corporate courts.”
Defending human rights, democratic freedoms and a strong global trade union movement

The AFT’s commitment to human rights and democratic freedoms has never stopped at our own country’s borders. Our international work is a natural extension of the AFT’s belief that human rights are at the core of all we do, and that labor rights are fundamental human rights. Our union works in close partnership with labor unions abroad, defending the right to organize, calling for workplace health and safety reforms, and advocating for a living wage for all workers in our interdependent global economy. We assist our fellow trade unionists in building democratic unions and fighting back against oppressive regimes that attempt to curtail human rights, suppress the labor movement, and persecute and imprison labor leaders. We work with our international partners to expose oppressive child labor and exploitation, reduce exposure to hazardous and dangerous work environments, and ensure that all children receive the services and supports they need to do well in school. And we support innovative, interactive initiatives to teach students about human rights, civil rights, and the need to create and safeguard democracy throughout the world.

Supporting educational access for children everywhere

The AFT champions the right of every child to a quality education, which is at the core of a democratic society and forms the very basis of economic opportunity. That is why AFT leaders and members applauded when the Nobel Peace Prize winners were announced on Oct. 10, 2014. The award went to two heroic human rights activists and leaders, whose work the AFT has enthusiastically and consistently supported: India’s Kailash Satyarthi and Pakistan’s Malala Yousafzai.

“‘There are no two people more deserving of the Nobel Peace Prize, ‘ said AFT President Randi Weingarten after the announcement was made. “Their courageous efforts in fighting for universal education and protecting children from exploitation and abuse are making our world a better place for generations to come. The right to an education is too often taken for granted. Malala’s and Kailash’s work reminds us that much still needs to be accomplished to ensure that all children, regardless of gender, family income, religion or homeland, are able to go to school and have the chance to reach their God-given potential.”

Satyarthi has been at the forefront of the global movement to end child slavery and exploitative child labor since 1980. The AFT joined him 16 years ago when he launched the Global March Against Child Labor, a worldwide network of trade unions and teachers’ and civil society organizations that work together toward the twin goals of eliminating and preventing all forms of child labor and ensuring all children have access to a free, high-quality public education. Satyarthi is also the co-founder of the Global Campaign for Education, a civil society movement working to end the global education crisis by making sure nations deliver the right of every child to a high-quality public education, and by eliminating gender and income disparities in education.

The AFT also proudly supports the heroic work of Yousafzai, who has ignited the campaign to make education a fundamental right for all girls throughout the world (tens of millions of children worldwide are not able to attend school—57 percent of them girls). Yousafzai is the 17-year-old Pakistani schoolgirl and education activist who survived an assassination attempt by the Taliban two years ago. At the time she was shot—two years and one day before becoming the youngest-ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize—she was well known as an outspoken critic of the Taliban’s denial of education to girls (she had championed girls’ education in Pakistan since the age of 11). Undaunted by the shooting that nearly took her life, she has continued to campaign tirelessly for girls’ education. She published her memoir I Am Malala.
in 2013, and has become a hero not only to human rights advocates but to children all over the world.

The AFT sponsored a delegation to Yousafzai’s speech—on her 16th birthday—to hundreds of young people from more than 80 nations at the United Nations’ headquarters in New York. In a statement about the speech, Weingarten wrote: “Malala Yousafzai’s courage and her zealous commitment to the principle that access to education is a fundamental human right are an inspiration to all who care about the well-being and advancement of children around the globe. … Malala’s message today is simple and wise: All children are entitled to basic education, and that is a right that must no longer be denied to girls.”

For free, Common Core-friendly classroom lessons on Yousafzai, targeted for grades 5-10, visit www.teachhumanrights.com.

A childhood free from fear, abuse and exploitation

From October 2013 through June 2014, the federal government apprehended approximately 57,000 unaccompanied children crossing the U.S. southern border, according to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection report. Most are from Central America’s Northern Triangle—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras—an increasingly dangerous region plagued by some of the world’s highest murder rates, rampant gang activity and crushing poverty.

