SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Revolution that is Overdue

Looking Toward The Future of Teaching and Learning

A Report of the AFT Task Force on the Future of Education

Submitted by: AFT Executive Council 1986
The Context

For the past two years, the nation has been in the midst of an education reform movement aimed at ensuring that the public school system prepare students for the future and thereby secure the vitality of America. More rigor has been introduced into curricula, and standards have been tightened. Teachers' salaries have been modestly increased, and some other additional resources have been pumped into education. Traditional friends of public schools have been reactivated, and new allies in the business and political communities have been found. In general and after a period of torpor, the interest and concern of the public have been redirected to public education. Throughout this period, the AFT and its affiliates led many of these changes, supported others, and, equally important, beat back most of the dangerous and simple-minded proposals masquerading as education reform. It was a time of both opportunity and danger, and the AFT's ability to seize and shape the opportunities on behalf of its members and public education earned us unprecedented and invaluable recognition.

But there is little reason to be sanguine about the future of public education. Despite recent polls indicating somewhat greater satisfaction with public schools as a result of the reform movement, public education is still in peril. The grades the public gives public education are still low. Fanned by the current administration, support for vouchers and tuition tax credits is still at an unprecedented high. The traditional political base of public education is eroding, along with the proportion of the population with school-age children. As for students, performance is still unacceptably mediocre, in terms of their own future needs and those of the democratic society they will inherit.

The "first stage" of education reform therefore has provided only partial relief to the problems threatening public education. One reason is that the public expects education reform to produce higher student achievement, but such gains are neither easily nor quickly obtained. While it is unrealistic to expect immediate, tangible improvements from recent reforms, it seems equally true that if positive results are not forthcoming, there will be a backlash against public education, and one from which we may not readily recover.

A second, and more significant, reason for the problems persisting in public education is that much more reform is required, and of a far more basic nature than the first round of reform afforded. Indeed, even if all the better reform measures of the past two years were enacted, they would not be sufficient to ensure a well-educated, democratic, productive citizenry—an education of value for all the nation's children, not
just some. They would not be sufficient to attract and retain a talented teaching force, without whom a fine education system, let alone an education reform movement, is impossible. And they would not be sufficient to ensure the future of our union. For as long as the educational function of our public schools is impaired, as long as teaching is not a full profession and teachers are disabled from assuming both the responsibilities and prerogatives of professionals, public education will remain in jeopardy and, with it, the future of our union.

Introduction

The AFT Task Force on the Future of Education therefore believes that there is a need for a second stage of education reform to sustain and extend the more promising features of the first stage and to correct its oversights and deficiencies. One of the chief, and most dangerous, omissions of the current reform movement is the failure to take seriously enough the fact that over half the nation's teaching force will have to be replaced over less than the next decade. However, the requisite supply, let alone education's fair share of talent, is not forthcoming. The demographics are against us, as are the prevailing salaries and professional conditions of teaching.

To date, virtually nothing positive has been done to attract and retain talented teachers into the nation's public schools. Instead, the historic tendency in education to meet shortages by lowering standards is once again being pursued as a matter of public policy. This policy must be vigorously resisted. It is a threat to all students, but particularly to disadvantaged youngsters for whom public education represents the best chance of full and equal participation in American society. It is a threat to our current members and to the vitality of our union. And, above all, it is a threat to the future of public education. The second stage of reform therefore should be responsive to the demographic and structural changes now affecting our society, to the needs and aspirations of our members, and to the nation's need for a well-educated, democratic, and productive citizenry.

To fulfill these requirements, the second stage of education reform should seek the full professionalization of teaching and the restructuring of public schools to promote student learning. In asserting these goals, the AFT Task Force on the Future of Education recognizes that they are not novel ideas for this union. While some of the concepts in the following report may be new, then, the basic philosophy underlying it reaffirms the core of our beliefs as a union. Throughout its history, the AFT has recognized that unionism and professionalism are inextricably linked and that public schools must be, first and foremost, institutions of teaching and learning. We have made significant achievements on behalf of our members, and we have made significant contributions to public education and to the protection and promotion of American democracy.

