



**Our TURN:**  
Revitalizing Public Education  
and Strengthening Our Democracy  
Through the Collective Wisdom of Teachers



The Teacher Union Reform Network of AFT and NEA Locals  
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# Our TURN: Revitalizing Public Education and Strengthening Our Democracy Through the Collective Wisdom of Teachers

Public education now faces an existential threat from a new administration in Washington that seeks to privatize a national treasure. We, the educators, will fight that effort with every ounce of energy, and in so doing, it is important that we offer a positive vision of what makes up a quality public education.

As teachers and teacher unionists, we believe that teaching and learning can be transformed if we embrace a new vision of education that rests on four pillars, each of which bears equal weight:

1. If we want schools to prepare student to be career and college ready, thoughtful citizens, and reflective human beings, then schools should be safe, learner-centered, and well-resourced to serve the needs of each individual student.
2. If teachers are the most important in-school determinant of student learning, then teaching must be recognized as a true profession.
3. If America needs to tap into the talents of all students, irrespective of their background, then educational excellence must be inclusive and education redesign must be accompanied by changes in other aspects of students' lives.
4. If all education policy must ultimately be about enhancing opportunities for students to learn, then collective bargaining (and other forms of collaborative decision-making) between teachers and management should always aim to advance student learning.

The Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN), a coalition of teachers and teacher union leaders from AFT and NEA union locals, was founded 20 years ago “to promote progressive reforms in education and in teacher unions.” To all who are engaged in the debate about the future of public education – whether practitioners or policymakers -- this document lays out precisely what we aspire to. We begin with our idea of what education, schools, and classrooms could and should look like, then turn to the policies needed to bring about that vision.



# Our Vision

## 1. Schools are Learner-Centered.

In our ideal classrooms, students learn how to become skilled adults; enlightened and thoughtful citizens; and reflective human beings and lifelong learners.

Students are excited about learning because it is hands-on and experiential. They are excited because teaching is highly personalized to their needs. They are engaged because learning is cooperative and takes place in groups, the way problems are solved in the workplace and in life.

Students have a rich curriculum that includes the “tested” subjects of math and language arts but also ensures extensive opportunities to learn multiple languages, science, history, geography, the arts, physical education, and other important disciplines.

Students learn in environments that are safe and orderly, and also joyful and exhilarating.

Students have a reasonable chance of receiving a teacher’s individualized attention and benefiting from a nurturing relationship because class sizes and teaching loads are determined with those goals in mind.

Students learn creativity, critical thinking skills, and habits of mind that will prepare them, in broad terms, for jobs that have not yet even been created.

Student learning is evaluated by authentic assessments that demonstrate those critical thinking and creativity skills. Students have assessments that are fewer but better, and are a continuation of learning as well as an application of learning.

## 2. Teaching Is a Profession.

In our ideal classrooms, teachers are drawn from the ranks of the brightest college graduates of diverse backgrounds because the profession is highly respected, strongly supported, and well compensated.

Teachers in the classroom are highly qualified to educate students because educators are inducted and compensated like professionals in fields such as medicine and architecture.

Teachers are excited to be in the classroom in part because they have a professional voice. They are involved in peer assistance and review programs to cultivate talent and assess the performance of their colleagues. Teachers shape the curriculum and become, as union leader Ellen Bernstein has suggested, “policymakers of classroom practice.”<sup>1</sup>

Because they are active participants in school decision-making, teachers model for students what it is like to thrive in a democratic environment, thereby underlining the larger democratic goals of public education.

Teachers are continually learning, through professional development and collaboration with colleagues.

Teachers have opportunities to advance professionally through a career path without having to leave the classroom to go into administration.

Teachers, like students, work in groups with colleagues to perfect their craft.

### 3. Equity is Honored in Pursuing Excellence.

In our ideal schools, students learn in racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse classrooms, in which children learn from the varied life experiences of classmates. In these classrooms, the democratic message that in America we are all social equals is valued.

In diverse classrooms, parents from all backgrounds are welcomed and enrich the classroom environment by bringing diverse talents and interests to the school. Teachers and administrators reflect the rich diversity of the student population.

In economically, racially, and ethnically diverse schools and classrooms, the quality of public education a child receives is no longer dependent upon the neighborhood her parents can afford to live in. Schools are truly public and accessible to all students.

Students from families of modest means receive the support they deserve. They receive free early childhood education so they can begin kindergarten on an even playing field.

Students living in poverty receive the necessary support and wrap-around services to succeed, including health care, social-emotional services, nutrition, and counseling.

In short, in well resourced, equitable, and diverse schools, success is no longer predictable based on race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

### 4. Collective Bargaining (and other forms of collective decision-making) Promote School Quality.

Ideally, in negotiations between teachers and management, every proposal, backed by each side, is supported by evidence of how it would advance student learning and enable education professionals to better meet the needs of all students.

