

Recommendations of the AFT Ad Hoc Committee on Standards Rollout

Adopted May 19, 2011

WHEREAS, the American Federation of Teachers is a long-term supporter of higher common standards and expectations for all students, regardless of ZIP code; and

WHEREAS, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts and math were designed with strong input by teachers and other experts; and

WHEREAS, the CCSS: are fewer at each grade level allowing for focused, deeper levels of cognitive understanding; hold higher expectations for our students than most previous standards; and, are designed to help students become college- and career-ready; and

WHEREAS, the highly focused and deeper nature of the standards calls for changes in instruction such that teachers and students have deeper (and less superficial) content to cover each year and therefore more time to devote to mastery, thereby making teaching and learning more effective for all; and

WHEREAS, additional content standards remain to be developed in all areas of the curriculum to ensure our students receive the well-rounded education to which they are entitled; and

WHEREAS, the standards movement of the 1990s failed due to an over emphasis on standardized testing, narrowing of the curriculum and the lack of essential aligned supports that make up a **comprehensive standards-based system** (i.e., curriculum, professional development, resources, materials and time), which resulted in incoherent alignment of the standards with assessments; and

WHEREAS, the AFT knows that for the CCSS to improve education in our schools, the rollout of the standards must include serious attention and support dedicated to the development of options in curriculum resources, meaningful professional development, the instructional materials (including state-of-the-art online tools) and time needed for teachers and other classroom staff to adapt to the new standards, and coherent alignment with assessments that measure what students are expected to learn to be college- and career-ready; and

WHEREAS, collective bargaining and collaborative agreements between unions and school districts can and should be used to promote collaborative, effective and innovative approaches to rolling out the standards; and

WHEREAS, the AFT is committed to working closely with all stakeholders throughout the implementation of the standards, beginning with our members (including teachers, school-related personnel, and higher education faculty and staff) and parents; and

WHEREAS, the AFT president appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on Standards Rollout that has worked throughout the 2010-2011 school year to develop recommendations from union leaders, classroom teachers, higher education members and other educators on the best approaches to implementing the standards; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the AFT adopts the following recommendations from the Ad Hoc Committee on Standards Rollout for the purpose of initiating an action plan so that all levels of the union, and our partners at the local, state and national levels, are equipped to ensure that the Common Core State Standards are implemented as part of a comprehensive standards-based system that benefits the students for whom they were designed:

Recommendations

Standards Design

1. The AFT will continue to ensure that preK-12 teachers, classroom school-related personnel, and higher education faculty and staff are involved and have significant voice in both the design and implementation of the Common Core State Standards.
2. To remedy the narrowing of the curriculum that has occurred in most schools as a result of excessive testing and test preparation, the AFT will increase its advocacy to ensure appropriate use of assessments and inclusion of all essential disciplines (e.g., science, social studies, the arts, physical education, foreign languages) as part of a well-rounded curriculum.
3. As standards in other content areas and all essential supporting materials are developed, the AFT will ensure that teachers are part of the development process.
4. The AFT is committed to seeing that the needs of all students are considered and incorporated in all standards work, from design to implementation. In particular, we will ensure the process addresses the issue of maximizing the capabilities of all students across the learning continuum, including but not limited to English language learners, students with disabilities, urban and rural students, and student from diverse socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic populations.

5. On a national level, the AFT will work with and continue to encourage other stakeholder groups to collaborate in the rollout of the CCSS, including those representing other preK-12 educators, other higher education faculty and staff, parents, administrators, school boards, the civil rights community, mayors and municipalities, other elected officials, professional education and advocacy groups, community organizations and business leaders. The AFT will urge state and local affiliates to do the same.

Shift in Culture

6. The AFT believes deeply that the current test- and test-prep-obsessed approach to education has been harmful in many ways, including narrowing the curriculum, limiting the time for teachers to engage children, decreasing the emphasis and opportunity to engage in project-based learning and the building of critical and analytic thinking skills, and increasing stress on students, parents and teachers. The CCSS offer an opportunity to provide every child access to a portable, high quality education. The AFT and its members will advocate for the changes in practice and resources that will be needed in implementing the CCSS, including higher quality, greater coherence and consistent alignment in every aspect of the implementation.
7. The Common Core standards are more focused, call for deeper levels of cognitive understanding, and hold higher expectations for our students than most previous standards, thereby requiring everyone to think about teaching and learning in more complex and different ways. All stakeholders must work together to implement the standards in systemic ways that will bring focus and coherence to support what goes on in classrooms. The AFT will help local and state affiliates lead the way in facilitating this systemic reform.
8. The current accountability system emphasizes teacher accountability and fails to hold any others accountable for student achievement. The AFT will advocate for a 360-degree accountability system that holds all stakeholders accountable, including, for example, teachers, students, parents, the higher education community, school boards, principals and administrators, elected officials, superintendents, chief state school officers, mayors, and governors.
9. Similarly, the AFT will use its resources, publications (print and online), speaking opportunities and other means of communication to help members and the public understand that the future of public education in the United States, and indeed, economic health and security of our nation, will ride, in large part, on the success of implementing a true standards-based education —a *real* reform of education as we know it.