But our vision as a union is only partially realized. Much more is required, now and for the future—for our members, for unionism as we practice it, for public education, and for the nation.
The following recommendations therefore represent a set of steps toward the further realization of this vision. They are not “specifications” for what to do tomorrow at 9 A.M. but, rather, the direction the Task Force firmly believes the AFT should be pursuing. Nor do these recommendations represent a comprehensive map of our vision or even of a second stage of education reform. Some territory is missing, other terrain needs to be more fully charted. In part, this is a result of the Task Force’s brief tenure, relative to the time required to explore new ideas fully and responsibly and to suggest their implementation. And in part, it is also because the Task Force views the following ideas and recommendations as a beginning, a bold one to be sure, but only a beginning.

The Task Force anticipates and urges AFT members and affiliates to engage in a process of education and discussion of these ideas, as the Task Force itself did. For it is through the collective wisdom of our members, fortified by open and vigorous discourse, that we will continue to be both innovative and responsible, on behalf of our members and for public education. There is much more to be done.
THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHING

The AFT recognizes that individual teachers act professionally and there is currently in place the best teaching force the nation is ever likely to see, if present conditions are not altered. Nonetheless, teaching is by no means a profession, by any accepted definition of the concept, nor are teachers treated as full professionals.

The ill effects of the status and conditions of teaching as an occupation on teachers and students have long been known to the AFT. Indeed, at the heart of the revolution the AFT wrought in pioneering collective bargaining for teachers, and central to the AFT vision of teacher unionism, was and is the belief that unionism and professionalism are inextricably linked—that collective bargaining for teachers was and is an important means of attaining the professionalization of teaching and the betterment of public education.

The AFT therefore has a long and proud history of seeking professional-level salaries and benefits for its members, improvements in teacher education and in the knowledge base of teaching, rigorous entry standards, limitations on class size, decision-making authority for teachers, restraints on the power of supervisors, working conditions that enhance teachers' ability to teach, professional development opportunities, and a host of other particulars related to professional matters. We have made great gains for our members—and shudder to think about how much worse the circumstances of teachers and public education might have been in the absence of the revolution we wrought.

But there is currently a crisis of standards in this nation, and it threatens to wipe out all the gains made on behalf of the teaching force over the past decades and, with these gains, public education as a viable, vital democratic institution. Precipitating this crisis is a massive teacher shortage. During less than a decade, over one half of the current teaching force—over one million people—will be retiring. But neither the number nor the quality of individuals needed to replace the current, able teaching force is forthcoming. Aside from a few saints, talented individuals will not be attracted to an occupation with low salaries,
limited autonomy and authority, and tough working conditions—a nonprofessional career with few extrinsic rewards and rapidly diminishing intrinsic rewards.

At the same time, the nation is experiencing a baby “boomlet,” the proportion of at-risk students is growing, and the quality of education required by all students must be increased if the American standard of living and the democratic institutions that sustain our freedom are to be preserved and strengthened.

Given the scenario facing our nation—a smaller absolute number of college-age individuals, and consequently, an even smaller pool of prospective teachers, few incentives to enter teaching, the ability of other sectors to outbid education for talent, monetarily and otherwise, greater student numbers and needs—the professionalization of teaching is not only desirable, it is a necessity.

The AFT recognizes that although the professionalization of teaching was not previously achieved, the nation nonetheless benefited from a variety of demographic and social conditions that assured a steady supply of talented teachers, comprised largely of women and minorities. There have been teacher shortages before, although none of this magnitude. More important, during prior teacher shortages, there was little problem in securing for education its requisite share of talented individuals. The prevailing demographic and social conditions, pernicious though some of these were in terms of equal opportunity for women and minorities, were favorable to the education sector.

It is now a different world.