Union leaders consider as their clients not just their members, but also the students their members serve. Teacher unions advocate on behalf of teachers, as unionist Adam Urbanski writes, and serve “also as a lobby for all of their students.”<sup>2</sup>

Negotiated contracts are “living” documents in which the union and management co-develop new systems and solve complex problems. When issues arise, parties seek resolution before small issues grow into major crises.

***Ideally, in negotiations between teachers and management, every proposal, backed by each side, is supported by evidence of how it would advance student learning and enable education professionals to better meet the needs of all students.***

# Pursuing the Broader Goals of Public Education

The four pillars we outline are meant to promote the ultimate goal of public education in the United States: to advance the common good.

The common good is furthered, in turn, when schools advance social mobility and social cohesion. On the one hand, schools are meant to provide students from every walk of life – even those from the most humble backgrounds -- an equal opportunity to develop their talents and have access to the American Dream. At the same time, public schools are designed to help unite students who come from various races, religions, nationalities, and economic circumstances, around common American democratic values.

Another part of promoting the common good is helping public school students understand the value of participating in a shared civic enterprise. In discussing the common good, scholars Séverine Deneulin and Nicholas Townsend observe, “it is not only the ‘good life’ of discrete individuals which matters but also the goodness of the life that humans hold in common... [T]he common good is not the outcome of a collective action which makes everybody better off than if they acted individually, but is the good of that shared enterprise itself. It is the good of the community which comes into being in and through that enterprise.”<sup>3</sup> In public schools, students learn not only what they can do individually, but also how they should interact with each other and ultimately understand and engage in the larger world around them.

While much focus today centers on changes in student test scores, public schools were originally designed for something much grander: to make our society’s great experiment in self-government a success. The founders of free public schools intended for citizens to be educated so that they could make wise choices among political candidates and because educated citizens are more likely to be actively involved in civic affairs. As the political philosopher Danielle Allen has suggested, denying an adequate education to some students, as we routinely do, undermines our democracy and could be thought of as another form of

“voter suppression,” given the strong correlation between educational attainment and voter participation.<sup>4</sup> In 2012, Census data show that 72% of adults with a bachelor’s degree or more voted, compared with less than 32% of those with less than a high school education.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, at their best, public schools are places where teachers help guide students to become not only skilled workers and thoughtful democratic citizens but also responsible adults and good human beings. We need schools to help students to become intelligent graduates who have critical thinking skills that will make them successful adults, discerning voters, and informed participants in civic life. And we need our public schools to educate students to be good human beings, to know how to get along with people of different backgrounds, and to appreciate, indeed celebrate, diversity within our pluralistic democracy. We need to educate the “whole child,” focusing not just on cognitive skills but also on affective and interpersonal skills.



# Policies and Practices

These are our vision and goals for public education in the United States. What policies and practices will help take us there?

Unlike some other education reform proposals, especially those emanating from Washington, D.C., this document draws upon the collective wisdom of teachers who educate our students day in and day out. The concepts and practices outlined below are heavily grounded in experience and research, not market-based hypotheses.

- We back “quality bargaining” that puts student learning at the center of collective bargaining (and other collaborative) agreements and requires that all proposals be buttressed by evidence of how they contribute to the advancement of student learning.
- We support the highest standards for teachers and reject the allegation that due process rights provide a lifetime job guarantee. Accordingly, we support the widespread adoption of peer assistance and review procedures that support struggling teachers and in some instances remove teachers from the profession.
- We call for the possibility of flexible, site-specific negotiated agreements, where a supermajority of teachers in a school can override the corresponding district-wide contract to allow for tailoring terms and conditions to improve teaching and learning.
- We propose modifying consideration of seniority in school transfer decisions in cases where fair teacher-led hiring practices are put in place.
- We call for modifying the traditional single salary schedule and instead adopting differentiated pay that recognizes that teaching is broad in its scope of responsibilities. We advocate a new compensation system that values teachers for their expertise and not just for quasi-administrative work; appropriately emphasizes classroom teaching by rewarding teachers who want to stay in the classroom; compensates educators for job-related knowledge and skills, as well as for added responsibilities to serve as instructional leaders; and acknowledges and compensates educators for their career commitment, education, and various credentials (including National Board certification and multiple certificate areas).
- We advocate meaningful consultation with parents and community members as part of the process of collective bargaining (or other agreements) with management.

Teachers and their unions have long advocated for improving our schools and this paper seeks to reclaim the “reform” and “renewal” mantle for educators.

With the more robust conception of the purpose of public education firmly in mind, we propose four pillars upon which our public education system should rest. In order to ensure that our public schools promote social mobil-

At the same time, some of what we propose may surprise readers who hold stereotyped views of teachers and their unions. In the media, education debates are often caricatured as ones in which outsiders to education propose and educators oppose. But as members of TURN, we too are dissatisfied with the status quo.

