STATEMENT OF
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REGARDING EDUCATIONAL REFORM
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I am Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, an organization of 600,000 teachers, paraprofessionals and school related personnel. All of our members have a vital interest in educational reform, and, indeed, improving education is a bread and butter issue for us. The AFT has been in the vanguard of the movement for educational reform, a remarkable position for a union with much invested in a system currently serving over 40 million American students. Our support for educational reform is not new. It is not just to get us through a period of heavy criticism such as the one education now faces. The AFT believes reform is necessary to re-establish the confidence of parents in public schools. We support reform to assure politicians that investment in public education is a prudent expenditure. Most of all, we support educational reform because teachers know that current trends, if uncorrected, will lead to disaster for public education.

The Gallup Polls show that close to half of the people in our country favor a measure such as tuition tax credits or vouchers. One nationwide poll taken in conjunction with the NIE shows that a tuition tax credit of only $125 would increase non-public school attendance in this country, from 10% of all students, if there were enough private school seats available.

The case of Mueller vs. Minnesota has removed a major roadblock to the enactment of legislation for tuition tax credits. There are bills of this type in the states of Michigan, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, and I believe, such legislation also will be introduced in

Pennsylvania and New York. It is quite likely, that before a year passes one or more additional states beyond Minnesota will have a program of assistance to non-public schools and this development will result in a movement of students from public to non-public schools. It is very clear that we who are in public education must now start thinking in terms of a new situation, one in which there is competition. It is a situation in which what we do or say will not merely have an effect on what the teachers think but will have an effect on how many parents decide to move their children from public to non-public schools. If one starts with that as an assumption then one does not deal theoretically with many of the issues that are before us. We deal with these reports and the issues they raise as life and death matters for public education.

The new factor of judicially legislated competition is especially serious when we look at major educational issues and how the public perceives the public school establishment. Issues such as competency testing of teachers and students, use of soft curricula, school violence and discipline are all seen as areas where the public schools have failed. Other teacher organizations have been on the wrong side of all these issues and the public has taken notice. The public believes that those who oppose entry level tests are covering something up and the public is right. The teaching force is about to undergo changes, largely for the worst, and testing of those about to enter the teaching profession confirms this.

We have had teacher supply problems before, specifically during the Post World War II baby boom, when we could not keep up with the demand. What we are now facing is a much more serious problem. For the first time the overall quality of people who are about to enter the teaching profession is about to decline. I don't want to use a broad brush and smear everyone who

is coming in by saying that none are competent. Obviously, there are people entering teaching and preparing to become teachers who had wonderful experiences in school with their own teachers and dream of doing for students exactly what some other teacher did for them. They are prepared to ignore economic realities and they ignore all sorts of other things--because for them teaching is a calling. It is wonderful that there are such people but there will never be enough of this type of person in any profession. Most who enter any profession have an eye on compensation, status and working conditions. When we examine the status, compensation and working conditions of teachers we cannot be sanguine about the future. Over the past 50 years or more, public education has benefitted from external forces that so distorted the job market that people became teachers even though the pay was poor and the benefits less than in other lines of work. In the 1930's we were able to attract many outstanding people because, with one-quarter or one-third of the nation unemployed, teaching looked like a secure career even if one did not expect to make a lot of money. Some of those people are still with us but the last of them will soon be retiring. In the Post World War II period many people who were scarred by the experience of living through the Depression feared that there would soon be another. As a matter of fact, one of the rationales of the GI Bill of Rights was to make sure that the returning GI's did not join the unemployed. The GI Bill sent them to college and kept them out of the job market. The Post-World War II military draft allowed some teachers draft exemptions for teaching in schools that were short on staff. Better a tough school than Korea or Viet Nam.

The largest supply of talented people entering teaching were women. Women were blocked from other professions--only teaching and nursing welcomed them. And that, of course, is over forever--women are going into

medicine, law, business administration and many other careers. One almost gets the feeling that women are making a statement today that even if teacher salaries were to double or triple they are not going to a field that was stereotyped as women's work. Women are now showing themselves and the country that they can go into all of the fields that have not been traditionally women's work and do as well or better than the men who previously monopolized such jobs. These factors, which enabled the schools to get talented people even though the schools did not pay very well and conditions did not compare to other professions, have passed. The schools benefitted from many talented members of various minority groups who experienced discrimination in other fields but were able to get jobs teaching, and that too has passed. Teaching will, from now on, attract the people who cannot do better somewhere else. In other words, the market with help from the government has corrected the distortions that benefitted education. Of the group between 16 and 25 years of age, today's cohort is 20% smaller than the previous cohort. We are about to go into a major national shortage of trained people. The top people will go into nuclear physics, the next group will go into medicine and so on down the line until we reach those who will train to be teachers, and they will be at the bottom.