If the current salary and professional conditions of teaching persist, and if states and localities continue to meet the teacher shortage crisis by issuing credentials to any warm body, not only will teaching be entirely degraded as a career but public education and the students that represent the future of this nation will suffer irreparable harm.

The following recommendations are therefore designed to ensure the future of public education and the democratic society it helps support by securing and retaining an adequate number of talented teachers through professionalizing teaching.

### PROFESSIONAL SALARIES

- **Because of the existing shortage of new teachers and the expansion of that shortage between 1986 and 1995, the AFT advises state federations to seek state-mandated minimum starting salaries for application during this projected ten-year period of teacher shortages, where states fall below competitive standards.** Such state-mandated minimum teacher salaries must be designed on a state-by-state basis to make entering salaries for new teachers reasonably competitive with entering salaries in that state for other professions requiring comparable education and training. State-level minimums also can be improved upon through bargaining at the local level.

- **Because of the existing and impending shortage of teachers, which is in part due to the expected retirement of a substantial share of the experienced teaching force, additional monies are urgently needed to retain experienced teachers.** Such funds should be generated at the state level, in addition to higher minimum salaries, and can be improved upon through bargaining at the local level.

### SHORTAGE AREAS

- **As an incentive to attracting and hiring teachers in all areas of shortages, as they develop, the AFT recommends that locals and school districts consider placing entering teachers in areas of shortage on higher steps of the salary schedule.** The salaries of certified teachers currently teaching in these shortage areas should be raised in those instances where placing an entering
To meet the current shortage and enable talented liberal arts majors, subject area majors, and college graduates with substantive knowledge in areas of critical shortage who have been in other careers, the AFT supports supplementary licensure programs, coupled with rigorous internships under the guidance of experienced teachers for at least the initial year of teaching. Supplementary licensure and internship programs should in no way be designed or used to reduce or undermine standards for entering teaching. They should, instead, be an alternative route to attaining professional standards.

To attract former teachers back into the profession, the AFT recommends that such teachers be placed at least on the salary schedule step they had attained in the year in which they left teaching.

In defining areas of shortage, it is important to account for all areas of shortage, as they develop, and not single out one subject area or grade level. It is critical that policy makers refrain from responding to teacher shortages by hiring unqualified individuals. Therefore, in addition to the recommendations above, the AFT urges states and localities to explore credit for academically equivalent work experience outside of teaching, flex-time arrangements, incentives to retain retiring teachers and utilize the expertise of retired teachers, and other means of attracting and retaining qualified teachers.

**SHORTAGE OF MINORITY TEACHERS**

Of vital concern to the AFT is the recruitment and retention of minority teachers. In view of our significant role in the civil rights movement, our historic achievements in securing minority teachers equal rights and equal opportunity in the union movement and in the educational enterprise, and because of our belief in the desirability of having schools staffed by teachers who reflect the diversity of the nation's heritage, the AFT views with alarm the shrinking number of minority teachers.

To address this concern, the AFT urges and endorses efforts to eliminate substandard educational opportunities, which contribute to inadequate school and test performance by a disproportionate percentage of minorities.

The AFT also proposes the following course of action at the national, state, and local levels:

- Emphasis on a national level to address issues of recruitment and retention of minority teachers as an area of critical shortage.
- Programs at the high school and college levels to identify talented minority students who are potential teachers, to diagnose their academic strengths and weaknesses, to strengthen their general school performance, to prepare them adequately for and in college, and to improve their performance on college-entry and teaching-entry tests.
- Scholarships and loans at the state, local, and federal levels, with targeted funds designated for minorities.
- Target teacher recruitment and intern programs at institutions that attract significant numbers of minorities.

**TEACHER EDUCATION AND INDUCTION**

- All teacher education candidates should have a broadly based, liberal arts undergraduate education, with at least one subject major.
- All prospective teachers should have a well-structured induction program that includes a one-year internship (for which they could be paid as intern teachers) under the supervision of an experienced, knowledgeable teacher.
All beginning teachers should be reviewed and assessed by experienced teachers who are prepared for this responsibility. The induction program should also involve a residency as a beginning teacher beyond the internship. Peer assistance and review would be applied throughout the residency.