We want to see major changes in education that reflect the collective wisdom of teachers. For instance:

ity, social cohesion, and the common good, we believe that federal, state, and local public policies should:

- 1) promote learner centered schools;
- 2) professionalize teaching;
- 3) promote equity alongside excellence; and
- 4) support negotiated agreements that improve student learning.

## 1. Policies to Promote Learner-Centered Schools

- Standards and assessments will be performance based
- They will include important skills not currently measured
- They will be diagnostic and integrated into learning
- They will be developed with teacher input
- They will be reduced in number
- They will be age appropriate
- They will be public and transparent

In learner-centered schools, the focus is on what is actually learned and “coverage” teaching is replaced with teaching for understanding. This approach calls for a fundamental shift from teaching and testing a series of facts and discrete skills to something more profound: preparing learners to understand ideas and processes that they can use and apply flexibly and autonomously.<sup>6</sup>

In practice, this means teachers must not only know the content of what is to be learned; teachers must also know their students and their individual needs, their learning styles, and their cultural backgrounds.

In learner-centered schools, students are rarely lectured to. Instead, learning is collaborative, and students do most of the work themselves. The paradigm of students who sit still and absorb material is replaced by well-crafted, active learning opportunities that promote cooperation, analysis, and synthesis.

And in learner-centered schools, learning is connected to the real world. Lessons often take place in real life settings, not just in classrooms.

All of this has enormous implications for policy, including, first and foremost, for the ongoing debates over what kind of standards and assessments we will have. In a democratic society, it is appropriate for elected officials and educators to have an important role in

setting out, in very broad terms, what students should know and be able to do. Teachers, on the other hand, will take the lead in creating the curriculum and effective pedagogical approaches.

If we want schools to be learner-centered, then standards and assessments must be crafted in particular ways.

First, standards and assessments must be broader than they are today. We will measure what we value, not the other way around. All too often in education, we elevate what is easy to measure. But if we value a broad set of outcomes for our students, such as the ability to understand essential concepts, work in groups, think critically, and solve problems, we must measure those abilities.

Accordingly, assessments will be performance-based to assess not only what students know but rather what students are able to do with what they know. Students will develop skills of critical inquiry and what Deborah Meier calls “habits of mind.”<sup>7</sup> Likewise, if schools are to be learner-centered, assessments must involve performance-based tasks, applying skills in real world contexts.

Second, assessments will seek to determine not only what students know and are able to do, but also other things we value, such as whether they are ethical human beings. We also need to assess “new skills,” such as whether students know how to get along with those who are different than them.

Third, in addition to being authentic, performance-based and broad-based, assessments will be integrated into –not separate from – learning. Teachers will embed formative assessments into the day-to-day learning. Teachers-designed, classroom-based assessments are more accurate, engaging, and provide more timely feedback. Tests will be used to diagnose learning needs that students and teachers can work together to address.

Fourth, teachers will be part of the process of developing appropriate content and

performance standards for students. When teachers lead in implementing standards and assessments, students will see far greater success than when district officials impose from above “curriculum maps” that dictate to teachers what they must do. There are many examples of districts that benefit from asking teachers to lead the way on standards implementation, including Baltimore City Public Schools in Baltimore, Maryland; Georgetown Exempted Village Schools in Georgetown, Ohio; Marquardt School District 15 in Glendale Heights, Illinois; Poway Unified School District in San Diego, California; San Juan Unified School District in Carmichael, California; and Washoe County School District in Reno, Nevada.<sup>8</sup> On this issue, as on others, we need to make the exception into the norm.

Once high standards are developed with substantial input from educators, teachers also must be free to adopt the most effective pedagogical models, including experiential learning.

Fifth, large scale standardized testing, whether state or district wide, needs to be reduced significantly to align with the practices of high-achieving nations. When standardized norm-referenced tests are adopted by states and districts, most decision-makers have little understanding that such tests are constructed to rank and sort students, which means that some students by definition must fail. Test makers assure that this will happen by including test items that either weren’t taught or are so obscure that few students will know the answer. This fact alone is harmful as it fails to address the issues of equity as it relates to biases against minorities and children of poverty. Furthermore, there is absolutely no evidence that standardized testing improves individual student growth. Nevertheless, states and districts will continue to spend millions of dollars on testing systems to meet the political demands for accountability. In such cases we strongly recommend that states and districts follow the way of Finland.

Finland implements a national testing system using a sample based methodology that includes about 10% of the age cohort (6<sup>th</sup> and



9<sup>th</sup> grade students, for example) carried out in 3 or 4 year cycles.<sup>9</sup> This approach is preferable to the U.S. strategy of testing in a couple of respects. For one thing, there are no high stakes attached to this system, in effect eliminating the problems associated with such tests as we experienced under NCLB. For another, costs associated with student testing will be reduced significantly and can be repurposed to more important areas outlined in this report. In his book *Finnish Lessons*, Pasi Sahlberg estimates that a student-testing budget in an equal-size state in America can be 10 times higher than in Finland.