Honduras and El Salvador lead the world in homicide rates. San Pedro Sula in Honduras is considered the world’s murder capital. In 2011, El Salvador ranked second in terms of homicides in Latin America, with Guatemala not far behind. In its report Children on the Run, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees found that nearly 60 percent of unaccompanied children at the U.S. border said they were seeking protection because they experienced or were in serious risk of violence in their home country.

At the AFT’s 2014 national convention in July, the AFT addressed the humanitarian crisis at the U.S. border and demanded immediate relief aid that meets the needs of child refugees being detained in inhumane conditions.

At the convention, California Gov. Jerry Brown discussed the border crisis, saying, “It’s very easy to take a problem that’s difficult and start pointing fingers. We have a problem at the border—a human tragedy. We have kids whose throats are being slashed in El Salvador and Honduras and Guatemala. We have a problem, and the only way to solve it is for Republicans and Democrats, congressmen and congresswomen, to work with the president.”

Louis Malfaro, president of the Texas AFT and an AFT vice president, told delegates at the convention, “Our state and country are facing a moral and humanitarian crisis I’ve never before witnessed. Our leaders must act swiftly and compassionately as we confront this crisis, recognizing that the most vulnerable members of society—our children—need our safe haven and caregiving. The potential consequences of inaction are too great; we have a moral obligation to protect those who cannot protect themselves.”

As an organization that represents those who teach and care for the next generation, the AFT is working with local leaders, community partners, faith-based networks and labor unions to ensure that the health, educational, safety and legal needs of the unaccompanied children are being met. And the AFT has called on the federal government to put the safety and well-being of children first as it works to solve the root causes of the migration.

Speaking to the convention’s assembled delegates and international guests, AFT President Randi Weingarten said, “We must be caretakers and stewards of children—whatever their country of origin. The children at the border are being detained in inhumane conditions. We—and by we, I’m including members of Congress—have a collective responsibility to act.”

Calling for an end to forced child labor in Uzbekistan

The AFT is a member of an international coalition of human rights activists, clothing retail companies and labor unions calling on the Uzbek government to end its notorious reliance on child labor in the government-organized cotton harvest. Uzbekistan is one of the largest cotton producers in the world, and students, as well as teachers, are annually forced by their government to leave school for weeks at a time to pick cotton. The children and their teachers perform long, hard and dangerous work in the country’s cotton fields, a violation of the International Labor Organization’s Convention No. 182 (against the worst forms of child labor) and Convention No. 105 (against forced labor), both of which the Uzbek government has ratified. The government is taking measures to reduce its reliance on child labor, but enforcement has been difficult; there continues to be a lack of real oversight, and many activists and local Uzbek human rights groups seeking to inspect conditions still get stifled and harassed.

Children in Uzbekistan picking cotton.
Putting an end to child trafficking in Jamaica and the United States

A recent study found that from 2006 to 2010, 4,870 children in Jamaica were reported missing—70 percent of them girls. Nearly 60 percent have not returned home. The U.S. State Department, the International Labor Organization and Amnesty International have found that the trafficking of children from rural areas into tourist areas for sexual exploitation is a serious problem in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean. The problem is urgent in America as well.

Thousands of vulnerable schoolchildren here in the United States are being lured into forced labor or prostitution by criminals who promise them money or fame and then market them through the anonymity of the Internet. The U.S. Justice Department estimates that as many as 300,000 U.S. children are at risk of being trafficked.

The AFT has partnered with the Jamaica Teachers’ Association to create a joint anti-child-trafficking program, which is currently being piloted in both countries. The pilot project will raise awareness among students about the dangers of trafficking for forced labor or sexual exploitation, provide educators with resources to help them identify children at risk and act as “first responders,” and harness community resources to protect children and advocate on behalf of survivors.

Condemning murderous attacks on schoolchildren, teachers and healthcare workers in Nigeria

The AFT has joined the global #BringBackOurGirls campaign urging Nigerian authorities to secure the safe release of abducted youth and to ensure that the perpetrators of these attacks on schools and communities are brought to justice. And the AFT has called for swift and determined international action against Boko Haram, which is terrorizing the population of Nigeria—especially schoolchildren, teachers and healthcare workers. The AFT condemned the February 2013 murders of nine healthcare workers delivering polio vaccines to children in the Nigerian city of Kano, which may have been the work of Boko Haram. The sect has been blamed for the deaths of thousands of people in central and northern Nigeria since 2010.

