Common Core: Do What It Takes Before High Stakes

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America’s public education system could be on the brink of a once-in-a-generation revolution. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for math and English language arts. The CCSS are a sharp departure from the too-common superficial sprint through huge volumes of material, asking students and teachers instead to focus on in-depth explorations of essential skills and knowledge. If implemented properly—namely, by ensuring that frontline educators are prepared to teach these rigorous new standards—we can provide all children with the problem-solving, critical-thinking and teamwork skills they need to compete in today’s changing world.

But that’s a big “if.” As I recently told the Association for a Better New York about the Common Core State Standards, “I think there’s a genuine enthusiasm out there about the promise of these standards. But they’re not going to be realized if we don’t do the things that are necessary to make sure that teachers are prepared to teach to the standards.”

The failure to provide students and educators with the necessary time and support to adapt to these ambitious new requirements has caused heart-wrenching, destructive anxiety. Wraparound services, early childhood programs and community childhood programs and community schools—all of which help disadvantaged students reach their potential—are central to this mission.

We are engaged in a fight for the heart and soul of public education. As Jeff Bryant wrote this week on the Campaign for America’s Future blog, “Fights to preserve and strengthen public schools … are connected to much larger struggles over what kind of nation America is becoming.” Proper implementation of the CCSS—and equal opportunities for all children to succeed—can help reverse the troubling trend toward low skills and high inequality that has done a disservice to our students and our country.

**We can reverse the troubling trend toward low skills and high inequality.**

Developments like these, which say they haven’t had enough time to put them into practice or share strategies with colleagues. Educators have joined parents, community members and opinion leaders to send more than 36,000 letters supporting the moratorium to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and to their state commissioners of education.

The AFT is working to help the Common Core succeed in classrooms across the country. ShareMyLesson.com is our online platform where educators can access and share their best teaching resources, with thousands of resources aligned to the Common Core standards. The AFT has trained hundreds of teacher-trainers in Common Core-aligned courses, and the AFT Innovation Fund provides grants to AFT affiliates trying to realize the promise of these standards.

The Common Core sets rigorous standards for all children, whether from Bed-Stuy or Beverly Hills, but high expectations must be matched with high levels of support, particularly for high-needs students. Poverty or near-poverty plagues nearly 1 in 2 children in America, and this week leading groups of pediatricians called for concerted efforts to aggressively combat this scourge. Weingarten speaking to the Association for a Better New York about the Common Core State Standards.

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