

Education *Matters*

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You Told Us What You Think of No Child Left Behind

AAE Member Survey Results



This year marks the fifth anniversary of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It is also the year Congress considers reauthorizing the law. Given the crucial importance of this legislation, it is not surprising to see a lively national debate on how or whether the law should be reauthorized.

As a policy representative for a large number of teachers, AAE is deeply involved in this debate. To investigate the opinion of our members, we conducted a comprehensive survey of AAE members on key issues in NCLB. Because 96 percent of our members are public school teachers, we knew you had a lot to tell us! We surveyed 1,225 teachers, which provides us with data of high statistical significance. We appreciate all the members who participated in the survey.

The survey questions deal with some of the most important and controversial aspects of the NCLB debate—education funding, national tests, differentiated pay, and restructuring components.

The survey results show an overarching theme that our members do not believe in a one-size-fits-all model of education. Unless flexibility can be built into the system, teachers and students will suffer. Not every child learns the same way, and not every school district in the United States faces the same challenges. Our members believe that teachers need to be respected and rewarded for their hard work, and that parents of children in low-performing schools should be given the opportunity to provide their children with a high quality education.

An Overview of NCLB Funding

One of the toughest questions in the NCLB debate concerns the use of federal funds to implement the law. A majority of our members are faced with the same conundrum as the rest of the country. They believe that federal spending on education is inadequate, yet they fear that any increase in federal funding will inevitably lead to increased federal oversight. AAE will soon request your participation in another survey so that we may continue to explore ways to take advantage of federal spending while maintaining some measure of flexibility.

Student Assessments

One of the hottest issues in the NCLB debate is whether student performance

should be assessed at the national or state level. The overwhelming majority of our members believe that states should have primary responsibility in this area. According to the survey, 86 percent of respondents are not in favor of student tests becoming exclusively federally designed. This point of view is reinforced by two additional statistics: 59 percent of the survey respondents do not think national tests should exist at all, even alongside state tests, and 33 percent feel that state testing should not be subject to federal oversight or review. However, a high percentage of our members (79 percent) support national tests being used as an optional model for states.

Interestingly, although teachers often feel that there are already too many tests, there is one exception: 70 percent of the survey respondents believe that an assessment should be added for students in the 12th grade to determine whether these students are prepared for college and/or the workplace.

Differentiated Pay

The issue of differentiated pay is an important aspect of the education debate. In the survey we asked whether special financial incentives should be offered to teachers who teach in hard-to-fill subjects such as science or math or in hard-to-fill schools such as inner city schools. A substantial majority of our members, 78 percent, support extra pay for teachers in hard-to-fill schools, and 60 percent support similar incentives for teachers who teach hard-to-fill subjects.

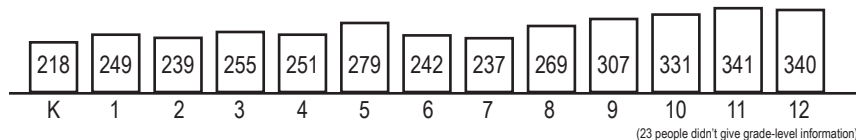
Teacher Assessments

One of the goals of NCLB is to improve teacher competence. Some recommendations that have been suggested to amend NCLB advocate for teacher assessment on effectiveness in the classroom. Eighty-two percent of AAE members support the idea of being assessed on their effectiveness in the classroom. Additionally, 83 percent of AAE members believe that new teachers in small, rural school districts should have additional time to meet Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) requirements. Over a third of survey participants feel that teachers who teach in rural areas should have to achieve HQT status in all subjects they teach.