Launching a partnership with Mexico’s largest teachers union to examine the root causes of forced migration

At the AFT’s convention in July 2014, AFT President Randi Weingarten welcomed the new leadership of the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, the largest teachers union in Mexico. Weingarten and SNTE President Juan Díaz de la Torre announced that both unions will work together to address the root causes of forced migration by children and to fight for children’s welfare and rights on both sides of the border. Cooperation between the two unions (each representing 1.6 million members) will extend to teacher training, continuous professional development and shared member benefits.

“Educators in Mexico and the United States face many of the same challenges and goals—from achieving high-quality education for all children to developing teacher evaluation systems that support and improve rather than test and punish,” Weingarten said. “Together, we will reclaim the promise of public education—across borders.”

Díaz de la Torre added, “Society must value the work teachers perform every day in the classroom and support them in this task that concerns everyone.” He noted that both unions agree that “quality education for all can only be achieved with the participation of teachers through strong organizations committed to all children and social causes.”
Global solidarity in times of need

Our world is more interconnected than ever, and the AFT acts on the belief that Americans cannot turn a blind eye to challenges around the globe. Thus, the AFT joins with international labor organizations and human rights activists to amplify the voices of and help those enduring adversity and undue hardship worldwide.

STANDING IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE.
In response to the horrific January 2015 attacks in Paris at Charlie Hebdo’s headquarters and a kosher supermarket, the AFT expressed abiding solidarity and recognition to teachers unions in France. During the attacks, educators, school staff and law enforcement officers safely evacuated the children of a school near the scene of one of the hostage locations. The AFT supports the courageous determination of the people of France, which was evident during a massive rally for freedom on Jan. 11.

DEMANDING SAFER WORKING CONDITIONS FOR GARMENT WORKERS IN BANGLADESH.
In the aftermath of the tragic April 2013 building collapse in Bangladesh that killed more than 1,000 garment workers, the AFT launched a wide-reaching public and shareholder leverage campaign to urge clothing retailers to sign the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. (Forty retailers have signed so far.) The AFT supports the suspension of U.S. preferential trade privileges for Bangladesh until it enforces international standards for factory safety and labor rights.

PROVIDING DISASTER RELIEF FOR THE PHILIPPINES.
Following the devastation caused by Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013, the AFT provided disaster relief to help rebuild communities in the Philippines. The AFT collected donations through its Disaster Relief Fund to help with ongoing recovery efforts, as it did after Superstorm Sandy in 2012 and the devastating Moore, Okla., tornado in 2013. In addition, the AFT sent a contribution of $10,000 to help get supplies and other assistance to those in need, and solicited volunteers to assist in relief and recovery efforts on the ground.

CALLING FOR THE RELEASE OF IMPRISONED UNION LEADERS IN BAHRAIN.
The AFT has joined the international outcry for the release of Bahrain Teachers’ Association President Mahdi Abu Deeb, who was given a harsh prison sentence in the wake of his union’s call for democratic reforms in the large-scale pro-democracy protests of the Arab Spring. Abu Deeb has been imprisoned since 2011, when the popular and peaceful protests began in Bahrain. The AFT supports the international campaign demanding Abu Deeb’s freedom and calling for an end to Bahrain’s oppression of teacher unionists. Hundreds of teachers have suffered harassment, dismissal, salary cuts and suspension from their work and studies since the 2011 protests.

FIGHTING FOR A LIVING WAGE FOR CAMBODIAN WORKERS.
The AFT is supporting an international campaign for a living wage for Cambodia’s 500,000 garment and footwear workers. Hundreds of thousands of these workers went on strike in December 2013 and January 2014 in an attempt to gain a minimum wage of $160 a month. An article in Bloomberg Businessweek called the strike “the largest mass action Cambodia’s garment industry had ever seen.” During demonstrations by striking workers, military police fired into the crowd of peaceful protesters, killing at least four people and injuring many more. Several union leaders and community activists were tried by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court in April and May for supposedly “inciting violence” during the strikes. Although the court convicted each defendant, international pressure resulted in the court suspending the sentences and releasing the defendants on May 30.
Defending the democratic and labor rights of teachers and public employees

OFFERING INSIGHTS AND RESOURCES ON TEACHER MIGRATION

The AFT’s involvement in winning justice for exploited Filipino teachers recruited to teach in the United States has helped fuel awareness of a growing trend in teacher migration. Recognizing the urgent need for better data on teacher migration, Education International commissioned the AFT to conduct in-depth research on different models of teacher migration.