Experienced teachers should be involved in the planning and development of internship, residency, and peer programs, through the agreement of their union.

**TEACHER TESTING AND CERTIFICATION**

- A new national, nongovernmental board of the teaching profession, composed of a majority of experienced teachers, should be created. The board would develop professional standards for teaching on the basis of the knowledge and clinical practice base in teaching and oversee the development of a new national assessment procedure for the professional certification of prospective teachers. The assessment should include high-quality procedures to examine subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, as well as providing for a well-structured clinical induction experience. Each component of the development and implementation of the assessment should be vigilant about safeguarding objectivity and avoiding racial bias, avoid explicitly or implicitly endorsing any "one best method" of teaching practice, and take account of the diversity of students and settings that prospective teachers will face.

- Board certification for new teachers should be awarded only upon successful completion of a rigorous teacher education program, passage of a national teacher entrance examination developed by the profession, and demonstrated teaching competence in intern and residency programs.

- Although board certification initially would be voluntary, states should give serious consideration to adopting the professional certification standards promulgated by the national board as a basis for state teacher licensure.

**PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT**

- In the future, experienced teachers should be eligible for professional career advancement through advanced certification by the new national professional board. This board would set the professional standards for such advanced certification and determine whether a candidate had met these standards. Such advanced certification should be voluntary and open to all teachers who sought it.

- Teachers should have a variety of opportunities for performing professional roles and advancing within the teaching profession, while continuing to be practicing teachers. Teachers should also have the option of working on ten-, eleven-, or twelve-month contracts in order to perform professional responsibilities while retaining their status as teachers.

- Teaching must be structured as a lifetime career. Teaching and traditional administration/management must be considered as two separate careers, and teachers' salaries should not be limited by the salaries paid to administrators/managers.

**TEACHER MOBILITY**

Although we live in a mobile society, teachers face many roadblocks to practicing their profession if they choose to or are forced to change geographic locations. Teachers moving from state to state must be recertified and often are required to obtain as many as fifteen or more additional college credits. Most states also require teachers who are new residents to teach at least three years, regardless of previous experience, before qualifying for tenure. Teachers who move to a new district or state are placed on lower steps of the salary scale than...
their many years of experience warrant and often also lose much or all of their pension entitlements because teacher retirement plans are not transferable. Because these practices discourage individuals from entering or re-entering teaching, encourage experienced teachers to leave the profession, exacerbate the teacher shortage crisis, and frequently result in unqualified people being hired to teach in place of qualified teachers, the AFT recommends that:

- Vigorous steps be taken toward the attainment of reciprocity of teacher license recognition from one state to another. A means for achieving such reciprocity that warrants serious consideration would be for states to adopt the professional certification standards promulgated by the national board as a basis for state licensure.
- The requirement of earning additional college credits be based upon need and not be an automatic consequence of having changed districts or states.
- School systems preserve full tenure rights and credit on the salary schedule for lifetime teaching experience, regardless of where these were earned.
- Pension programs should allow teachers who move from state to state to be employed or re-employed without losing benefits.

SCHOOL STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

The American Federation of Teachers believes that all decisions regarding the establishment, maintenance, or reform of school structure and governance must be based on their effect upon student learning. The litmus test of all such decisions is whether they positively affect student learning and facilitate teachers' efforts to provide that learning. Therefore, all AFT recommendations are based on the assumption that schools must be learning centered with teachers empowered to carry out their responsibilities.