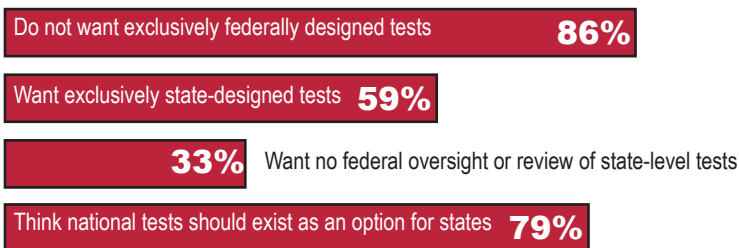
AAE National Member Survey

A nationally representative sampling of 1,225 AAE members from across America covering every grade from kindergarten to twelfth

Number of Respondents by Instructional Grade Level



Student Assessments – National versus State-level



Teacher Assessments

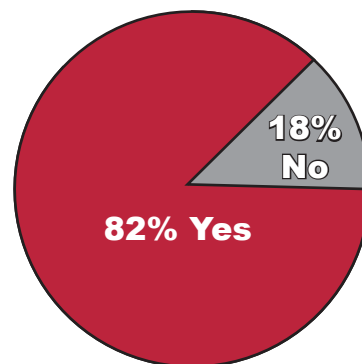
Q: "Do you feel teachers should be assessed on their effectiveness in the classroom?"



57 percent of survey respondents were between the ages of 20 and 49

72 percent were women

56 percent have taught less than 15 years

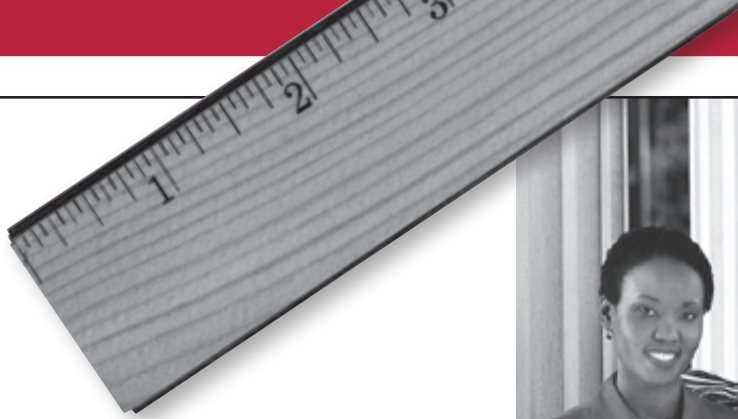


Restructuring Components

An important question that has recently received a great deal of attention is what steps should be taken to assist schools that are in the process of restructuring. One study has suggested that school districts that contain such schools should be allowed to move teachers who volunteer to other schools in the school district, even if this would break provisions of the collective bargaining agreement. This would enable school districts to make op-

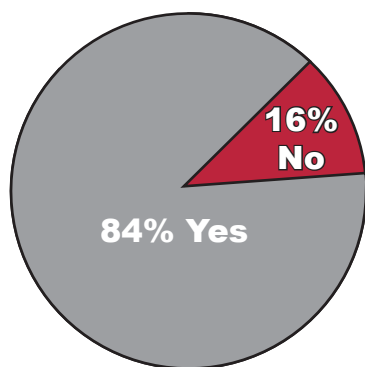
timal use of their most talented teachers. An overwhelming majority of all AAE survey respondents (84 percent) agree that schools should be allowed this kind of flexibility.

The survey also asked respondents whether they believe that parents of children who attend low-performing schools should have the right to move their children to public or private schools. A majority of survey respondents believe that such parents should have the right to pick

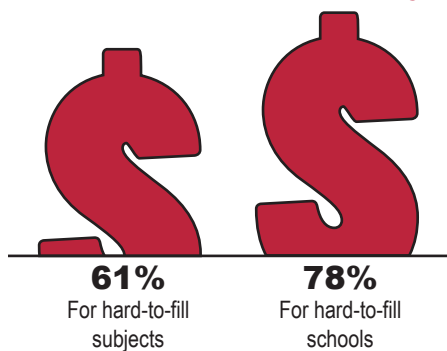


School Restructuring

Q: "Should school districts be allowed to move willing teachers to other schools if those schools are restructuring, even if this would require more flexibility than is currently in that district's collective bargaining agreement?"