Sixth, in order to ensure that tests are high quality, they will be fully funded by the federal government. In addition, tests will only be required of children who have become completely “concrete operational” – Jean Piaget’s third stage of cognitive development – at the age of eleven.

Seventh, if standards and assessments are connected to a learner-centered approach, they can be powerful engines for equity as students from all backgrounds have a clear sense of what is expected of them. Summative assessments must be public and transparent. All parents and students should be able to see past tests in order to have a level playing field to prepare. When assessment results are disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, any disparities that are revealed can serve as an important spur for action.



## 2. Policies that Recognize Teaching as a Profession

- Teachers will have greater voice in the workplace
  - Excellence in teaching will be recognized and rewarded
  - Teachers will have time to collaborate
  - Teacher evaluations will use multiple, accurate, and job-embedded measures
  - Teacher pay will be differentiated for job-related knowledge, skills, and added responsibilities
  - Teacher due process rights will be protected and peer assistance and review procedures will remove ineffective teachers
- o They collaborate and consult with other professionals in the field to improve their craft.
  - o They remain engaged in continuous learning.
  - o With all these responsibilities come the right to have the appropriate working conditions, greater autonomy and higher compensation.<sup>12</sup> Autonomous professionals have decision making power over content, course offerings, discipline practices, assessments, and materials.<sup>13</sup>

The United States today has a teacher shortage in part because educators are not paid enough and are tired of being micromanaged and denigrated.<sup>10</sup> The inability to consistently attract the very strongest candidates to teaching is deeply problematic, because even the best redesigns will not be well implemented without high-performing professional teachers.<sup>11</sup>

Looking abroad, successful education systems have extensive mechanisms in place to attract and retain high quality teachers. Strong systems recruit well-prepared educators who see teaching as a lifelong profession, not a resume-building opportunity prior to entering some other occupation. Leading educators, including Albert Shanker, outlined what it means to be a professional and suggested that the model apply to teaching.

- o Professionals earn a liberal arts degree, then undergo specialized training that provides them with an acknowledged knowledge base.
- o They must then pass an examination before entering the profession.
- o They next participate in a process of induction involving an internship guided by mentors.

To ensure that teaching is a true profession, we must provide teachers an influential voice in the workplace in decision-making about professional matters, such as instruction and curriculum, teacher assignments, and the hiring and evaluation of colleagues, including principals. Teachers should be at the forefront of both diagnosing and solving problems.

Providing teachers with greater voice in school affairs, and greater levels of autonomy, offers several advantages. As the University of Pennsylvania's Richard Ingersoll has found, such schools "have fewer problems with student misbehavior, show more collegiality and cooperation among teachers and administrators, have a more committed and engaged teaching staff, and do a better job of retaining teachers."<sup>14</sup> Nationally, there are more than 90 teacher-powered schools, which are committed to deeper learning outcomes for students.<sup>15</sup>

Also noteworthy is Teach to Lead. An initiative of the U.S. Department of Education, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Teach to Lead highlights state and district efforts that support teacher leadership, shares resources about teacher leadership and encourages new efforts to expand teacher leadership. The organization has sponsored Teacher Leadership Summits and Leadership Labs grounded in the belief that teachers should be "valued as the foremost experts in instruction" and be "leaders

in developing, informing, and implementing education policy and practice.”<sup>16</sup> When teachers have voice in decision-making, educators also model for children the democratic values of public education. As union leader Adam Urbanski has noted, “We cannot teach what we do not model.”<sup>17</sup>

Strong systems also provide recognition of teacher excellence so that great teachers can be promoted in teaching without necessarily leaving the classroom. And effective systems also encourage professional growth and development, which occurs not only in periodic workshops but during time regularly set aside for collaboration and reflection with colleagues. Teachers are given time to learn from each other, working together to perfect lesson planning and “polish the stone,” in the words of James Stigler and Harold Stevenson.<sup>18</sup> John Dewey’s laboratory school at the University Chicago emphasized that teachers needed to continue their intellectual development alongside their students.<sup>19</sup>

We believe that changes in the teacher evaluation system can be a powerful tool for positive change. High-quality, thoughtful evaluation systems can change public education for the better. Teachers know the current evaluation systems are ineffective and need improvement. Good teaching is much more than a student’s test score, yet teacher evaluation cannot ignore the importance of student learning.