A great deal has been written and discussed about effective schools. Such schools are learning centered. Descriptions of academically effective, learning-centered schools share common factors across the studies and reports: (1) clear goals related to academic learning, (2) high expectations for students and staff, (3) a stable faculty with a clear sense of school ownership and community of shared interests, (4) strong leadership in support of the learning goals of the school—exemplified by a respected principal who involves teachers or a group of teacher leaders, (5) collegial relationships/collaborative planning among teachers and administrators, (6) school-wide staff development, (7) school site management, (8) learning time given priority, (9) frequent student assessments and feedback, (10) community and district support, and (11) a safe and orderly climate with clear and fairly enforced discipline codes.

These school characteristics are consistent with AFT's goals and policies related to the professionalization of teaching. They are also in line with AFT's long-standing positions in support of high quality standards for students, teachers, and other personnel. However, these "effective school" factors are descriptive rather than prescriptive. That is, they tell how an academically effective school appears; they imply but do not necessarily guide how to create such a school.

As public schools are currently organized, the only way for teachers to advance professionally and monetarily is by leaving the classroom. This
structure diminishes the importance and value of the role of the teacher and thereby impairs student learning. In contrast, it is the fundamental premise of learning-centered schools that teachers are at the core of school success. To recruit bright teachers, equip them with highly sophisticated skills through rigorous training, and then offer them little opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in school decision making inevitably will drive capable people away from teaching. Teaching must instead be structured as a lifetime career.

The AFT therefore strongly recommends that schools and school systems abolish the factory model of education-management, which treats teachers as workers who must adhere to predetermined practices and follow endless rules and regulations, even against their professional judgment, and assumes that students are passive, uniform cogs in a production process.

Professionalizing teaching begins with a clear recognition that teachers must become much more self-regulating, that traditional management responsibilities in public schools must be altered, and that the organization of learning must put student needs above bureaucratic convenience.

The following recommendations therefore support the creation of learning-centered schools and advance the professionalization of teaching:

GOALS AND DECISIONS

- In a democratic society, the general goals and learning outcomes for schools are established by states and local communities. However, the means to achieve these state and local goals are best determined by those responsible for the implementation of the educational program at the local school site. Teacher unions, as the collective voice of the teaching profession, must be involved in the development and implementation of education policy matters at all levels.

- School faculty and staff must share in the establishment and maintenance of school goals and values consistent with required state and local education outcomes.

- School site autonomy must be increased, with greater decision-making power invested in classroom teachers.

- Schools should operate in a collegial and participatory fashion under the leadership of the teaching faculty. All building employees should be recognized as contributing to the efficient operation of the school.

LEADERSHIP

- As progress is made in restructuring schools, the AFT supports an even greater distinction than currently exists between the roles of teachers and those who do not teach. Teachers should assume the appropriate instructional and curricular functions currently exercised by those who do not teach.

- Teachers should be the instructional leaders of the schools and should be responsible for making decisions about instructional strategies, staff development, curricular materials, pupil assignments and scheduling, structure of learning time during the school day, instructional goals beyond those set by the state or local school board, school-level budgetary matters, and elements of professional evaluation.

- The role and function of managers in a learning-centered school must continue to be explored. Different roles and models have been suggested:
  1. teacher-run schools with a group of teachers taking on school site management responsibilities, employing an administrator to handle the day-to-day administrative tasks, which could include the employment of managers from outside the field of education (see 3 below):
2. principal as institutional advocate who also serves as a liaison with central governance bodies and the community, with teachers empowered to make decisions about and implement the instructional and curricular functions of the school;

3. principal as building manager who implements the educational program and school discipline policies designed by teachers and carries out district and state reporting requirements. The principal is generally responsible for working with personnel not directly involved in the school instructional program and with the coordination of student services provided by outside agencies.

Teachers' salary levels should not be limited by the salaries paid administrators.

