

**TESTIMONY OF ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, AFL-CIO
ON FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR THE
NATIONAL BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS
BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION
OF THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR
July 25, 1989**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

The American Federation of Teachers strongly endorses legislation to provide research support for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. This Board has requested federal assistance in order to pay for research that will help to develop standards and to determine what skills are needed to be a superior teacher. The tests that are now in existence are not useful in the process of determining the qualifications that teachers need to meet.

Currently, teacher tests are purely instrumental--they sort and screen and set cut-off scores for minimum competency. Test questions are eliminated if too many of the sample test-takers failed and, while efforts are made to establish job-relatedness, existing tests often have no relationship to skills needed in the classroom. This sort of testing, which dominates the teaching profession, really has little or nothing to do with determining the necessary skills needed to support and enhance professional practices. Fortunately, this type of testing need not be the norm any longer.

The type of testing that regulates other professions is largely unknown in education. Tests, in most every profession, seek to examine the professional knowledge base of the individual taking the test.

These type of tests also screen and have cut-off scores, but they seek to test what is worth knowing in order to be a competent professional.

The successful lawyer, architect or doctor must pass such a test before being certified to practice. Passing scores for these exams do not fluctuate with job markets or pass/fail rates. This is the type of testing that is common in other professions and is greatly needed in education.

The purpose of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is to develop testing instruments for the teaching profession similar to those already in use by other professions. If this effort is successful, we believe the following things will happen: teacher training institutions will modify their curriculum to meet the new standards in the profession, and more qualified people will aspire to meet the higher standards expected from teachers.

The availability of such tests may drive efforts for increased compensation, and as new standards are approved and met, student achievement will be positively affected. It is important to note also that some things will not happen: teacher licensing will not become subject to the National Board, and state and local officials will continue to

hold licensing power and, in all likelihood, will continue to make licensing decisions based upon market factors and financial realities. Not every teacher will be able to meet the new standards, and with school reorganization, it will not be necessary for every teacher to be board-certified.

The current situation in teacher testing must be changed if our schools are to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The only way that teacher testing will change for the better is if this Board succeeds. Change in this area must come from an outside agency that has massive popular support and has built a consensus in the education community.

I believe the Board's mission does have support from the public. As this hearing indicates, the Board has built an impressive consensus for its work in the education community.

The funds that have been requested are critical for the success of this enterprise. If federal support is not forthcoming, we may see this promising movement languish for several years missing the wave of public support that currently exists. If this movement for education quality does not succeed, the public will be poorer for the Congress' failure to invest the \$25 million needed for its success.

The AFT urges that any federal support provided should be earmarked for research alone. We also urge that all research become public property in order to help all who are concerned with improving

the teaching force. Normal federal requirements for auditing and assurances, that funds are matched and spent for the proper purposes, are a must in this legislation.

Beyond these requirements, however, we believe that the Board should be left to pursue its mission. Federal support has been made available for projects that serve the national interest with a minimum of strings--I cannot think of another project that would better serve the national interest than one that will stimulate the improvement of the teaching profession.

A final reason for the Congress to act now is the tremendous leverage that a relatively small investment will now have on our educational future. Investing twenty-five million dollars now can pay huge dividends in employability, competitiveness and productivity of our workforce and economy. These dollars could be the most crucial education support that the Congress votes in this decade. I urge swift positive action on this important matter.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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