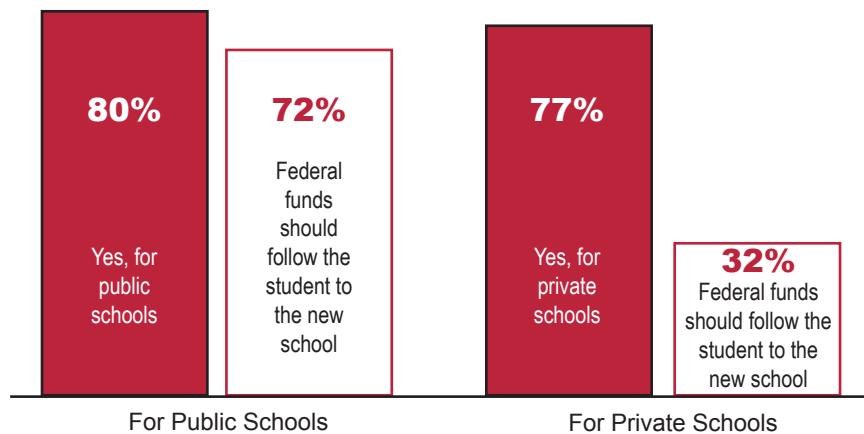


Support for Differentiated Pay



Parental Choice

Q: "Should parents have the flexibility to move their children to higher-performing schools?"



a better performing school for their children, with nearly equal support given to public schools (80 percent) or private schools (77 percent).

Interestingly, while support for the principle of parental school choice is very high for both public and private schools, a great disparity exists in support among AAE members for the idea that federal funds should follow the student to the new school. While 72 percent of respondents agreed to let federal funds follow a

student to another public school, only 32 percent of respondents were in favor of federal funds going with a student to private schools.

From the data presented here, it is clear that our NCLB survey provides an important overview of what AAE members think about today's pressing issues in education. Many different groups have offered suggestions for reauthorizing No Child Left Behind. In this debate we must not allow the voice of teachers to

be drowned because no one knows better than teachers how NCLB affects education in the United States. ■

This article and survey results compiled by AAE Washington, D.C. staff members Tracey Bailey, Heather Reams, Christy Paavola, Rebekah Glover, and Andrea Hofer.

How to Raise Average Teacher Salaries without Spending a Dime

By Mike Antonucci

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) released its teacher salary survey for the 2004-05 school year, and concluded...oh, heck, you don't need me to tell you what AFT concluded.

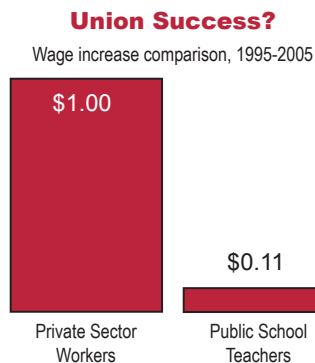
So let's move on to an actual stunning revelation that came out of AFT's research, although I'm still laughing about it, especially since the union's blog picked that very statistic to highlight. Referring to the ten-year period of 1995 to 2005, the union's researchers compared teachers to private sector workers:

"For every new real dollar gained in the private sector in this time, teachers gained only 11 cents. It is unclear what is causing this trend."

So how can we clear up this unclear trend? How does the establishment of most public

school teacher pay differ from that of most private sector workers?

Just slightly change your angle on AFT's arguments. In its own report, AFT is touting the claim that after 46 years



of representing public school teachers, the union's accomplishments have been to win members a wage that is underpaid by 30 percent, while private sector workers, 92.6

percent of whom are non-union, received pay raises that were nine times greater in real terms than teachers received over the past ten years.

Average salaries are a useful statistic, but using them without reference to hiring, firing, and retiring is politics, not research. To illustrate, here is my super-secret method to raise the average teacher salary 30 percent without spending a dime. In fact, you can save your school system a ton of money. I call it "layoffs." Here's how it works.