STRUCTURE

If a group of experienced teachers were brought together and given the opportunity to design a school structure from scratch, the chances of their reaffirming the present structure would be remote. Beginning with the isolated, cellular organization of classrooms on to the whole top-down, "egg-crate" structure of the typical public school, there is a series of obstacles to effective teaching and learning. Present classroom arrangements, for example, force teachers into spending most of their time lecturing and maintaining order, and sometimes even require them to be entertainers rather than teachers in order to hold the attention of their usually excessive number of students. The professional ideals that drew teachers into teaching in the first place—working intensively with students, preferably on a more individual basis, intellectual challenge, cooperation, and control over one's work, to name but a few—are everywhere thwarted.

It is little wonder, then, that such an alarming proportion of teachers "burn out," leave, or become cynical. For even under more enlightened school administrations, the present school structure makes it difficult for teachers to function as full professionals on behalf of their students. In all too many schools, it has become increasingly difficult for teachers to deploy human, curricular, and technological resources within the school, as necessary, to work with students individually or in groups, and to interact with and learn from their colleagues.

The costs this factory-model school system imposes on students are also considerable. Students learn in a variety of ways and through a variety of means, and these patterns frequently vary even subject to subject. The present structure takes little or no account of this. Students are individuals, some of whom need intensive help from a variety of sources in order to attain mastery, others of whom can function more independently, and most of whom embody diverse needs, depending on the situation. The present structure takes little or no account of this. Some students who could forge ahead may be held back by the needs of the majority of their class or grade, while others who encounter difficulties that might be easily detected and rectified under a more flexible class, grade, and curriculum structure may be left back unproductively and become tomorrow's dropouts. The present structure takes little or no account of this. All students require problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, as well as basic skills, and prompt and constructive feedback on school and homework assignments. The present structure, with its fixed and excessive class sizes, takes little or no account of this.

The dysfunctional nature of the present structure has become increasingly apparent to the AFT. This is evident from the massive defections of teachers from the teaching ranks and in the criticisms of those who remain. It is evident in the staggering dropout and failure rates, particularly among disadvantaged students. And it is evident in the low performance of average and even gifted American students relative to their counterparts in other
Rethinking the present structure of schools is therefore an essential precondition to the creation of learning-centered schools. The AFT recommends the following preliminary steps toward the realization of this goal:

- Time is a key element in restructuring teaching and schools. Time for teachers to teach, to plan, to continue learning, and to make educational decisions requires alterations in current teacher loads and creative uses of technology, paraprofessionals, and other instructional personnel under the direction of teachers. Current teaching loads therefore must be reduced and restructured to achieve these goals. The prevailing principle should be to improve, rather than diminish, students' access to professional teachers.

- In contrast to the current system in which students are assigned a new teacher(s) every year, and in order to enhance teachers' ability to make appropriate instructional decisions for students and students' prospects for receiving individualized attention, the possibilities of new arrangements should be explored, such as having staff teams take responsibility, perhaps over periods of more than one year, for determining the instructional needs of groups of students, providing appropriate follow-up, and monitoring their progress.

- Paraprofessionals involved in instruction must be well trained and certified and given greater responsibility for working with students while under the direction of teachers.

- Learning-centered schools should employ a variety of informational technologies, including video, audio, and computing resources; however, the use, assessment, and refinement of these resources should be part of the professional task of teachers.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Staff development should exist on a continuum beginning with an internship and continuing throughout one's professional life. Continued professional development should be a normal job expectation and occur within the regular school day. This could include regular reviews and observations by colleagues, demonstration teaching, coaching, and opportunities for conducting independent research.

EVALUATION

- Beginning teachers should be assisted and assessed by experienced teachers prior to certification.

- Following implementation of high-quality teacher internship and residency programs and when teacher-directed professional growth opportunities are a regular part of the school program, peer assistance and intervention should be used to safeguard standards within the profession.

- Intensive evaluations of certified teachers should occur only when serious problems are evident.

ACCOUNTABILITY/REGULATION

- In order to help ensure the establishment and maintenance of at least the minimum conditions necessary for teaching and learning to occur, an index of essential learning-input conditions (such as teachers teaching in field, adequate teaching resources and supplies, up-to-date and adequate numbers of textbooks, etc.) should be developed and schools should be publicly rated every year or two under the criteria established by the index. The AFT should consider encouraging states to pass such Fair Learning Conditions Acts, with rigorous state and local enforcement provisions, so that schools that consistently fall below the minimum
learning-input standards can be brought up to par.

