



## A Reset We Need to Get Right

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THE DAY AFTER President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December, the American Federation of Teachers convened a telephone town hall about the new law. More than 172,000 educators and activists called in—the response was unprecedented. The number one issue raised was: How will this new law affect the classroom? Every educator knows that No Child Left Behind and the Obama administration's Race to the Top policies, while well intentioned, went terribly wrong by creating a test-and-punish environment in America's schools. Our members want to know: Will this law be different? Will it support our students and our profession? And will the voices of educators be heard?

The passage of ESSA provides a much-needed opportunity to move past the era of high-stakes testing and punitive sanctions, which left students stressed or bored, parents frustrated, and teachers demoralized. ESSA is not perfect, but it maintains the original intent of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by supporting the disadvantaged schools and children who need it most. (Title I funding is maintained the way it's currently allocated.) And it makes it possible to redefine accountability—to both expand what constitutes student learning and make everyone, not just individual teachers, responsible for every student's education.

Teachers are on the receiving end of a lot of reforms and policies. The bottom line from their perspective is (and should be): Does it work for kids? And does it work in classrooms? That is the lens through which we view ESSA. AFT members alone took more than 100,000 online actions related to this reauthorization, submitted 20,000 comments to Congress, and met with numerous congressional leaders and staff.

Teachers want the latitude, tools, resources, and respect they need to

provide their students with the excellent education those students deserve. And they recognize the potential of this law to help create those conditions.

It is critical that states create accountability systems that are aligned with what kids need to know and be able to do and what teachers need to help get them there, while providing relevant indicators of where they are in that process. ESSA gives states and districts the opportunity to move away from top-down, test-and-punish accountability and toward accountability systems that unleash teachers' creativity to cultivate meaning-

ESSA must truly be a reset of education policies, not a repeat of failed ones. It will take time to put in place new policies and practices, so we are asking for time—within reason—to do this right. Public education has been subject to countless reforms that were undermined by hasty, inadequate implementation. Now, states must take the time to bring key stakeholders together and ensure that all voices are heard, instead of merely rushing to repackage the system that is currently in place.

The AFT believes that a moratorium on the stakes attached to accountability

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ful learning that prepares children for the complex world they are entering. Teachers must be fully involved in the development of these new systems.

The AFT supports a framework of indicators for school success that has three broad categories: academic outcomes, opportunity to learn, and engagement and support. The first, academic outcomes, means not only achievement on standardized assessments, but also success in performance assessments and other meaningful demonstrations of college and career readiness. The second category, opportunity to learn, includes access to a full curriculum that incorporates science, history, and the arts; access to high-quality teaching and student support; and access to safe and adequate facilities. Finally, the engagement and support category considers indicators of social-emotional skills and support, and indicators of teacher, parent, and community engagement. We believe such indicators can serve as a guide for states and districts and provide meaningful information for schools, families, and communities.

systems, until those systems are fully implemented, makes sense; many states have already begun this process. For example, New York has adopted a four-year break for students and teachers. Utah has introduced legislation to temporarily limit how test scores are used. A lawsuit in New Mexico challenges the state's unreliable and unfair teacher evaluation system. And just recently, Tennessee announced that test scores would not be used in teacher evaluations.

We must seize the opportunity to get this reset right. This is our chance to redefine student learning in a robust way that any parent or educator would value, and to offer interventions that will put struggling schools on the path to success. I challenge district, state, and federal officials to empower and support teachers to stoke students' curiosity and help them pursue their dreams. The AFT stands ready to partner at every level with all who share the goal of reclaiming the promise of public education—and that starts with bringing back the joy of teaching and learning.