We advocate teacher evaluation and accountability systems that ensure that teachers are evaluated fairly, with multiple, accurate and job-embedded measures. Among the measures will be teacher knowledge, notes Ellen Bernstein, “of students, of how children learn, of subject matter, and of instructional techniques.”<sup>20</sup> Evaluations will include the input of excellent peer educators, which will enhance, rather than undermine, the professional status of teachers by making teaching more like other genuine professions.

We call for differentiated pay for teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards because the program rewards excellence without creating a zero sum game in which aid to colleagues reduces

a teacher’s own chances of receiving a fair financial remuneration. We support a system that compensates an educator for job-related knowledge and skills, as well as for added responsibilities.

We support due process rights for teachers as a critical tool for promoting academic freedom and a bulwark against patronage hiring, but not as a guarantee of lifetime employment. We believe that allowing ineffective teachers to stay in the classroom is detrimental to students, teachers, and the profession. Teacher unions have a responsibility to teachers, the teaching profession, and students to ensure that all teachers meet high professional standards of practice. Those teachers lacking competency will improve or be removed from teaching – and we propose the widespread adoption of fair processes for doing so, such as peer assistance and review programs. Under the plan, first begun in Toledo, Ohio, master teachers evaluate new and veteran educators, provide assistance, and in some circumstances, recommend termination of employment. Evaluators teach the same subject as teachers being reviewed but come from different schools.



While some critics liken union involvement in terminating teachers to the fox guarding the hen house, in practice, teachers have been even tougher on colleagues than administrators have been in several jurisdictions. In Cincinnati, where peer review was adopted in the 1980's, unsatisfactory ratings for teachers doubled compared with reviews by administrators.<sup>21</sup> In Montgomery County, Maryland, the *Washington Post* reported in March 2012 that a peer assistance and review program had “led to the dismissal of 245 teachers and the resig-

nation of 300” since 2001. In the decade prior to that, when peer review was not in place, only “a handful were terminated for poor performance.”<sup>22</sup>

We will prioritize efforts to ensure that the 95% of good or great teachers stay in the profession and the merely good teachers are supported to become great. Cultivating good teaching on the front end is far more efficient than weeding out bad teachers on the back end.

### 3. Policies to Promote Excellence with Equity

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Fifty years ago, a groundbreaking federal study concluded that the biggest predictor of academic achievement is the socioeconomic status of the family a child comes from; and the second biggest predictor is the socioeconomic status of the classmates in the school he or she attends.<sup>23</sup> Yet in recent decades, these two findings – confirmed in dozens of subsequent studies -- have essentially been ignored by educational policymakers. But we cannot create excellence with equity unless we take poverty and segregation head on.

#### A. Combating Social Inequality

- Policies will be adopted to increase wages and reduce poverty
- Quality early childhood and full-day Kindergarten programs will be created and expanded
- Greater resources will be provided to students with the greatest needs

Our educational system produces well-documented and shameful gaps in outcomes between black and white students, poor and rich, immigrant and native born, English language learners and English speakers, and between special education students and those not requiring special educational services. Racial bias, economic deprivation, discrimination against immigrants and non-English speakers, and antiquated attitudes about special education students are all barriers to success.

Disadvantaged students bring to schools considerable assets, including an ability to overcome obstacles. A student who has an untreated tooth ache, who does not have eye glasses, who has no room at home to study (or no home at all) or who is plagued by nightmares from growing up in a refugee camp, needs and deserves extra support.

Students spend only about 19 percent of their time at school – and 81 percent somewhere else. What happens in the classroom is largely affected by what happens before and after school. Therefore, our challenge requires a dual agenda: we, the educators, must make schools better and more ready for all students; and the rest of the community must help to get all children more ready for learning. We need shared accountability. Education redesign must be accompanied with reforms in child-care, housing, juvenile justice, job training, health care, and other aspects of children's lives.

Growing economic inequality, in particular, presents an enormous challenge to the efforts of teachers and schools to provide equal educational opportunity. Researchers have long known that a family's socioeconomic status, on average, has a much stronger impact on the life chances of children than what goes on within the four walls of the school classroom. Nations such as Finland, that beat us on educational outcomes, routinely have stronger

safety nets than the U.S. and provide better opportunities for a pre-kindergarten education. They achieve excellence by being equitable.

We advocate three sets of policies to ameliorate the effects of socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and other forms of inequality in the larger society.