The groundbreaking May 2014 report, Getting Teacher Migration and Mobility Right, reviews existing data on teacher migration and information collected through research visits to a variety of countries. The global survey conducted for this report garnered responses from 1,358 teachers from 53 countries who worked abroad in 127 host countries. It is the largest and most extensive known survey of migrant teachers.

AFT President Randi Weingarten applauded the report’s release, saying, “All too often migrant teachers—the majority of whom are female—take extraordinary risks to support their families and advance their careers, and face exploitation and abuse instead of support and advancement. This study … offers a blueprint to ensure that migrant teachers are supported, that their rights are protected, and that they have real value in the lives of the students they teach and their new communities.”

The report centers on three key findings: First, in our increasingly interconnected world, authentic professional and cultural exchange programs for teachers promote educational quality, yielding important benefits for students and teachers alike. Second, when international teacher recruitment is undertaken to address teacher shortages, it can mask underlying causes and leave teachers and students in both source and destination countries vulnerable. Third, protecting the rights of migrant teachers and reducing the risks associated with migration is crucial, both to safeguard an inherently vulnerable teacher population and to ensure strong educational and professional outcomes.

To accompany the report’s release and to help teachers on the move, Education International launched a website dedicated to teacher migration worldwide. Through the website portal “Migrant Teachers’ Rights,” teachers going abroad will find valuable information on their rights, a list of 10 questions to ask before leaving home, a description of various hiring models, and country-specific rules and legislation affecting teacher migration. It also offers teachers the opportunity to meet and share stories with others who have traveled from home to teach. For unions, the portal provides resources, strategies and examples of best practices.

New partnership empowers U.N. Staff Union to fight for bargaining rights

The United Nations Staff Union, with 7,000 members, most of whom are employed at the United Nations’ New York headquarters, is now a member of the AFT. The new partnership’s first challenge is to counter a troubling move away from employee bargaining rights by the United Nations—the same world organization that is mandated to defend such rights around the globe. Central to the AFT and UNSU’s message has been the failure of the United Nations to honor its own founding principles regarding labor and human rights.

The AFT and UNSU are not waiting on the U.N. administration to advance their greater goals. At the AFT’s 2014 convention in Los Angeles, delegates overwhelmingly passed a resolution vowing the AFT’s support for bringing attention to the struggles of U.N. employees and their unions through labor and community alliances in the United States, global union federations and international alliances. The resolution also pledged that the AFT will urge the Obama administration to support collective bargaining rights for U.N. employees.

The AFT and UNSU are also collaborating closely on efforts to establish vital whistle-blower protections for U.N. employees. The Government Accountability Project, an advocacy group that focuses on strengthening whistle-blower protections in the United States and abroad, has long urged that countries impose penalties on the United Nations for its failure to enforce a strong, consistent whistle-blower protection program. In February 2014, President Obama signed a new appropriations bill requiring the U.S. State Department to cut the United States’ annual contribution to the United Nations by 15 percent if it does not enforce effective whistle-blower protections for employees who report misconduct, corruption or fraud. The United States provides 22 percent of the United Nations’ total budget.
A central tenet of the AFT’s international work is fighting inequities and discrimination wherever they are entrenched—including in schools in the United States. Thus, the AFT swung into action to support efforts to eliminate the legacy of past discrimination against Latino and African-American students in the Tucson (Ariz.) Unified School District.