10. The AFT will develop a “tool kit” of resources for local and state affiliates to help us reframe our thinking and support this work. At a minimum, this will include talking points for targeted audiences, “Frequently Asked Questions,” model articles for local newspapers, Power Point presentations, materials for parents and more. We will work with other organizations and share, with permission, the best of what others develop as well.
11. In addition, the AFT will work with other partners to develop a user-friendly, accessible video/DVD explaining what the CCSS are and how they will lead to different—and better—learning for all our students.

Curriculum

12. A curriculum must be a thoughtful guide to help teachers use their repertoire of skills to ensure students master the required content and skills. The AFT does not believe a curriculum should be prescriptive or scripted, thereby impeding teachers from thinking, interacting and collaborating as professionals. A curriculum must allow appropriate teacher autonomy.
13. A curriculum must provide teachers with a rich and detailed “road map” to guide what children should learn and teachers should teach. Schools, districts and states would be best served if offered options of curricula from which they could choose; in every case, curriculum must be closely aligned to the standards, and must contain the high-level content and instructional strategies needed to support rigorous and challenging schoolwork.
14. The AFT is committed to working with states, districts, higher education faculty and professional staff, and other appropriate organizations to develop high-quality, thoughtful curricula designed and implemented with intense and ongoing input from teachers. In each case, the curricula must be aligned with the CCSS, coherent and user-friendly.
15. It is insufficient to have standards (voluntarily adopted by 43 states and U.S. territories) and assessments (already under development) without vital tools. The federal government, foundations and corporations should offer incentives and support to appropriate consortia to begin work at once on essential tools that are required to roll out the standards—i.e., curriculum, professional development, *appropriate* textbooks and other instructional materials, and time. Failure to provide for each of these components is what led to the collapse of the standards movement of the 1990s, and we all have a responsibility to make sure that history does not repeat itself.
16. To the degree possible, curricula should be interdisciplinary between and among subject areas, thereby promoting integrated learning opportunities.

17. The AFT will develop curriculum review tools to help members and their colleagues choose the most appropriate curriculum resources for their students and to facilitate the use of those resources.

Professional Development

18. Teachers' experience and expertise must play a meaningful role in the development and dissemination of all professional development.
19. The AFT will work with representatives of principals, other administrators, school boards and chief state school officers to urge them to support, advocate, and allocate resources for essential professional development opportunities. This push will be a key part of the AFT's advocacy for high-quality pre-service and in-service professional development for teachers and other classroom personnel.
20. School, district and state administrators, along with teacher educators and professional organization representatives, must participate in the same professional development trainings as required of teachers, so they too have a deeper understanding of the processes and implementation of the content and instructional changes needed to take place and how best to support those changes.
21. To best support members in local and state affiliates, the AFT will use input from classroom teachers to actively participate in and advocate for identifying, developing and disseminating the best professional development tools aligned to the CCSS. The AFT will invite and challenge other providers of high-quality support to work with us in this regard, including affiliates, districts, states, higher education, foundations and other education organizations.
22. The AFT will provide state and local affiliates with models and technical assistance for innovative contract language and/or collaborative agreements to support professional development, including fresh approaches to embed professional development opportunities into the school day, thereby providing time for professional activities and making better use of time that already may be available. These may incorporate models negotiated by locals already, and may look at new uses of current or extended time opportunities, meaningful collaboration between teachers and colleagues, and unique instructional approaches to meet the *depth* of the CCSS. Eventually, these new approaches can enhance and inform much of what we know about some essential routes for professional growth—e.g., mentoring and induction, instructional coaching, collaborative professional learning communities, career ladders, teacher development and evaluation, peer development and support, differentials for mastery of new content, and lesson study.