First, we support efforts to reduce economic and racial inequality outside of schools: strengthening the American labor movement to increase the wages of students' parents; increasing the minimum wage; improving health care and housing. Educators rightly worry about the impact of poverty-induced stress on student learning, but rather than simply treat those effects, as Thomas Geoghegan has noted, wouldn't it be more efficient and "simpler to raise the parent's wage" in the first place?<sup>24</sup>

Second, we support high-quality pre-K and full-day Kindergarten programs, common in most other advanced societies, to provide all children with an equal start. To the extent possible, these early education programs should be placed in the public schools and be taught by qualified educators. If pre-K programs were to become a part of our public education system, it would likely attract highly educated teachers who are well compensated and see less staff turnover than our current system does. Children would benefit.<sup>25</sup>

Third, we support providing greater resources in high-poverty schools – including wrap-around services – to recognize the effects of economic inequalities outside the classroom. Richard Rothstein of the Economic Policy Institute has exhaustively documented the myriad ways in which low-income students, who have innate talents and a desire to learn, are stymied: by poor health care, inadequate nutrition, and substandard housing that fails to provide a quiet place to do homework.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, new research has found that the gap between what rich and poor families are able to invest in children has tripled in recent decades.<sup>27</sup>

To provide a level playing field, students with the greatest needs deserve the greatest resources. They need a comprehensive system of school and community resources that includes excellent counselors, nurses, speech pathologists, and school social workers. Too often, we instead provide the least to needy students, because of our nation's heavy reliance on local property taxes to fund schools.

A good example of redesign is California's Local Control Funding Formula, signed into law in 2014, which provides additional funding for high-need students – low-income pupils, English language learners, and foster youth – and gives local communities more flexibility in spending. According to a report by Daniel C. Humphrey and Julia E. Koppich, "The LCFF is unprecedented: It seeks to combine a state



school funding mechanism aimed at more equitable distribution of resources to students needing the most support with a decision making process that moves power from the state to local communities. It is, indeed, a grand vision, as ambitious and noble an agenda as any state has set.”<sup>28</sup>

Research suggests that money matters in education, particularly for low-income students. Recent scholarship by C. Kirabo Jackson, Rucker C. Johnson and Claudia Persico finds that “for low-income children, a 10 percent increase in per-pupil spending each year for all 12 years of public school is associated with roughly 0.5 additional years of completed education, 9.6 percent higher wages, and a 6.1-percentage-point reduction in the annual incidence of adult poverty.”<sup>29</sup>

In Union City, New Jersey, for example, researcher David Kirp reports that generous funding for free pre-K and K-12 student supports, coupled with a rich district-wide curriculum and a strong focus on reading, has helped fuel the school district’s rise. A low-income, mostly Latino school district of 12,000 students, Union City ranked next to last in the state academically in 1989. Today, Union City students score at roughly the New Jersey average in reading and math from third grade through high school and has a graduation rate of 89.4 percent, compared with about 70 percent nationally. Union City High School, according to the American Institutes for Research, ranks among the top 12 percent nationally, and sends students to superb colleges.<sup>30</sup> The district is a powerful exemplar of what resources wisely spent can accomplish.

In the same vein, we support providing critical resources to students with disabilities. As the Network for Public Education Action notes, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is funded at only a fraction of what the legislation calls for.<sup>31</sup> In order to provide necessary supports to students, IDEA should be fully funded.



## B. Reducing Economic and Racial Segregation

- School segregation by race and economic status will be reduced
- Racial and economic-based tracking within schools will be reduced

American society is becoming increasingly fragmented and our public schools are becoming more sharply segregated by socioeconomic status. This development is deeply problematic for two reasons.

First, segregation undercuts the critical role that public education plays as the glue that holds our society together. Albert Shanker marveled at the success of the public schools in forging a common democratic American identity in a nation of immigrants. “A Martian who happened to be visiting Earth soon after the United States was founded would not have given the country much of a chance of surviving,” Shanker wrote. “He would have predicted that this new nation, whose inhabitants were of different races, who spoke difference languages, and who followed different religions, would not remain one nation for long. They would end up fighting and killing each other... But that didn’t happen. Instead, we became a wealthy and powerful nation – the freest the world has ever known...Public schools played a big role in holding our nation together.”<sup>32</sup>

Second, research going back a half-century has found that school poverty concentrations reduce the chances for student learning. High-poverty schools are 22 times less likely to be high performing as middle-class schools; and low-income students in middle-class schools are as much as two years ahead of low-income students in high poverty schools on the 4<sup>th</sup> grade National Assessment of Educational Progress in mathematics. Low-income students given a chance to attend economically mixed schools have peers who are, on average, more academically engaged, are supported by a parental community that is able to be more active in school affairs and have access to stronger, more experienced teachers, on average.<sup>33</sup>

Although explicit racial integration programs are legally vulnerable under a 2007 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Parents Involved in Community Schools vs. Seattle*, it is perfectly legal to use socioeconomic status as a factor in where students attend school.

Of course, in some places, demographics and distances raise barriers to producing socioeconomic integration, but in most jurisdictions, much more can be done. In New York City, for example, one study estimates that half of the community school districts have enough middle-class students to integrate by socioeconomic status.<sup>34</sup> Today, 95% of education reform is about improving economically segregated schools; we need to devote more effort to reducing the number of high poverty schools through magnet schools.

