



Thursday, September 27
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My QuickLinks ↓

AFT National

[AFT Governance](#)

[AFT Resolutions](#)

[AFT Budget & Financial Statements](#)

[AFT on the Issues](#)

[Lobbying & Political Action](#)

[Branding](#)

[AFT Public Web Site](#)

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[Report an Error](#)

[LeaderNet Suggestion Box](#)

[Home](#) > [AFT National](#) > [AFT Governance](#)

AFT Resolutions

TESTING SHOULD INFORM, NOT IMPEDE, TEACHING AND LEARNING

All children deserve a rich, meaningful public education that prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and challenges that await them as they become contributing members of a democratic society. Growing our nation's future citizens and workers is a serious undertaking that calls for a thoughtful focus on teaching and learning. Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, the growing fixation on high-stakes testing has undermined that focus, putting at grave risk our students' learning and their ability to meet the demands of the 21st-century economy and fulfill their personal goals.

The current generation of low-level, high-stakes tests—and their extreme misuse as a result of ideologically and politically driven education policy—has not improved our schools. Indeed, several studies have shown the exact opposite: Test-based rewards and sanctions for schools have slowed our progress in narrowing the achievement gap and have diverted attention away from many other important educational goals.

Appropriate assessments are an integral part of a high-quality public education. By contrast, the current test-and-punish accountability model has seriously damaged public education. We have lost vital parts of the curriculum because they are not subject to testing. Student learning time has been sacrificed in favor of testing and test preparation. Teachers have been led to focus their attention on the students closest to passing the tests, at the expense of developing every student's full potential. All of this has stifled teachers' ability to develop all students' capacity to think deeply, critically and creatively, and has driven many talented teachers from classrooms that desperately need them. This loss has been especially pronounced in the schools and classrooms serving America's neediest children and students with disabilities, adding further insult to the injury of poverty and other social challenges.

In short, the inappropriate and punitive use of assessments, which too often are low quality to begin with, has eclipsed teaching in too many schools. It is time to restore a proper balance to public education, and to ensure that assessments—as important as they are—inform and not impede teaching and learning.

We believe in assessments that support teaching and learning, and align with curriculum rather than narrow it; that are developed through collaborative efforts, not picked off a shelf; that are focused on measuring growth and continuous development instead of arbitrary targets unconnected to how students learn; that rely on diverse, authentic and multiple indicators of student performance rather than filling in bubbles; and that provide information leading to appropriate interventions that help students, teachers and schools improve, not sanctions that undermine them.

Further, we believe that assessments designed to support teaching and learning must contribute to school and classroom environments that nurture growth, collaboration, curiosity and invention—essential elements of a 21st-century education that have too often been sacrificed in favor of test prep and testing. Specifically, we call on the consortia currently developing assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards to do their part in solving this by including the crucial voices of teachers in the development of these assessments. We know that collaboration with educators is necessary to ensure that high-quality instruction and content are given their proper emphasis.

America's public school accountability system must be re-examined and rebuilt. By every credible measure, the testing fixation rooted in the No Child Left Behind Act has failed our students. We commit to working with all who share our commitment to restoring balance to public education by prioritizing high-quality instruction informed by appropriate and useful assessments. Anything less would be unworthy of our children and of the world-class public schools they deserve.

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[Print Page](#)

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Christine Teasdale, 202/393-4287

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Search by year or keyword.

Keyword:

Year:

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