

FACTS AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS PROPOSED POLICY STATEMENT ON TEACHER EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Why now? It is time to show respect for the profession, honor those that have made teaching a career, and reframe the current debate to focus on what is best for our students. The nation’s current education “reform” conversation has devolved into a discussion about lowering professional standards, finding quick and cheap ways to rate teachers based solely on tests, and making it easier to fire “bad” teachers while lowering the bar to enter the profession. Educators have grown weary of fighting one bad idea after another – our students and educators deserve better. This statement reflects the importance of maintaining high standards, not lowering them; robust evaluations based on multiple indicators, not a single narrow metric; and ensuring that when a teacher distinguishes herself and attains career status, it is a meaningful event.

How does this policy statement strengthen our position? The statement does not shy away from tough issues – it takes on the biggest evaluation and accountability concerns facing education today, but does so in a positive manner that makes clear ***what we are for***. The statement gives teaching new respect by putting more control of the profession into the hands of teachers. It takes teaching to new levels of professionalism.

How does this policy statement help Association leaders? Almost half of the states have moved to reform teacher evaluation and accountability systems. Many of their legislatures have taken approaches that threaten public education and harm educators and students. Our current policies do not give adequate guidance in this complicated environment, nor do they create the space necessary to have difficult conversations at the state, local and national levels. The policy statement does not dictate how state and local affiliates must approach these issues. Instead, it empowers educators and affiliates to provide leadership, even on the toughest issues they face today.

Why is it necessary for NEA to discuss student assessment indicators in the statement? As the world’s largest organization of educators, it is critical for NEA to provide guidance in this area and set clear and high standards for student growth and how it is assessed. Many of the poorly crafted standardized tests being used today do not meet a high standard and are not scientifically valid or reliable measures of student growth, much less of a teacher’s performance. The RA has already taken the position (in Resolution B65) that “classroom teachers must be involved in the development of assessment systems and are best qualified to determine the criteria for assessment of students and dissemination of results.” The policy statement builds on this important notion and provides a critically needed framework for those states and locals that choose to incorporate student assessment indicators into teacher

evaluation systems. The policy statement also supports states and locals that decide that the use of standardized tests in evaluations, either for formative or summative purposes, is inappropriate because the tests are not being used for purposes for which they have been scientifically validated and shown to be reliable and do not provide meaningful information regarding student learning and growth.

How much weight should student growth have in teacher evaluation? The policy statement does not recommend any specific percentage or weight. The weight and use of growth indicators should be determined at the local level through bargaining or legislation, or through policy at the state or local level where bargaining is not possible.

Democratic process and authority of the Representative Assembly: Policy statements are uniquely democratic in two ways: 1) They must be considered and approved by NEA's two highest governing bodies (the Board and ultimately the RA) before they can be considered formal policy; and 2) They are one of the few policy vehicles that delegates receive well in advance of debate and action. This expanded lead-time gives delegates an opportunity to deliberate the complex and interconnected aspects of the subject addressed by a policy statement over a longer period before arriving at the RA. In addition to the dedicated open hearing scheduled for June 30, 2011, delegates will have an opportunity to hear more about the policy statement via tele-town hall before the RA.

What this policy statement DOES NOT do

- It is not a top-down directive. The policy statement provides a guiding framework. Locals and states will decide (through bargaining and legislation) which components work best for them and how much emphasis to place on each component.
- It does not address compensation.
- It does not address seniority.
- There is no recommended weight associated with any of the evaluation components.
- There is no support for the invalid and unreliable standardized tests currently being used in many states, most of which were poorly crafted and hastily designed in response to NCLB testing mandates.

Significance of the policy statement – 10 key points

1. The policy statement puts the focus on what is best for the student and the profession of teaching.
2. The policy statement puts NEA on the record, for the first time, as calling for a comprehensive overhaul of both teacher evaluation and accountability systems to advance student learning.
3. The policy statement establishes a broad framework for improving teacher evaluation and accountability systems. It leaves decisions as to how to proceed

within that framework to local bargaining (where available) or to state and local affiliates, including the weight any particular component should bear.

- 4.** The policy statement includes student learning and growth indicators as one of three key components of evaluation systems, to be measured by indicators chosen at the state or local level.
- 5.** States and locals decide what indicators to use for all three components. For example, states and locals can decide to use – or not use – standardized tests to measure student growth. The policy statement would support the choice of a state or local to use such tests if – and only if – the standardized tests are valid, reliable, high quality, and meaningfully measure student learning and growth.
- 6.** The policy statement protects students assigned to struggling teachers by calling for accomplished teachers to work with struggling teachers.
- 7.** The policy statement provides for the acquisition of career status only if a teacher meets or exceeds expectations on his or her evaluation. It also allows teachers who meet or exceed expectations to challenge a district’s refusal to grant career status.
- 8.** Once a teacher has career status, she or he cannot lose that status based on evaluations, but can be subject to a fair dismissal process.
- 9.** The policy statement calls for a well-designed system for improving a struggling teacher’s practice. Should that teacher not improve within a specific time, the policy statement provides for a fair and expedient dismissal process.
- 10.** The policy statement calls for support for beginning teachers so that they will not just stay and survive, but thrive in the profession.