- 23.** The AFT also will work with other organizations in developing materials for parents, so parents can support and become full partners in the new kinds of learning being provided for their children to ensure their children are college- and career-ready.
- 24.** The AFT will thoroughly review all its current professional development offerings, including ER&D (Educational Research and Dissemination), and will redesign and supplement them, as needed, to ensure they are sufficiently rigorous and aligned with the CCSS. The AFT will urge state and local leaders to do the same.
- 25.** The AFT will conduct an institute at the July 2011 AFT TEACH conference to help state and local affiliates develop their knowledge and capacity around the CCSS.
- 26.** The AFT will continue to advocate for meaningful support for related professional development in federal and state educational bills and policies—e.g., the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and state initiatives such as Teacher Centers and school turnaround programs.
- 27.** The AFT will engage the higher education community to develop collaborative plans in partnership with preK-12 educators to rethink and revamp teacher education programs based upon what we have learned from “what works” in the United States and in other countries.

Instructional Tools, Time and Resources

- 28.** Working with high-tech, nontraditional, and public and private partners, the AFT will advocate for a comprehensive and easily accessible online repository of resources in support of the CCSS, including curricular choices and the resources needed to implement them. The AFT will actively participate in developing and advocating for the widest array of high-quality tools and resources, both electronic and print, to assist teachers and classroom paraprofessionals, including but not limited to teacher-developed model lesson plans, original text materials and exemplars of model instructional strategies. In all of these endeavors, there must be high levels of “quality control” and significant teacher voice.
- 29.** Modern technology must be used in new and innovative ways to reinvent approaches to teaching and learning that are better aligned with the technologically savvy students of this generation.
- 30.** Attention must be paid to issues around equity and student access to technology, time for teachers to be properly trained, and updating and maintaining hardware and software. The AFT Innovation Fund will expand its priority areas to include potential funding for local and state affiliates to apply for grants to come up with

innovative tools and resources to support the implementation of the CCSS and disseminate their products and results.

31. The AFT will collect and disseminate local models of materials and best practices, as well as contract language and collaborative agreements, that address rolling out the standards at the grass-roots level.
32. The AFT will help locals advocate for **time** for teachers to: learn about the CCSS; collaboratively develop lesson plans and other materials; review student work and use multiple forms of student data to inform instruction; and reflect on, discuss and review their practice. This time for collaborative work and professional growth will make learning a fluid process from grade to grade and across subject areas. Without meaningful time devoted to the thoughtful implementation of the CCSS, the good work that has already been done will have little utility and benefit for our students.
33. Throughout the development and identification of tools and resources, both print and online, the AFT will pay close attention to the needs of parents, diverse student populations (including high-achieving students), English language learners, students with disabilities, and students in low-performing or hard-to-staff schools. Maximizing the capabilities of all students across the learning continuum must always be uppermost in everyone's planning and work.
34. The AFT will partner with other organizations and stakeholders to develop a DVD and other tools to orient educators, parents and the public, to provide them a deep understanding of the standards themselves and how the rollout will influence and change ongoing teaching and learning.
35. There is growing concern among many educators that textbook publishers of K-12 materials need to be motivated to overhaul their materials so that they are aligned with, support but do not replace the new standards and curriculum. The AFT is committed to working with publishers to accomplish this goal.

Assessments

36. The AFT will use its expertise, advocacy and influence to ensure that assessments being developed are of high quality, aligned, appropriate, timely, and never used excessively or punitively. Assessments should be tools to help teachers guide and plan instruction and should not be used inappropriately—in ways that distort instruction and prevent students from developing the thinking and analytical skills described in the CCSS.
37. The AFT will work with the two assessment consortia funded by the U.S. Department of Education to ensure that teachers and other educators are involved every step of the way in the design, field-testing and implementation of any new assessments. These consortia have begun work on developing

assessments aligned to the CCSS. While we believe that similar, well-funded investments should have first been made with the needed supports—such as curriculum, professional and instructional material development—it is important to ensure the assessments ultimately developed are valid, reliable and aligned with the standards and curriculum they are intended to measure. It is essential that the assessments are credible, focus on the acquisition of knowledge and deal with deeper thinking – not just rote memory. Throughout the assessment development process, the AFT will collect and disseminate ongoing information and access to local consortia representatives in each state.

- 38.** The AFT will vigilantly use its voice to assess the development of assessments to ensure they play their rightful role, mainly to support teaching and learning, and *not* to either replace curriculum or be used punitively.

AND BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the AFT adopts the recommendations from the Ad Hoc Committee on Standards Rollout, and initiates an action agenda across all levels of the union so that we are equipped at the local, state and national levels to ensure that the Common Core State Standards are implemented as part of a comprehensive standards-based system that advances the quality of education for the students for whom they were designed.