With the exception of those who have the calling and feel that their mission is education, the people who are attracted to education are the lowest group of college graduates. In fact, this group has not ranked high for several years. Many should not be in teaching and some should not have graduated from college. If test results are to be believed some should not have even graduated high school. Some are not literate and are certainly not able to master complex math and science subjects well enough to teach them. It is plain that we are about to face a major nationwide shortage of

qualified teachers and that the well-publicized math-science shortage is only the tip of the iceberg. The most likely short-term solution will be to issue emergency substitute certificates as was done in the 1950's. At that time, school districts were so shorthanded that they took any warm body over a certain age, administered the Farenheit test and hired those who passed. The public today is not going to tolerate what was done in the 1950's because we have educated the public and they expect, and are entitled to, more. It is clear that public education must compete for quality teachers or the public will go elsewhere. Schools will have to offer salaries and working conditions that can compete with the Burroughs and IBM's and all the other private and public enterprises that hire college graduates. These changes must be dealt with or all the reports in the world will have no effect. I do not think I have really said anything you did not know already--these are all matters of common knowledge. So if this is the case what do we have to do? I will briefly outline a program.

First, I think there is absolutely no question that two things at the very beginning are key. We must have a high enough beginning salary to attract qualified applicants; and we must bring in people of a high enough standard to secure the public's confidence in public education.

We must be certain new hires are qualified to teach and the best way to find out if someone knows mathematics, english or social studies is to give them an examination. If we don't require an examination for new teachers we are not serious about fighting declining standards. There is a bar examination for lawyers, doctors graduating from medical school must take an examination, people who want to become actuaries have to take an examination, insurance brokers take an examination, in fact, there is only one field that I can think of that doesn't require an exam and that is teaching. I would go a step further and say that we should not test teachers for

minimum competency. We do not want teachers who are at the same level of competence as their students. Florida has been giving new teachers a test for a couple of years and about 20% of the perspective elementary school teachers fail. The arithmetic section of the test is at the 6th grade level. By the way, if teachers do not think that they know 6th grade arithmetic they do not go to Florida to take the test, they go to a state where there is no test. It is probably the better teachers who go to states like Florida, and the result is still a 15-20% failure rate.

I submit to you that a 6th grade arithmetic test is better than no test but 6th grade math is not a high enough standard to teach elementary school. Teachers should know considerably more than their students, and if they don't the student is being short-changed. Teaching cannot afford to recruit from people who rank at the bottom among college graduates. It would be unrealistic to expect that teachers will earn what doctors do, but it is quite realistic to say that you must offer a teacher the same salary as a person who graduated from the state university in English or History with a C+ average. That person currently can get $18-or $19,000 as a trainee in business and if we want their services we will have to pay just as much as to an entry level teacher. New teachers are increasingly market sensitive, just as our whole country is. I would like to have B graduates and A-graduates enter teaching but right now the C+ student would be an improvement. If you want to get a C+ student you are going to have to pay what a C+ student can get on the open market. If we do not accomplish this the reform movement will inevitably fail.

Now let me say something about the other teacher organization. I consider myself a pretty savvy union leader. I have been around for quite a while, I have gotten re-elected many times and by fairly large majorities.

The reason the other teacher organization is negative about increasing beginning salaries is because the new higher starting salaries would go to people who are not currently association members. Higher starting salaries are designed to attract people now in college. The NEA seems to believe that a really smart union leader concentrates on getting big increases for those currently on the job. Current members are the ones who come to meetings, and most are at or near the salary maximum. I want increases for all of AFT's current members but our members know that attracting quality teachers can keep millions of students in public schools; AFT members realize that the future of public education is on the line, and that the true faith of the past will not guarantee a future for public education.