The best programs provide free transportation to allow movement of students in both directions at once. Middle-class families choose into magnet school programs open to students in distressed neighborhoods and low-income families can choose to send their children to wealthier suburban schools. In this way, we honor schools as community anchors, wherever they are.

Teachers unions have been involved in advocating socioeconomic integration in numerous districts throughout the country because educators know first-hand that they can do a better job of teaching students in economically mixed, rather than in segregated, high poverty, school environments, where it is easy to become overwhelmed.

Teachers also know that it is not enough to integrate school buildings. Thoughtful efforts should be made to reduce tracking to ensure that classrooms, as well as schools, are integrated. Teachers know, too, that culturally responsive curricula not only have a positive effect on student learning but also are a matter of social justice. And having a more diverse education workforce is an important corollary to having a diverse student body.

Today, more than 90 school districts – from Cambridge, Massachusetts to Louisville, Kentucky -- are pursuing socioeconomic school integration. These districts, which educate 4 million students, usually rely on voluntary participation and incentives (like special magnet programs) rather than compulsory busing.<sup>35</sup>

***Educators know first-hand that they can do a better job of teaching students in economically mixed, rather than in segregated, high poverty, school environments.***

Likewise, a number of jurisdictions, including Montgomery County, Maryland, promote inclusionary zoning housing policies that can have a profound positive impact on student achievement segregation.

The results are quite encouraging. In Cambridge, for example, in 2014, 85% of low-income students graduated high school in four-years, compared with 76% of Massachusetts low-income students and 65% of Boston low-income students. Graduation rates for black and Hispanic Cambridge students were also substantially higher than those in Massachusetts or Boston and white graduation rates were comparable. Meanwhile, in a careful study of Montgomery County’s inclusionary zoning policy by Heather Schwartz of the RAND Corporation found that students whose families were randomly assigned to low poverty neighborhoods and schools performed far better in math than those in higher poverty neighborhoods and schools, even though the latter spent \$2,000 more per pupil.<sup>36</sup>

Middle-class and white students also benefit enormously from integrating schooling, as a growing body of research finds that diverse environments make us smarter.<sup>37</sup>

America’s diversity is one of its greatest strengths. Our schools should reflect that diversity in a way that benefits all students.

### **C. Drawing on the Strengths of Communities**

- Teachers and parents will build stronger ties
- Teachers will consult parents as a part of collective bargaining

Whether schools are economically and racially diverse or not, they serve as vital community hubs and sources of pride. Especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods that lack the private investment found in wealthier communities, schools can be focal points and critical gathering places that provide a variety of important services.

Conversely, schools need to better draw upon the strengths of community members. Schools are stronger when teachers work with parents,

families and members of the larger community to pursue the common goal of doing right by children.

Accordingly, we support innovative programs to build stronger ties between parents, teachers, and communities in places like Chicago, Illinois, and St. Paul, Minnesota. In St. Paul, union leaders noted that parents and teachers are the two sets of people who know kids best and ought to work more closely together.

Before drawing up collective bargaining demands in 2011, the union in St. Paul met with parents to see what they would like to see in the contract. Union negotiators incorporated community goals into the collective bargaining process, which broadened the scope of issues to be discussed beyond wages and salaries to consider what are often thought of as “management rights.” Teachers asked for smaller class sizes, reduced standardized testing, and the hiring of librarians, nurses, social workers and counselors to better serve students. The union participated in open contract negotiations, which are transparent to the public.

Management in St. Paul initially balked at the broader set of requests, but with community support of a threatened strike, the teachers prevailed on key demands.<sup>38</sup>



## 4. Policies to Promote Collective Bargaining For Educational Quality

- Teacher collective bargaining will be expanded nationwide
- The scope of collective bargaining will be broadened to include substantive education issues
- All collective bargaining proposals will be judged by their effect on teaching and learning
- Teachers and management will create “living” collective bargaining procedures that address issues as they arise
- Teachers and management will negotiate site-specific contracts on a subset of issues

We support policies that would allow teachers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to collectively bargain because it is the most effective way to provide teachers with collective voice to improve education. We also advocate expanding the scope of collective bargaining to allow teachers to engage in negotiation over substantive educational issues about which they have considerable knowledge and expertise.