Let's say I have five teachers making \$60,000 per year, and five making \$30,000 per year. That's an average salary of \$45,000. Now I lay off five teachers, which according to the collective bargaining agreement, must be the five newest teachers. That raises the

average salary to \$60,000—an increase of 33.3 percent! And I cut district costs by 33.3 percent at the same time! Isn't math fun?

The only reasonable way to evaluate increases to teacher salaries is to compare last year's teachers with the same working teachers this year. This factors out increases in the overall workforce (lowers the average) and retirees (lowers the average). It also highlights in stark relief step-and-column increases along with COLAs and legislative hikes.

A statistic like that not only would be more accurate, but also might even be more enlightening for everyone, regardless of where you stand on salaries. ■

Mike Antonucci is the Director of The Education Intelligence Agency. www.eiaonline.com

Integrating Science and Reading

Elementary school teachers know science is important. But with so many requirements, how can they fit each subject in during a school day? National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) Press knew their frustration and first published *Picture-Perfect Science Lessons, Grades 3-6* in 2005 to help combine science and reading time. Two years later, a companion book has been published. The lively mix of kid-magnet books, Standards-based science content, and ready-to-teach lessons that incorporate the BSCS 5E learning cycle is continued in the newly available *More Picture-Perfect Science Lessons, Grades K-4*. This volume, like the previous book, offers fifteen new lessons that combine picture books and inquiry to develop students interest in science and reading.

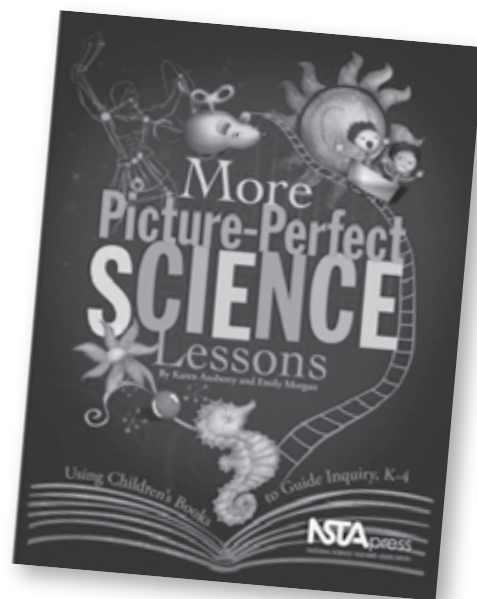
More Picture-Perfect Science Lessons,

follows the same winning formula that made the first volume a bestseller. The lessons cover physical science, life science, and Earth and space science. Teachers will find featured reproducible student pages, assessments, and reading-comprehension strategies. Students will learn from such engaging fiction and nonfiction books as *Diary of a Worm*, *Sunshine on My Shoulders*, *How Big Is a Foot?* and *Leo Cockroach, Toy Tester*.

The award-winning authors know from their own classroom experiences how important it is for time-starved teachers to integrate science and reading in a natural way.

You can browse sample pages of this new title free at the NSTA Science Store Website at <http://store.nsta.org>.

For additional information or to purchase *More Picture-Perfect Science Lessons, Grades*



K-4 and other books from NSTA Press, visit NSTA Science Store at www.nsta.org/store/. To order by phone, call 1-800-277-5300 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. ET weekdays.