Under pressure from Arizona state officials, the school district essentially shut down its successful Mexican-American Studies (MAS) program in July 2012. The officials contended that the courses violated a 2010 Arizona law, H.B. 2281, which requires state law enforcement officers to demand “papers” from people they stop who they suspect are not authorized to be in the United States, and which has spawned at least two dozen copycat bills around the country. It cited Arizona’s notorious racial-profiling law S.B. 1070, which requires state law enforcement officers to demand “papers” from people they stop who they suspect are not authorized to be in the United States, and which has spawned at least two dozen copycat bills around the country. It called for the immediate repeal of H.B. 2281 and S.B. 1070 and urged the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education to investigate the constitutionality of the Arizona ethnic studies ban.

The AFT also immediately launched a campaign to educate its members and the public about the threats to academic freedom and cultural identity that the Tucson ban on the Mexican-American Studies program represented. The AFT’s education campaign included disseminating broadly the list of MAS program books banned in Tucson so that they could be widely read and taught throughout the country. The union’s campaign also highlighted the measurable effectiveness of the MAS program.

The AFT applauded a February 2013 ruling by U.S. District Judge David Bury ordering the implementation of the Unitary Status Plan for the Tucson Unified School District. The plan seeks to improve the quality of education for African-American and Latino students, including English language learners. A key element of the ruling is that the district must return to offering “culturally relevant” courses that focus on the history, experience and culture of African-Americans and Latinos. The ruling opens the way to the reinstatement of the highly acclaimed and successful MAS program, stipulates a districtwide professional development plan for all educators working with English language learners, and requires the district to ensure Latino and African-American students have equal access to advanced learning programs and courses.
Bringing Nelson Mandela’s inspiring story to students through film

In November 2013, the AFT and the Weinstein Company brought the story of former political prisoner and South African President Nelson Mandela—and his message of social justice, reconciliation and leadership—to Los Angeles and New York City public high school students with a special screening of the film “Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom.” (The film opened nationwide the following month.) The screenings were followed by a conversation with AFT President Randi Weingarten and Harvey Weinstein, co-chairman of the Weinstein Company.

“The message of this great man and his incredible life should not be lost on this generation,” Weingarten said. “Film can be a phenomenal educational tool, and this film touches on the universal themes of fear, oppression, hope, reconciliation and forgiveness.”

Partnering with the Weinstein Company and the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory, the AFT also posted lesson plans and other materials related to the movie on Share My Lesson, the AFT’s digital collection of teaching resources (and the nation’s largest online collection of free lesson plans). Three lengthy clips from the movie, as well as English language arts and world history lessons for grades 9–12, are available for free for educators, parents and others who register at ShareMyLesson.com.

‘Speak Truth to Power’ student video contest focuses students’ lenses on seeking justice for human rights violations

The AFT and its 600,000-member affiliate, the New York State United Teachers, have joined with the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights to sponsor the annual Speak Truth to Power nationwide video contest for middle and high school students, now approaching its fifth year. The competition, conducted in partnership with the Tribeca Film Institute, invites students to create a three- to five-minute video examining a human rights issue or violation and profiling the defenders who are fighting to restore justice. Judges look for videos that demonstrate independence, content knowledge and creative storytelling—no prior video experience is required. Past winners have explored voting rights, child labor, bullying, domestic violence and more. The contest builds upon the RFK Center’s Speak Truth to Power human rights curriculum, taught in schools across the United States and around the world.

Recent grand-prize winners include filmmakers from Southeast Middle School in Los Angeles, for their profile of Russian domestic violence activist Marina Pisklakova and for their film about the Women’s Crisis Center of Los Angeles, and students of the Young Women’s Leadership School of Brooklyn, N.Y., who made a film about the work of anti-sexual-slavery and anti-trafficking activist Juliana Dogbadzi of Ghana.

www.teachhumanrights.com
Teachers Advancing a Rights Culture (TARC)

HARNESSING THE POWER OF TEACHERS UNIONS TO PROMOTE HUMAN AND WORKERS’ RIGHTS

In December 2012, the AFT Educational Foundation, Education International, the Solidarity Center and teachers unions in four countries launched the Teachers Advancing a Rights Culture initiative to promote workers’ rights and to encourage civic participation in defending workers’ rights. With a grant from the U.S. State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, the program builds on the important roles teachers play in their communities, harnessing the organizational power of teachers unions to foster respect for human and workers’ rights around the globe. The program focuses on four countries undergoing significant political and social change: Egypt, Georgia, Honduras and Zimbabwe. Union partners in these countries conduct trainings, host community events and develop innovative curricula, with the goal of enhancing teachers’ effectiveness in promoting human and workers’ rights by working collaboratively with community allies. Since it began, the TARC project has trained more than 2,500 human rights defenders in the four participating countries. Some of the accomplishments and successful trainings of each country are captured below:

EGYPT
Union staff from the Independent Teachers Union of Egypt (ISTT) have focused their efforts on developing materials and hosting community events to promote quality education as a human right. The ISTT has developed five human rights tools and six union training materials to support advocacy for quality education, and has disseminated more than 1,000 copies of these materials. It has also partnered with eight community organizations to advance human rights and has engaged in discussions with Egypt’s Ministry of Education about its right to be involved in the national debate on education laws.

GEORGIA
Georgia has made significant progress both in developing materials and in conducting trainings to strengthen teachers’ knowledge and resources to advance human rights in their classrooms and promote workers’ rights through the Educators and Scientists Free Trade Union of Georgia. The ESFTUG has trained more than 600 teachers in human rights education and 300 union members in the benefits of union membership and workers’ rights, and it has hosted numerous community events on educational reform issues, drawing more than 375 community activists. It has also re-established cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and constructive dialogue to improve labor and social conditions for teachers.

HONDURAS
The Federation of Honduran Teachers’ Organisations (FOMH) has hosted a series of human rights teacher trainings and union trainings. Three human rights curricula have been developed for these trainings, and nearly 500 teachers have attended to learn about human and workers’ rights. Five community events have also been hosted by the FOMH, with nearly 400 community members in attendance. These community events promote support for teachers and advance human rights and educational reform issues.

ZIMBABWE
Teachers in Zimbabwe continue to face a dire economic situation and an underfunded public education system, causing their unions to struggle to address serious shortage issues. Nonetheless, the Progressive Teachers’ Union of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Teachers’ Association remain committed to the TARC project. On top of producing and distributing workers’ rights training materials, the unions have partnered with 12 organizations to hold community events, which have been attended by 1,000 community activists. These events and trainings further advance and support teachers’ rights and commitment to sustaining a quality public education for Zimbabwean youth.

HUMAN RIGHTS, LABOR RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY
Sharing ‘Share My Lesson’

THE AFT WORKS WITH CARIBBEAN TEACHERS UNIONS TO EXPAND VALUABLE RESOURCE FOR EDUCATORS

Share My Lesson is the AFT’s award-winning online professional development community where educators can come together, at no cost, to share their greatest teaching resources and collaborate on best practices.

Encouraged by the rapid success of Share My Lesson and the enthusiastic educator feedback the program has received, the AFT has been reaching out to teachers unions in other countries to share its online collection of resources and professional community. In particular, the AFT has been working to expand Share My Lesson to include and address the crucial teaching needs of teachers in the Caribbean and South Africa.

In April 2014, the AFT partnered with teachers unions in Barbados, St. Lucia and Jamaica to offer Share My Lesson to educators there. The ongoing partnerships kicked off with Share My Lesson presentations that included input from educators on what resources and features they would find most helpful.

In Jamaica, Share My Lesson fit perfectly into the theme of a 2014 conference hosted by the Jamaica Teachers’ Association, “Revolutionizing the 21st Century Education System through Best Practices.” Marla Uccelli-Kashyap, the assistant to the AFT president for educational issues, led a standing-room-only workshop on using technology to improve practice through Share My Lesson. Most participants at the workshop were new to Share My Lesson and were quick to fill out sign-up cards for free online accounts.

In Barbados, teachers and their union, the Barbados Union of Teachers (BUT), have been calling for higher-quality professional development and better teaching resources. Share My Lesson workshops were a key part of a full day of professional development for teachers at the BUT’s annual general conference. Beverly Voos, a national AFT math trainer and a member of the Share My Lesson materials evaluation team, presented on how Share My Lesson works and elicited teacher suggestions for customizing offerings for the Caribbean. One suggestion included an island-wide “upload party” to upload these specific resources to the Share My Lesson website. Another suggestion was to tag Share My Lesson offerings (currently identified by grade level) with student ages, since in Barbados, students are categorized by age, not necessarily by grade level. After the workshop, Voos, BUT President Pedro Shepherd and BUT Vice-President Richmark Cave talked about Share My Lesson on the island’s weekly radio program for teachers.

