

AFT Resolution

REAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

WHEREAS, the AFT agenda is to reclaim the promise of American public education by creating strong and effective community public schools that are safe, collaborative and welcoming places; and

WHEREAS, our public schools should:

- Address the social, emotional and health needs of all children, with particular attention to children who are poor, children with disabilities, and children who are English language learners;
- Ensure that children and their families have access to wraparound services such as health, mental health, and social services, adult education, and other supports that help mitigate the effects of poverty;
- Have teachers and school staff who are well-prepared and supported and have manageable class sizes and collaboration time; and
- Expose all children to an engaging and rich curriculum that includes art, music, social studies, civics, the sciences and physical education; and

WHEREAS, the very purpose of public education and the joy of both teaching and learning are now at risk because policymakers perversely attempt to capture—and evaluate—everything about teaching and learning with testing; and

WHEREAS, states and local school districts continue to use fundamentally flawed data methodologies such as value-added measures (VAM) and student growth percentiles that research shows should not be used for high-stakes decisions; and

WHEREAS, teachers, parents and community members have mounting evidence that standardized testing is increasingly driving education policy and practice leaving us with a disastrous “shame-and-blame/test-and-punish” accountability system that corrupts the teaching and learning process; and

WHEREAS, performance data in the United States are often used purely for assigning blame, while other high-performing countries use such data to guide intervention, reveal best practices and identify shared problems; and

WHEREAS, for more than two decades this punitive test-based accountability—the attempt to use large-scale assessments to measure schooling outcomes and identify struggling learners and poorly performing teachers—has failed to improve student performance or ensure equity in the

distribution of educational resources and services and has eclipsed by far any parallel efforts to strengthen teaching and learning; and

WHEREAS, policymakers have tried to “reform” our schools on the cheap with “turnaround” strategies that substitute test scores for student and teacher supports, fire teachers and close schools instead of giving them the resources they need to help struggling students succeed, and that irresponsibly hand over public schools to privatizers and other groups eager to make a quick buck off the backs of children; and

WHEREAS, schools and teachers cannot do it alone since more than two-thirds of the achievement gap is attributable to non-school factors; and

WHEREAS, there can be no excellence in public education without equity and yet 60 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, public school disinvestment and charter school and privatization expansion have contributed significantly to increased segregation with the result that many children of color and children living in poverty still receive separate and unequal schooling; and

WHEREAS, inappropriate education policies, austerity budgets, deprofessionalization and privatization attacks have created polarizing, unhealthy and ineffective competition, and wrong-headed “incentives” among states and districts for scarce dollars, and have pitted the needs of our most vulnerable students against the resources of more affluent communities; and

WHEREAS, improvement of schooling cannot occur without the recognition of teacher professionalism and the engagement of teachers in developing policies for improving equity and excellence in our schools; and

WHEREAS, THE AFT’s beliefs and goals about the promise of public education unite parents, students, teachers, school staff and the community in trust and common cause:

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers in partnership with parents and other community groups will advocate for the development of “support-and-improve” accountability models to replace the current, failed “test-and-punish” systems; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will promote “support-and-improve” accountability systems that:

- **Are transparent and readily understandable by teachers and families and the broader public;**
- **Engage a broad cross section of the school stakeholders—teachers, students, parents and community organizations—in planning and implementing accountability policies and strategies that are tailored to each school and district’s unique context;**
- **Ensure the delivery of a broad and well-rounded curriculum, including the arts, science, social studies, civics, world languages, health and physical education, and social/emotional and character development;**

- Support meaningful learning that links curricular tools and resources, instruction and new assessments to ensure the development of higher-order thinking and performance skills that students need to be successful in the world outside of school;
- Are designed to enhance learning environments, improve curriculum and increase teacher efficacy;
- Use feedback from parents, teachers and students to evaluate and continuously improve the system;
- *Retain disaggregated reporting* by race, ethnicity, poverty level, English language status and disability, *but no longer require testing of every student at every grade level every year*, and instead employ sampling methodology to determine how well the system is meeting its goals;
- Identify schools needing improvement by qualitative observation as well as multiple measures of students, educators and schools that reach beyond standardized math and reading test scores and instead capture the multifaceted aspects of education valued by parents, the profession and the community;
- Hold policymakers responsible for appropriating the necessary funding for implementing the new accountability system;
- Hold administrators responsible for distributing the funds equitably and for creating a collaborative environment that includes teachers in decision-making about the curriculum, the assessments and the professional development necessary for successful implementation;
- Hold *all* education stakeholders responsible for wisely using the resources—e.g., enriched and engaging curriculum, well-prepared teachers, safe and orderly schools, teaching supplies, computers and other technology—necessary to meet student needs and to achieve both equity and excellence for *all* students; and
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RESOLVED, that the AFT will support action against state and local policies that misuse VAM, student growth percentiles, similar methodologies, and other test data for high-stakes decision-making; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will advocate for accountability that rests collectively both with individual educators and with the administrators in schools, districts and state agencies that recruit, hire, assign, support and evaluate them; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will advocate for replacing policies of fiscal austerity and competitive funding, which particularly harm our neediest students and districts, with policies that increase federal compensatory education funding for all high-needs schools; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will continue to work toward academic and nonacademic wraparound services to support children’s social and emotional needs and the teaching and learning environment as a component of the overall community schools strategy; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will take the necessary steps to secure respect for teachers and give them a voice in the development of education and accountability policies that support teaching and learning, and policies that place public schools at the center of their communities; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT will work to fulfill public education's purpose as a path to individual self-fulfillment, a propeller of our economy, and an anchor of a democracy that is a shining example of racial, social and economic justice.

(2014)