Profit is Good for Schools

Making money has a role in public schools

By Lawrence W. Reed

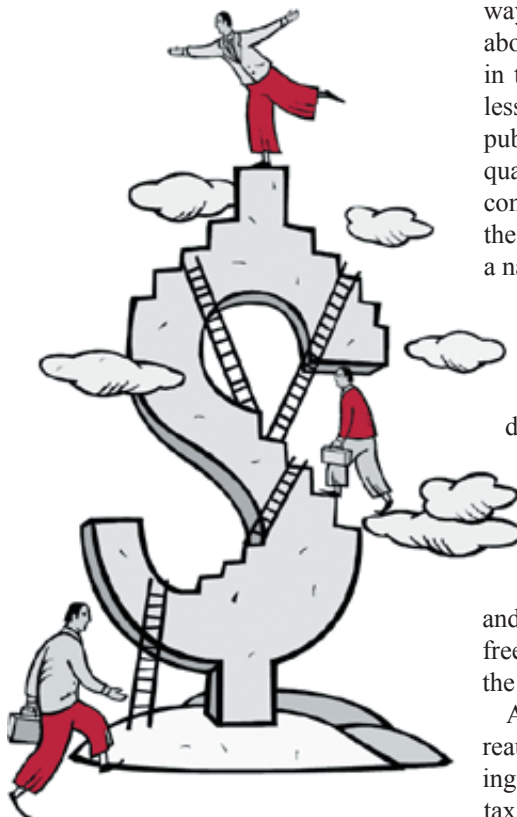
Is it wrong for a private company to learn a profit when it does business with a public school? Is it ever appropriate for a public school to contract with a private profit-making company at all?

These questions or variations of them come up every time that a school board considers any form of privatization or “contracting out”—in part because the unions that represent school employees use them to raise objections. Unions oppose privatization even when they employ it themselves at their own headquarters.

Critics of privatization often make an issue of the fact that charter schools sometimes hire private management firms. In opposing this, one former state representative told an audience, “I don’t believe it’s appropriate for somebody to make a profit off of public education.”

But if we follow the antiprofit premise to its logical conclusion, we would have to pass laws requiring public schools to hire only government-owned construction companies to build or renovate new buildings (fortunately, the government usually doesn’t run construction companies). Desks, chalk, and pencils would have to be purchased from government-owned desk, chalk, and pencil factories (fortunately, the government usually doesn’t run those either, except in places like North Korea). At lunch time, students would have to eat food that was grown on state-run collective farms and sold in government grocery stores by government employees.

Alternatively, we could pass laws that tell public schools it’s all right to buy these things from private companies but only from those that lose money instead of earn it in the form we call “profit.” It’s



hard to imagine that school districts could find suppliers who would provide a product or a service at a loss. Not even the National Education Association does that.

In fact, the NEA (and its state affiliates, like the Michigan Education Association) is not so much against profit as it is simply against somebody other than the NEA making any. In the Michigan Education Association’s flagship publication, MEA President Luigi Battaglieri stated:

“Private companies don’t care about our students or our communities.

They are in the business for the money. They aim to turn a profit and that’s not in the best interest of public

education.” But the headline for the cover story in the very same publication read, “Adrian food service staff fight privatization by turning big profits for district.”

Perhaps Mr. Battaglieri was unaware that the profits that private companies earn allow them and their employees to pay the taxes that keep him and the MEA in business.

The fact is that public schools have al-

ways relied on profit-making firms for just about everything. Maybe what’s needed in the public schools is more profit, not less. Think about it: Where is the crisis in public education these days? Is it in the quality or availability of desks, food, or computers, or in other areas provided by the for-profit private sector? Do we have a national crisis in paper and pencils?

The education crisis that concerns Americans from coast to coast is not in these things. It’s in what happens in the classroom, the part that is delivered by government, regulated by legislatures, certified by government university education departments, and supervised by district bureaucracies—the part that could benefit from the same choice, accountability, and dynamism that make our relatively free profit-driven economy the envy of the world.

A good number of politicians and bureaucrats don’t like profit, and that’s nothing new. They’ve been bad-mouthing and taxing it since the sun first came up in the east. For some like the NEA, it’s self-serving rhetoric. On the part of others, it represents neither deep thought nor study but simply knee-jerk bias.

