

ESEA REAUTHORIZATION UNDERWAY

Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is in full swing, and some of the most powerful messages to Congress on what needs to change under the law have come from educators. In January, teachers from New York City told a Senate panel that high-stakes, test-driven sanctions under the current law were corrupting good practice in the classroom. At a hearing in early February, a teacher from a Baltimore public school described how community schools can help restore opportunity in schools serving some of the city's poorest neighborhoods.

The AFT has been working to bring these frontline voices to the fore. The union delivered a petition with more than 18,000 signatures to the Senate, urging lawmakers to return ESEA to its original mission: ensuring every school receives the resources it needs to teach its students, particularly in poor neighborhoods. AFT President Randi Weingarten wrote in a recent column that ESEA reauthorization needs to start with the premise that “all students deserve a high-quality public education, and teachers need the resources and support that will allow them to teach.” Read the column at <http://go.aft.org/AE115news1>.

BRINGING PARTNERSHIPS TO SCALE

Parent engagement and community schools emerged as key themes when district and school improvement teams from several states gathered in New York City Jan. 22–25 to discuss effective labor-management collaboration. The setting was the AFT's Center for School Improvement Leadership Institute, which delivers professional development and technical assistance aimed at strengthening collaboration. About 160 educators, administrators, union leaders, and school board representatives from school systems in seven states attended the 2015 event. Read more at <http://go.aft.org/AE115news2>.

SPOTLIGHT ON EARLY LEARNING

Early education and childcare took center stage when President Obama released his budget proposal on Feb. 2. The administration seeks funding in the 2016 fiscal year to make high-quality childcare accessible to more than 1.1 million additional children under age 4 by 2025. Separately, *Education Week* focused on early childhood and education in its latest Quality Counts report, which finds that states' performance in the early years is generally subpar. In a recent blog post for the public advocacy group MomsRising, AFT Executive Vice President Mary Cathryn Ricker lays out a compelling case for putting affordable, high-quality childcare at the top of the nation's agenda. Read it at www.bit.ly/15xN0bF.

“MORAL MONDAYS” IN ALBANY

The New York state capitol filled with 1,000 activists on Jan. 12 as AFT affiliates joined “Moral Mondays” coalition partners to target unequal educational opportunities and to challenge Gov. Andrew Cuomo's failing education policies. The keynote speaker, Rev. William Barber, who established the Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina, spoke to the crowd about the hundreds of thousands of children in New York who go without the high-quality education that is their right. Days later, seven former New York teachers of the year wrote an open letter to Cuomo criticizing his

policies, particularly his efforts to link half of a teacher's evaluation to student standardized test scores. “Merit pay, charter schools, and increased scrutiny of teachers won't work because they fundamentally misdiagnose the problem,” the teachers wrote. “It's not that teachers or schools are horrible. Rather, the problem is that students with an achievement gap also have an income gap, a health-care gap, a housing gap, a family gap, and a safety gap, just to name a few.” Read the letter at www.wapo.st/1DwXbec.

Rev. William Barber and AFT President Randi Weingarten lead a protest at the New York capitol.



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TEACHER TRAINING AND DIVERSITY

The AFT partnered with Howard University to hold a panel discussion Jan. 27 in Washington, D.C., highlighting the negative impact that the U.S. Department of Education's proposed teacher-preparation regulations will have on teacher diversity. The regulations would mandate that states receiving funding under the Higher Education Act must create new accountability systems for teacher preparation. In a major change, states would be required to implement rating systems for teacher preparation programs that are based on K–12 student performance, employment statistics, surveys of principals and graduates, and accreditation/state program approval. The potential impact for programs that train teachers for high-need schools? They will likely receive lower ratings, which could deter colleges and universities from training teachers to work in these schools. A video of the discussion is available at www.bit.ly/1Ep9qLl.

ETHNIC STUDIES MOMENTUM

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) late last year joined the growing number of California school systems that require ethnic studies in the high school curriculum. The district's school board voted 6-1 to offer ethnic studies at every high school by the 2017–18 school year. By 2019, students must complete at least one ethnic studies class to graduate. The vote was a victory for Ethnic Studies Now, a coalition of students, parents, community activists, and members of United Teachers Los Angeles. Long a staple of college courses, ethnic studies is currently offered at only 19 of 94 LAUSD high schools, reports the union's newspaper. The shortage “flies in the face of a wide body of research that confirms the academic and social benefits of the programs.” The full article is available at www.bit.ly/1z1uAbo on page 7.