Although learning-centered schools and professional teachers must have flexibility to meet the needs of students, the public necessarily requires accountability. Central school system administration and state governments therefore should monitor the progress of schools. However, regulation and intervention should be applied to the school site only if the school fails to meet minimum learning-input standards outlined in an index of essential conditions for a learning-centered school or other appropriate problem indicators, such as high teacher turnover, dropouts, violence, and poor student performance.

The autonomy of teachers in school sites is predicated upon norms and standards of practice established by the teaching profession.

THE ROLE OF THE UNION

The details of the various mechanisms described herein should be developed and implemented through the participation of teachers and through the collective bargaining process or memorandum of understanding at the local level or through a collaborative agreement.

Collective bargaining contracts should continue to allow for flexibility in mutually agreeable experimental programs at the school site.

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

Choice within the public schools exists in many forms: magnet schools, alternative schools, schools within a school, open enrollment, and elective courses, among others. The AFT recognizes, however, that for both parents and teachers, current choices of educational programs may be unnecessarily limited, largely by the wealth of a district or the inflexibility of central or school administration. The AFT therefore remains open to the discussion of choice options within the public school system if such options fulfill the educational conditions, goals, and outcomes duly established by states and local communities.

Our openness is a cautious one, for we recognize the pitfalls of the choice issue, even within the public school system. These pitfalls involve the need to balance the public or social interest against individual interests and to avoid the kind of racial, class, and ability segregation that is antithetical to the mission of public schools in a democratic society. Any consideration of a public school choice proposal must also be sensitive to the protection of the rights of teachers.
Throughout its history, the AFT has recognized that unionism and professionalism are inextricably linked. That basic precept has shaped our activities and clarified the role that a union of professionals must play. The AFT pioneered collective bargaining for teachers and other education employees. A strong union structure has been established, an effective political action capacity developed, and considerable power and authority have been moved to our members.

Through these means—collective bargaining, political action, and professional development assistance—we have made significant achievements on behalf of our members and have overcome tough obstacles in the face of difficult conditions and changing requirements for public education. We will continue to use and develop these means to bring about change and improvements in the status and conditions of teaching and to enhance the quality of education. And we now have a special opportunity to build on our achievements and to advance the teaching profession.

The American Federation of Teachers has a responsibility to play a significant role in the education reform movement. It is crucial that the quality and level of education received by Americans be improved. As a union, we can make an important contribution to assure that there will be sufficient numbers of qualified teachers to teach America's children and that those teachers will have professional authority over teaching practices. In fact, the unprecedented attention given to education at this time by governors, legislators, the business community, and the public at large presents an opportunity to achieve gains for our members and for public education that may not come our way again soon.

The AFT realizes that certain conditions must be met if we are to be successful in our obligation to represent members in their relationship with management, protect the institution of public education in the environment in which it exists, and protect the institution of democracy in America where we are privileged to live and practice our profession. Consequently, the union's role in education reform is an important part of the union's primary responsibility of effectively representing its members. Past achievements were made possible because hundreds of thousands of individuals who joined our union because of a belief and a vision remained to build an organization capable of meeting the challenge we now face.

We are about to experience the largest shortage of teachers in the history of American education. Some of the first efforts at education reform have resulted in overly prescriptive changes affecting professional conditions and discouraging the choice of teaching as a career. Pay and status in teaching, while showing recent gains, remain below levels in other professions. To overcome the shortage while resisting the erosion of professional standards, we must attempt radical, rather than incremental, changes in the basic structure of American education.