School districts should consider all options fully and objectively—including provision of goods and services by their own employees, by volunteers, by nonprofits and by for-profit firms. Schools aren’t supposed to be a public works employment scheme. They exist primarily for the benefit of the families who send their children to them. If a school board finds that it makes sense to contract out operations like custodial or busing services and put the savings to work for the kids, doing so ought to be a no-brainer. To waste time and money spreading myths and misconceptions about profits and private firms serves no one but selfish interests. ■



Lawrence W. Reed is president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy headquartered in Midland, Michigan. A version of this commentary first appeared in the Midland Daily News.

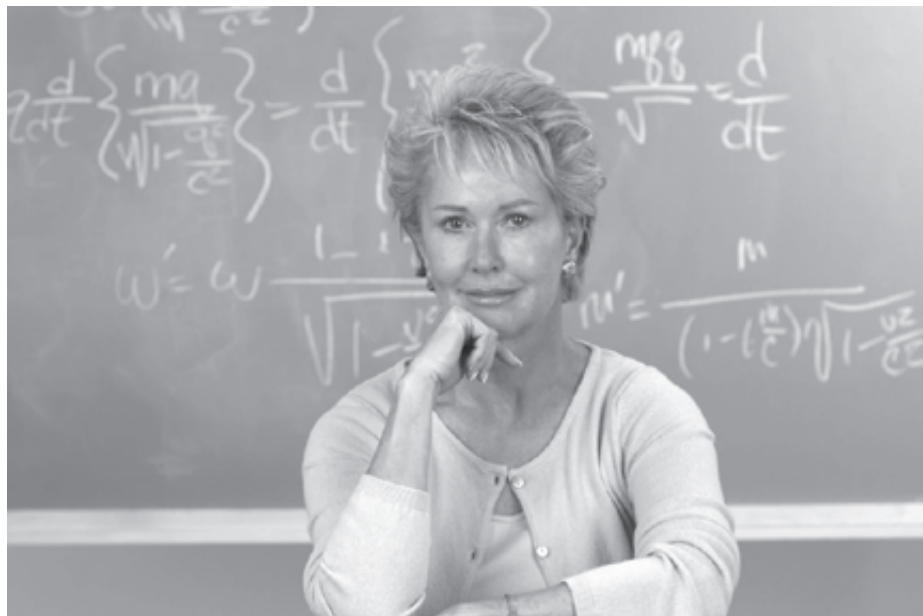
The Right Calculation

The power of rigorous teacher tests for math

By Sandra Stotsky

Most elementary teachers seem to require intensive, expensive, and continuous professional development in mathematics. Even if current federal and state initiatives to train experienced teachers are successful, their costs are staggering. Other countries sensibly focus on “frontloading” (imparting subject-matter knowledge to teachers before they are licensed and enter the classroom) rather than “backloading” (trying to patch teachers’ knowledge after they’ve started their career). It is reasonable to think that our elementary teachers’ understanding of mathematics might be increased more effectively and efficiently via regular or specially designed mathematics courses they take before, rather than after, they begin teaching.

In December 2006, the Massachusetts Board of Education seized this tiger’s tail and voted to create a demanding 40-item



of a calculator, a deep understanding of the mathematics concepts that underpin what they will teach their students, who, in turn, must master them without the use of a calculator. The Board wants the test to have strong ripple effects through the state’s institutions of higher education. So it is also proposing stronger math requirements for elementary licensure programs as well as detailed guidelines for the content of the mathematics courses for aspiring teachers, courses that it expects to be taught by mathematicians.

Student Learning

Why is the Massachusetts Board of Education making it harder to get an elementary teaching license and expecting education schools to ensure that its teacher candidates have taken more demanding (and probably more) mathematics courses? Both common sense and research tell us that pupils of math teachers who know their subject learn more math than students of teachers who do not. In a February 2001 report for the U.S. Department of Education summarizing teacher preparation research, Michigan State University scholars noted that studies show “a positive connection between teachers’ preparation in their subject matter and their performance and impact in the classroom.” In one study of 2,829 students and their high school math teachers, from 1994, David Monk found that the number of undergraduate courses in a teacher’s background—up to about five—had a

positive impact on pupil performance.

