



California Federation of Teachers
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Tuesday, September 15, 2009

*Contact: Steve Hopcraft, 916/ 457-5546, cell 916/956-4592, steve@hopcraft.com;
Fred Glass, 510-579-3343; cftoakland@igc.org*

In case you missed it...

San Francisco Chronicle

'Race to the Top' - we expected better

Marty Hittelman

Tuesday, September 15, 2009

What are the ingredients of successful education reform? From the perspective of a classroom teacher, reform must be rooted in classroom practice and supported by research.

For eight years, educators endured No Child Left Behind, an education law that focused on one-size-fits-all standardized testing. We looked forward to the day that a new administration, headed by a president who promised transparency, reliance on research and support for public education, took office.

We are grateful that federal stimulus funds included money to help fill the giant holes left by disappearing tax revenues in state budgets.

Now the president and Congress have provided Secretary of Education Arne Duncan with \$4.35 billion to award to states for educational innovation.

California's share might be around \$500 million. But there is a catch: States must enact a laundry list of federally mandated "reforms" to qualify for the competition. Duncan and Obama call this initiative "Race to the Top."

Many of these funding mandates are controversial because they have never been shown to improve student learning. One would force states to adopt teacher performance evaluation procedures that would include reliance on individual students' standardized test scores. Another would compensate teachers based on

California Federation of Teachers news release, SF Chronicle Race to the Top, page 2, Sep. 15, 2009

those scores. Both have been shown by research to be ineffective. Public education faces complex problems and won't be fixed by simplistic solutions. Standardized tests can be a useful tool among others to assess student learning. But it is too narrow of a measure on which to base a student's grade, let alone gauge a teacher's performance.

Noticeably missing from the list of proposed priorities in "Race to the Top" is evidence of learning by examining student work. A portfolio that includes multiple-choice tests but also essays, research projects, homework and classroom presentations gives a much more complete picture of student achievement.

Likewise, to judge teacher effectiveness solely on student test scores ignores a range of factors outside a teacher's control, including support (or lack of it) in the home, changes in the student's situation from year to year, or even whether the student happened to be sick on the day of the test. Research by Educational Testing Services and others shows that less than half of student achievement on standardized tests is based on what happens in the classroom and school. The rest is correlated to what happens in homes and communities. This has been known since the Coleman Report was issued in 1966.

Some will try to paint teacher union opposition to "Race to the Top" mandates as "the unions are opposed to school reform."

Let me set the record straight: We are for reforms that work, which include standards-based and common curricula that have multiple source assessments; student data available for classroom teacher use based on a comprehensive approach; smaller class sizes; new teacher mentoring; and peer assistance and review. What we oppose are reforms based on the latest bright idea that has caught the eye of a politician or pundit with no experience teaching.

We call on the Obama administration to heed suggestions for changes in the federal requirements before they are cast in stone. We hope the president will live up to his pledge of education reform "with teachers, not to them."

Marty Hittelman is president of the California Federation of Teachers.

For more information please visit www.cft.org

(end)