

NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

WHEREAS, the AFT has always supported high standards for students and high-quality tests; and

WHEREAS, the standards students must meet are unacceptably low and the tests they most frequently take do not support high-quality teaching and learning; and

WHEREAS, this nation's low educational standards and testing system are strongly implicated in our students' low levels of academic achievement; and

WHEREAS, poor youngsters have borne the brunt of low standards and accountability schemes driven by low-level standardized tests; and

WHEREAS, research and the experience of other nations indicate that having clear and high content and performance standards for students, basing curriculum and assessments on those standards, providing the resources that schools and teachers need to help students meet high standards, and motivating students to work hard on their studies are the hallmarks of successful education systems; and

WHEREAS, the AFT has weighed the pros and cons of a national system of standards and assessments (see, for example, "AFT Background Paper on National Standards and Assessments") and concluded that the benefits outweigh the risks; and

WHEREAS, there is a lack of clarity and consistency in many of the key terms and concepts associated with a national system of standards and assessments and legitimate questions about some of the claims about how such a system would work:

RESOLVED, that the AFT support the development of a national (not federal) system of standards and assessments in principle; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT support the establishment of a National Education Standards and Assessments Council and advocate that its first tasks be to develop and disseminate common operational definitions of the terms and concepts relevant to a national system of standards and assessments and to examine the basis of the claims and counterclaims about how such a system would work; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT work to ensure that the following principles are observed in developing a national system of standards and assessments or state systems of standards and assessments:

- Teachers, through their professional and disciplinary organizations, must have a major role in developing content and performance standards, the diverse model curriculum frameworks and other materials to illustrate those standards and the assessments based on the standards;
- Standards should be developed with reference to the most exemplary education standards of the nations whose expectations for and levels of student achievement exceed our own;
- Standards should take account of what students need to know and be able to do to undertake real college-level work, and therefore higher-education faculty must be involved in their development;
- Standards should reflect what students need to know and be able to do to qualify for high-skill, high-wage jobs and to function as productive and dignified workers, and therefore employer and labor representatives must be involved in their development. Work-related and academic standards should be integrated and should maximize students' lifelong vocational and continuing education opportunities;
- Standards, whatever the subject, discipline, interdisciplinary field or skills under consideration, should reflect the basic purpose of American public education: the development of free and equal citizens capable of participating in a pluralistic democracy;

- Standards should be public and understandable. Teachers and students should know what is expected of them, and parents and the public should know the outcomes schools are dedicated to achieving and what youngsters are expected to know and be able to do as a result of their education;
- Assessments must be directly based on standards; standards should not be inferred from assessments. That means standards and model curriculum frameworks should be developed and disseminated before new assessments are given. Teachers must have the opportunity to teach and students to learn the knowledge and skills new assessments will call for, especially if individual student assessments are developed;
- Assessments should move away from exclusive reliance on multiple-choice items toward more authentic methods of assessing students' knowledge and skills and their application. Assessments should measure student achievement, not ability, and students should be able to prepare for them. Assessment questions and tasks should be made public, along with samples of work demonstrating various levels of performance;
- In the early grades, the assessments should have no consequences for students except to gain those who need it additional help in meeting high, not watered-down, standards. That help should supplement and not supplant regular instruction;
- At the secondary level, the assessments should reflect the following mix: assessments that all students take in common and that reflect the high-level knowledge and skills all students need to have; and assessments that students choose to prepare for and take in order to demonstrate a higher level of mastery in their areas of concentration. Students should have multiple opportunities to meet standards and should not be prevented from pursuing preparation to meet a higher standard in an area of strength or interest so long as they have met the common core standards or are working toward mastering the knowledge and skills in which they initially fell short;
- The results of secondary-school assessments should be a major but not exclusive factor in qualifying for college and for better jobs at better wages; course grades, conduct and teacher recommendations also should count. Student incentives should be phased in over about a ten-year period. No one who qualifies for college should be denied access because of inability to pay, and no one who enters a community college or the work force directly from secondary school should be denied continuing opportunities to qualify for college;
- National standards and assessments should be accompanied by school and system delivery standards and by the resources schools and systems need to meet those standards;
- A national system of standards and assessments or state systems of standards and assessments should be continually monitored and improved.

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