The Board also knows that many elementary teachers struggle with mathematics, and fears that they are passing on their limited math mastery to their students. Although Bay State students’ average scores are the highest in the nation on NAEP’s grade 4 and grade 8 mathematics tests, their scores on the state’s own mathematics tests have not risen for several years, and not enough students achieve at the two highest performance levels.

Other states should follow suit. Most teacher licensure tests are pitched at the high school level in terms of overall difficulty, and their cut scores are set so low that a passing score often means no more than middle school achievement. We would expect more from high school students who wanted to become teachers, never mind college graduates.

All states should ensure that newly licensed elementary teachers begin their careers competent to teach arithmetic effectively—and then need only authentic professional development, not endless remediation. ■

“All states should ensure that newly licensed elementary teachers begin their careers competent to teach arithmetic effectively.”

math test that all elementary and special education teachers must pass in order to earn a license. The new Massachusetts test will be the first in the country to seriously assess the mathematics knowledge of prospective elementary (and special ed) teachers. Designed primarily to assess the conceptual foundations of what the state’s mathematics standards now expect them to teach, the prospective teachers’ test will be based on the reasonable assumption that candidates who take it should be expected to demonstrate, without the use



Sandra Stotsky is a member of the Massachusetts Board of Education. She is also a member of the President’s National Advisory Mathematics Panel.



House Hearing on Teacher Quality

On May 11, the U.S. House Education and Labor Committee held a hearing on teacher quality in which the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) Act was a main component. TIF is designed to provide funds to states and local school districts to help them develop performance-based compensation systems for teachers and principals who raise student achievement and close achievement gaps. No federally designed system would be imposed upon the states.

One of the witnesses at the hearing, Dr. Joseph Burke, superintendent of schools in Springfield, Massachusetts, stated at the hearing, "The Teacher Incentive Fund creates the opportunity for highly motivated and courageous school reformers to change tightly held traditions in education. In fact, the Teacher Incentive Fund has served as a catalyst for reform in the Springfield Public Schools."

Dr. Gary W. Ritter, associate professor with the University of Arkansas College of Education and Health Professions, testified at the hearing as well. He believes that one of the impediments to improving schools, especially low-performing schools, is rigid pay schedules. He stated, "If a single-salary schedule limits the ability of school leaders to enhance teacher quality—and many have made this claim vehemently and effectively—then the single salary schedule used in the name of equity for teachers may in fact lead to less effective teaching for our students and this is clearly inequitable as the students most likely to suffer from ineffective teaching are those attending school in our most disadvantaged schools."

At the hearing, Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon (R-CA) urged the committee in the debates about No Child Left Behind to start breaking down barriers set in place in schools through the use of collective bargaining agreements by teacher unions that set hurdles for schools to improve teacher quality. Without the impediments of collective bargaining agreements, schools have the flexibility to reward good teachers, remove bad teachers, and create a school environment that meets the needs of the students. McKeon stated, "If we are truly serious about placing high-quality teachers in every American classroom, then Congress must get serious about proposals addressing collective bargaining agreements."

The Silent Epidemic

According to one study, more than one million students will drop out of high school this year. This serious problem, often referred to as the "silent epidemic," is gaining attention across the country. On May 9, more than 500 superintendents, parents, teachers, state and federal policymakers, and community lead-

ers gathered in Washington D.C. for the launch of the "Summit on America's Silent Epidemic," in an effort to start a national movement to address the high school dropout crisis.

More than 100 organizations have endorsed a 10-point plan to help reduce the number of students who drop out of high school. Some components of that plan include raising state compulsory school age requirements; establishing more challenging college and work preparatory learning in high schools; supporting parents roles in keeping students in school; and, demanding accurate graduate and dropout data.

One of the speakers at the summit was First Lady Laura Bush who stated, "More than 200 years ago, Benjamin Franklin observed that an investment in knowledge always pays the best interest. Our country has learned that investing in education yields citizens who can develop their talents, pursue their passions, and make the very most of America's opportunities. Investing in education yields a nation that's healthier, more prosperous, and more secure."