Across the nation, school boards take the position, borrowing from the National Labor Relations Act governing private sector unions, that there must be a strict line demarking the roles of unions (to negotiate for workers) and management (to set policy.) Under the adversarial model, if labor and management worked too closely on policy, there was the danger of cooption. “Under an industrial view of education, teaching and labor relations,” write Charles Kerchner and Julia Koppich, “finding solutions to educational problems is management’s work, not the unions’.” In this understanding, unions represented private interests and management the public interest.<sup>39</sup>

This traditional perspective proved problematic on a number of grounds. To begin with, Shanker saw a political trap. If unions could only negotiate for bread and butter issues, they could be depicted as caring only for their own selfish

interests rather than about children and educational success. Moreover, Shanker argued, teachers had a lot of good ideas that could be introduced through bargaining – the best types of curricula, and what types of policies would lure teachers to high poverty schools, for example. Finally, policies bargained by teachers would have the support of educators and therefore have a much better chance of actually being implemented in the classroom.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, Kerchner and Koppich note, the distinction between wages, benefits and hours, on the one hand, and policy issues on the other, is somewhat artificial in the education arena, because so much of educational spending is driven by teacher compensation. As a result, bargaining creates “accidental policy making” without conscious reference to the educational consequences. “It is the worst of all worlds,” they write, “one that preserves the legal assertion that education policy remained in the hands of legislatures and school boards while operating in an environment where the control of budgetary expenditures and time allocation are not examined as education policy decisions.”<sup>41</sup>

For all these reasons, we advocate “education quality bargaining,” whereby unions and management spend most of their time at the bargaining table discussing education issues. Going back to 1995, TURN’s mission statement has called for “the scope of collective bargaining to include instructional and professional issues.”<sup>42</sup> Also known as “reform bargaining,” this approach, Adam Urbanski notes, is “based on three key principles: developing options for change; using reason and research, not power, to make decisions; and focusing on interests, not on positions. Reshaping collective bargaining in these ways can lead both labor and management to look at issues through the lens of what is educationally best for their students.”<sup>43</sup>

Under quality bargaining, any proposal from labor or management – to increase or decrease class size, or to increase or decrease testing, for instance – has to be buttressed by evidence about the way it will affect teaching and learning.



Rather than haggling over salaries, some districts use objective data in the surrounding area to determine salary and benefits. In order to attract high-quality teachers, salaries can be set based on research regarding what competitors pay. For example, Rochester, New York, a high poverty district, benchmarks teacher salaries to be the average of the top one-third of the 15 surrounding school districts. This means Rochester is never the very highest paying district, but that in order to draw teachers to its relatively hard-to-staff schools, it will be among the top third and therefore more competitive. Another variation, being considered in Rochester, is to benchmark salaries to those in comparable professions requiring similar educational levels and work requirements, such as engineers and accountants.

Higher salaries might seem like a budget-buster, but offsetting savings can be found by reducing administrative costs. When higher salaries for teachers attract stronger candidates, there is less need for administrators to supervise teachers.

We also advocate “living contracts.” Employed in districts such as Hammond, Indiana, Rochester, New York, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, unions and management address issues as they arise rather than waiting until a contract expires and festering problems have grown to crisis proportion. For example, Section 39.2 of the Hammond contract provides, “It is the intent of the parties to create a living document to which additions, modifications, or amendments may be made whenever the parties deem it appropriate and desirable.”<sup>44</sup>

We support site-specific contracts that are tailored to the needs of particular schools. There are many possible manifestations of this principle. For example, because students in a disadvantaged school have greater needs, a special contract could be negotiated for an extended learning day in that school, if a supermajority of teachers agrees.

Finally, we strongly recommend that unions take up the call for creativity and innovation in addition to the progressive values of social activism and political reform. Continuing to defer to academics, politicians, policy makers, and management theorists regarding school reform not only leads to the deprofessionalizing of teaching, but often to waves of superficial solutions and quick fixes. As the representative voice of teachers, unions must build creativity and innovation into their foundational practice and culture. This means unions must systematically prioritize their resources and infrastructure to support creative instructional practices and innovative school structures that reflect the latest research in neuroscience, motivation, and human potential.

Teacher unions should continue to bargain agreements and memoranda of understanding that support thoughtful contributions to the long-term commitment of adding to the educational knowledge base. Negotiating agreements that facilitate “teacher powered” schools and other innovative school structures add value to local communities as they provide choice to the increasing diversity of needs. One strategy is to bargain prototypes as a way to solve problems. Facing the increasing demand to personalize a student’s education, the San Juan Unified School District and The San Juan Teachers Association bargained a three-year prototype called “The UnSchool”, for approximately 100 students and four teachers. The first sentence reads “The Mission of the UnSchool is to ignite our students’ creative genius by ensuring a challenging, relevant and joyful education.” The UnSchool program, rooted in students’ innate creative genius and innovation, focuses on preparing UnSchool students to flourish on any path they may choose.

# Conclusion

The unprecedented threat to public schooling that we face requires us to think creatively about some basic questions: How can public education, once again, become “the great equalizer” and the foundation for our democracy? And how could it be made to benefit all our students, not just some?

The moment is ripe to rejuvenate our stale education debates – to listen to the collective wisdom of teachers, to refocus on the big noble goals of public education, and to embrace research-based policies that teachers know work in practice. The future of public education, of the American Dream, and of our pluralistic democracy, depend on it.

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**Student photos courtesy of Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action**