Our organizational goal is to preserve public education while empowering teachers to exercise independent professional judgment in educational matters. This means we seek to restructure the present public education system and obtain for teachers the legitimate authority to make decisions affecting their work. We will not exchange one set of prescriptive controls for inflexible working conditions established in any other manner. The union is a force in the education system for the practicing professional because it represents and asserts its members' interests in improving the profession and the quality of education.

The AFT seeks to empower teachers to gain legitimate responsibility and authority for teaching and the learning environment in the schools, to retain independent decision making in matters relating to the profession, and to
assist in obtaining the resources needed to provide a high-quality education program. The union welcomes proposals that can help achieve these goals.

- The AFT should provide a forum for the exploration of developments in the advancement of the profession and other aspects of education reform, consider national policies and responses related to these developments, and provide research and staff support for affiliates.

- The AFT should, at the same time, be involved in providing assistance for activities that will strengthen the capacity of state federations and local unions in efforts to organize and represent members. The AFT should assist in the establishment of union structures, provide for leadership training and assistance, and help our locals develop the skills and programs that they require to represent members and participate in the development and implementation of education reform issues.

Opportunities to advance the interests of members can take many forms, and we should be open to these opportunities while we seek to develop our capacity to represent our members' interests. The union consists of locals in various stages of development and maturity. Because of the different conditions and the variations of experience, some state federations and locals will necessarily choose different ways to advance the profession. At each level of governance, we should use the tools available to us—collective bargaining at the local level where possible, heightened political and legislative activity at the state level, and union-sponsored programs to enhance the profession.

There are significant opportunities in the education reform movement for emerging locals and state federations. By being open to new ideas and involved in their development, drawing on the resources and experience of other segments of the union, locals can provide a stronger voice for their members. This involvement can result in important improvements in education and gains for teachers and other school employees and can also help the union grow. The growth of the union is important to the education reform movement because of the special relationship of the union to its members. Teachers and their unions will evaluate proposals, develop new concepts, and serve as the vehicles through which the new reform measures will be implemented. The most valuable reform proposals are those that support these opportunities.

The consideration of new ideas and involvement in education reform activities should enhance the efforts to strengthen our ability to represent members. In fact, such involvement may suggest the importance of organizing and prove useful in broadening our sense of purpose for the organization. As that strength is established, the union can effectively insist on the involvement of teachers in any activity relating to the profession and obtain, through bargaining or collateral activity, the conditions of employment sought by its members. At the same time, we must continue to target resources and efforts toward building strong local unions in new areas.

The following considerations should guide state federations and locals engaged in the development of education reform proposals:

- Teacher unions, as the collective voice of the teaching profession, must be involved in the development and implementation of education policy matters at all governance levels. The union's role is to provide leadership through informing and educating the membership about the latest developments in education reform and by taking the initiative in suggesting new education reform policies.

- Participation of the membership in developing, deciding, planning, and implementing reform proposals is critical to the acceptance of reform by members. The local, state, and national structures should encourage opportunities for broad participation by members in the process.

- The collective bargaining process or collaborative agreements at the local level and the legislative process at the state level are important means to rely on in the exploration and development of various reform proposals.
The discussion of reform proposals and the experience of other state federations and locals can provide valuable insights to state and local federations about new approaches that can help us achieve our goals. AFT locals and state federations have gained experience in successfully bargaining new measures to enhance teachers' professional lives, as well as lobbying for educational improvements at the state legislatures. We should make every effort to find ways to come together to share these experiences for the benefit of all.

Members can benefit from efforts by state federations to bring together locals to achieve state education reforms. The coordinating role of the state federation is crucial in the political debate surrounding education reform issues. A strong state federation program is imperative to ensure the ability of the union to provide effective leadership in education reform.

State federations and local unions need to expand their political action capacity so that reform activities requiring legislative activity or political responses can be achieved. State federations and local unions are urged to commit specific resources to achieve this goal.

In developing programs to explore and implement education reform, we need not draw resources away from our present activities but, rather, develop new resources to meet the needs of our membership as a consequence of reform proposals.