“The Share My Lesson workshops were very well received,” said Voos. “The participants were engaged and excited to begin use of the system. They related their difficulty in accessing high-quality resources for their students without Share My Lesson.”

Voos also traveled to Trinidad and Tobago, where she taught workshops to members of the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers’ Association on remedial strategies for reading and math, as well as accessing relevant materials on Share My Lesson.

In St. Lucia, professional development centers on reading and conflict management

Responding to an invitation from the St. Lucia Teachers’ Union, two AFT trainers, Christina Phillips and Rosalind LaRocque, presented three professional development courses—two in reading and one in conflict management. Eighty principals attended the conflict management session alongside teachers.

“There were two highlights of my experience,” Phillips said. “One was to hear the superintendent during her welcome remarks state that she is still a member of the union. Second was the fact that the participants gave up days during their spring break to attend the training.”

Participants praised the workshops enthusiastically. One participant in a reading workshop wrote, “I learned many strategies and activities that I can take to my class to help my students become better and more fluent readers.” Another commented, “This workshop was very eye-opening for me as an educator. It emphasized activities which I have found to be effective with my students, as well as introduced new and/or better activities. The facilitator was vibrant … and well-versed in her field. Bravo!!! Come back soon.”
Because the AFT believes healthcare is a human right, we are committed to expanding access to quality care in the United States and abroad. The Vermont affiliate of the AFT’s 112,000-member Nurses and Health Professionals division has worked to bring quality care to a country in desperate need: Haiti, which suffered a devastating earthquake in January 2010. On Aug. 15, 2011, the Workers Solidarity Clinic in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, opened its doors for the first time.

The vision for a union-run clinic emerged when members of the AFT’s Vermont Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals traveled to Haiti with members of the Vermont Medical Response Team to provide medical assistance in the aftermath of the quake. The VFNHP shepherded the project with the help of Public Services International and its affiliate in Haiti, the Confederation of Workers in the Public and Private Sectors (CTSP), a Haitian trade union federation. In addition, funds from the AFL-CIO’s Solidarity Center, the New York State United Teachers and the AFT, as well as support from a number of other U.S. unions, charities and individual donations, have helped finance the clinic.

The Workers Solidarity Clinic, as it is known, was built at CTSP headquarters to serve the families of union members, but it has since opened its doors to the larger community. Initially staffed by VFNHP members, the clinic is now run by a team of Haitian doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers. It focuses on general health, mother and child care, and preventive health, and has provided free care to hundreds of patients.

AFT Secretary-Treasurer Lorretta Johnson visited the clinic in October 2012. “This might seem like a very small project in the grand scheme,” Johnson said, “but this is a country that was so torn apart and devastated, and it remains a place where healthcare services are relatively scarce, much less free. We’re pretty proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish to improve the lives of our union brothers and sisters, families and children in Haiti.”

Johnson toured the facility and spoke with doctors, nurses and local union leaders. The leaders told Johnson about their vision to expand the clinic, including establishing a lab to do blood work and offering vision and dental care. Some spoke of their desire to eventually turn the clinic into a larger, full-service hospital.

Record numbers of patients were treated in 2014, and the AFT and international partner Centrale des syndicats du Québec have continued to support the project through continuous professional development for Haitian nurses, doctors and other healthcare professionals.
AFT global affiliates

Education International and Public Services International fight for quality public education and public services

One way that the AFT effectively does its work in the world is through its international affiliates Education International and Public Services International. These global affiliates help the AFT share strategies, experiences and resources with labor unions and their members around the world, and they work with the AFT to reach common goals and win common battles. EI and PSI present the case for quality public education and public services in many forums and international bodies, from the United Nations and World Bank, to the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

“EI and PSI support our international affiliates, and take an active role in those affiliates, because we need to be part of the larger global labor movement,” said Candice Owley, an AFT vice president and the chair of the AFT’s democracy committee. “We join with education and trade unions in other nations because the fight we are all fighting is the same. We are all facing the same attacks: privatization, austerity and attempts to erode the very foundations of public services and public education. Together, we are stronger to meet and defeat these attacks.”

EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL represents organizations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is one of the world’s largest union federations, representing 30 million education employees in about 400 organizations in 170 countries and territories. Education International:

- Promotes the principle of free, high-quality education for every young person;
- Represents the interests of education employees on the international level;
- Assists in the development of independent democratic organizations to represent education employees; and
- Advocates for equity in society, combating racism, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and racial or ethnic origin or characteristics.

In January 2013, Education International hosted a dynamic conference in London, “Framing Education for the Public Good,” that gave affiliates from member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development the opportunity to meet on an informal basis to consider key issues affecting equity and excellence in education.

AFT participants included President Randi Weingarten, who also chairs the EI’s OECD Advisory Committee; then-president of the New York State United Teachers Richard Iannuzzi; then-president of the Saint Paul (Minn.) Federation of Teachers Mary Cathryn Ricker, now the AFT’s executive vice president; Rob Weil, director of field programs in the AFT’s educational issues department; Patricia Keefer, director of the AFT’s international affairs department; and David Sherman, an assistant to the AFT president.

El General Secretary Fred van Leeuwen set the tone of the conference with his opening remarks:

The values of public education are essentially the values that underpin democracy as well as our prosperity. They encompass the principles of equity and equal opportunities, of nondiscrimination and social justice. ... The simplistic transfer of ideas from the corporate world will not advance the quality of our school systems. The idea that you can somehow improve quality by introducing standardized testing, league tables and performance pay, by ranking schools, by measurement, is wishful thinking. It does not work. ... We do accept the concept of accountability. We too want quality education. We are committed to keeping up the highest professional standards. And yes, it is natural that there be ongoing dialogue between the education unions and the public authorities. But let us be clear! The starting point for that dialogue must be the recognition of the professional role, the expertise of the educator.

Weingarten chaired a plenary session on framing education as a public good. In opening the session, she noted that while conference participants offered various perspectives, the group shared common values, such as the beliefs that “education is a right” and that “inequity is the main opportunity cost of privatization.” She added, “This day has shown how important it is to be part of the international trade union movement.”
GLOBAL UNION VOICE

PUBLIC SERVICES INTERNATIONAL is a global trade union federation that brings together more than 20 million workers of 669 unions in 154 countries and territories.

In November 2012, the AFT sent a delegation led by AFT Secretary-Treasurer Lorretta Johnson to the 29th PSI World Congress in Durban, South Africa.

At the congress, Candice Owley, president of the Wisconsin Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, was re-elected to the PSI executive board. “These last few years, the workers in Wisconsin have been at the epicenter of attacks on public services,” Owley said. “It is clear that there are forces at work that are determined to destroy the trade union movement in the United States because we stand against the right-wing agenda. These experiences have led me to understand more clearly than ever the critical importance of a strong global voice for public employees, with an activist agenda that will mobilize workers around the world in defense of public services and trade union rights.”

During the congress, the AFT sponsored a meeting to discuss support for a medical clinic set up by the AFT in Haiti following the devastating earthquake that shook the island in 2010 (for more on the AFT’s work in Haiti, see page 23). During the meeting, PSI affiliates from Brazil, Canada and other countries expressed admiration and support for the work being done at the clinic, and pledged their help for the effort going forward.

The AFT also held a meeting on the issues facing school support workers in unions around the world. Delegates expressed the need to strengthen links among school support personnel unions worldwide. As a result of these discussions, the AFT hosted leaders from PSI in April 2014. Johnson welcomed the international visitors and described typical jobs for paraprofessionals and school-related personnel in public schools and colleges across the United States, including administrative professionals, custodians, skilled maintenance workers, school nutrition workers and transportation workers.

In July 2014, PSI General Secretary Rosa Pavanelli addressed delegates to the AFT convention in Los Angeles and described how her global union has created a new sector for educational support personnel. “Defending public education means we do not defend only teachers but all the workers involved in public education,” she said.