For more information about the Summit on America's Silent Epidemic, please go to <http://www.silentepidemic.org/summit/index.htm>.

No Classroom Left Barren

As New Orleans rebuilds its schools, one particular issue in education has been brought to our attention: teacher shortages in the United States. A closer look at this issue reveals the fact that New Orleans is not an isolated case. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, in 1970, 25 percent of bachelor and master's degrees were in education. In 2003 this number dropped to 14 percent. Today's college students are not going into education, but at the same time baby boomers are retiring.

Today it is common for people to switch jobs every couple of years or make complete career changes. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 18- to 40-year-olds will switch jobs more than ten times. One suggestion that has been brought forth is that the teacher shortage could be decreased if the education community could capture some of the people who change jobs frequently. By gaining alternative certification through groups such as ABCTE, individuals could become certified to teach and start a new career path in schools that need teachers.

For more information about alternative certification, please read the following article at http://www.edspro.com/2007/05/no_classroom_left_barren_dave.htm. ■



To read AAE press releases, visit www.aeteachers.org. Click on "press room."

The Knowledge Deficit

Hirsch Looks at Closing the Shocking Education Gap for American Children

E. D. Hirsch, Jr., is one of the most prominent and provocative voices in education today. His latest book, *The Knowledge Deficit: Closing the Shocking Education Gap for American Children* (Houghton Mifflin), is an incendiary call to action for educators and parents.

Hirsch highlights the alarming news that the performance of American students declines the longer they stay in school, and illustrates how this trend can be reversed by teaching the specific knowledge children must have to read with comprehension.

Hirsch powerfully reasons that literacy depends less on formal reading “skills” and more on exposure to rich knowledge. What kids really need is to be grounded in a broad knowledge of history, geography, math, literature, science, and the fine arts—a process that should begin at a very early age and should be keyed to the way they are taught to read. Children should be exposed to material read aloud that exceeds their ability to read but not their ability to listen. They should be taught to speak in a formal way, mastering public

language skills that differ from their familiar language skills. In other words, early and systematic training in listening and speaking should precede and be part of a student’s reading program.

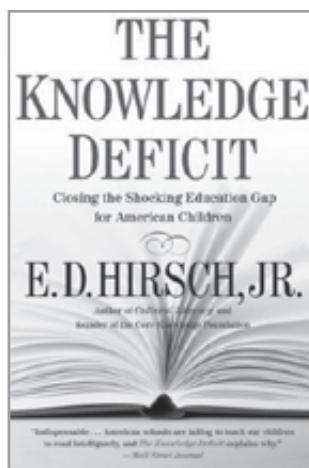
Hirsch offers explicit recommendations for our nation, including:

- States should agree on specific core content in all subjects in the early grades.
- States should specify publicly and openly what core subject matter will be taught, grade by grade, rather than the current arrangement, under which nobody really knows what is being taught.
- Schools should offer students a cumulative content-oriented reading program during the class periods devoted to language arts.

Schools should specifically tie content tests to the knowledge of literature, science, history, and the arts—these sub-

jects provide the background knowledge required for reading comprehension.

The most recent findings from the



“Fluently written and accessible to teachers and parents alike, the book presents a challenge to reigning educational orthodoxies.”

—Publisher’s Weekly



National Assessment of Adult Literacy showed distressing declines in literacy, especially among those with the most education. In fact, fewer than a third of college graduates (down from 40 percent a decade ago) were deemed proficient in terms of literacy: they were unable to read and understand lengthy passages placed before them.

Hirsch’s best seller *Cultural Literacy* (1987) argued that literacy itself depends on specific background knowledge. This acclaimed and controversial book ignited a cultural taking of sides, and sadly the message was overlooked. Today, the climate is still ripe for debate. *The Knowledge Deficit* gives parents, activists, and educators a powerful case to effect school change. ■