After establishing a starting salary good enough to make teaching attractive to qualified people, we must establish the skill level of the prospective teacher in his or her subject areas. After those two steps I advocate a three-year probationary period during which a careful evaluation of the new teacher is carried out. This probationary period should involve more than a principal looking to uncover flaws in new teachers. School districts must invest in on-the-job training for new teachers. New teachers need what any trainee would get in business or another profession--a program of support and professional development. At the end of this period, administrators have the right to ask questions about the prospective teacher's abilities. Unfortunately, we in education frequently ask the wrong questions at the end of a probationary period. The question usually asked when deciding if a teacher should be permanent is this: Is this person incompetent? That's the major question we ask. Sometimes
even if the answer is yes, a permanent job is provided and I can tell you that I know of no district in the country that will say "you are not incompetent but we don't hire marginal people here." The question we should

ask ourselves is: does this person have a good chance of making a real contribution to the school system? Mere competence should not be enough. If you start with marginal people most will not improve. In fact, most will likely deteriorate. Entry level testing, a good starting salary, an internship and a well thought out management decision on whether or not this person is going to make a substantial contribution to the school system is necessary. Even if all these steps are taken another problem must be addressed, that is teacher retention, and the key to retaining good teachers is job satisfaction. Sometimes even if you pay an adequate salary and provide in-service support you are still not going to keep good teachers.

Job satisfaction is crucial--by job satisfaction I mean a teacher's sense of working at the highest level possible. People want to teach math or english because they enjoy these subjects and want others to share their joy and knowledge of Shakespeare or Dickens or Newton. But, too often, they are asked to be a policeman protecting the rest of the class from a violent and disruptive child. Sometimes the teacher has to be a psychiatrist or social worker or jailer handling problems for the rest of society. That is not what a good teacher bargained for and it is no overstatement to say that this situation destroys job satisfaction.

The answer to this problem is simple but very difficult to achieve: A disruptive or violent child must be put into a different setting so that other students and the teacher can go about the business of learning. Not every child can be educated by a regular teacher in a regular classroom, and we must face this fact. If public education does not acknowledge what the public already knows then parents will choose private schools and public schools will consist only of those students who could not get into a private

school. This problem of the disruptive and violent child is going to be solved by public schools or it will be solved for public schools when parents vote with their feet. Aside from religious education which some parents want, the attraction of a private school is the promise of an orderly learning environment. More than anything else if we can not provide order in public schools, little else will matter. Good teachers will not teach in a system whose best students have been skimmed off the top.

A second element to job satisfaction is the real substance of teaching. If I am a high school math teacher I want to teach high school or even college math not three classes a day of students taking 4th grade remedial arithmetic. I may be willing to sacrifice a little bit of salary and status when if I can teach algebra or trigonometry and maybe even once in a while a college calculus, but I am not going to make sacrifices for myself and my family to teach remedial arithmetic. Life is too short and the private sector too attractive.

Job satisfaction means matching teaching expectations and student talent and, job satisfaction is a must for educational improvement. I should point out why we have so many remedial arithmetic classes in high school and it goes back to that Florida test. If 15% to 20% of the entry level teachers cannot pass a 6th grade math test, I would estimate that a much higher percentage of the teachers who are entering elementary don't know basic arithmetic. And if they don't know arithmetic, we have a pretty good handle on why by the time high school rolls around the student is taking remedial arithmetic. So, what do we do? Even if we fired half the current teachers statistics show that the people waiting to take their place are less qualified than the current work force. What we can do is to organize schools in such a way that the teacher who doesn't know math and is good at

music and art can work with the teachers next door who may have math skills and teaching insights that would help the teacher with the math problem. This is not to call for departmentalization of elementary schools but, clearly, more collegiality would be appropriate.

So far I have talked about how to avoid hiring teachers who are at the bottom among college graduates in order to bring in people who are average college students. This is important because getting the average college graduate would be an improvement. But average is a far cry from excellence in education. Excellence does not mean average--it means superior. The Report on Excellence in Education only got it partly right. The teachers we have now are pretty good, if they had a little support you would see greater achievement simply by allowing the current teaching force to work to their own standards. Unless changes are made, the people who are now on their way into teaching will change all that.

We must also ask, how do we get the top 5% or 10% of college graduates into teaching? A program that I proposed a few weeks ago has been catching on. One congressional committee has supported it and a number of governors have come out for it; I propose that if those students who are in the top 10% of SAT's as they graduate high school will agree to teach for five years, the government will pay for their entire college education. Not everybody who takes advantage of such an offer will stay in teaching, not everyone will want 20 or 30 years in the classroom. But, if everyone in our society said teaching is important and if businessmen said anybody who is a teacher for five years is not going to be hurt when they come into the business world five years later, our system of education would be greatly improved by the contribution of such people.

Finally, I want to say something about merit pay. Merit pay has a bad

name with teachers and deservedly so. In the past, merit pay has meant a small extra payment for a very select few at the expense of many. In addition, the beneficiaries for merit pay were selected on the grounds that most teachers believed to be unfair or biased. Every teacher knows that every supervisor is human and often confuses those who he/she agrees with for those who are right or even meritorious. Merit pay as we have known is a concept that has not and will not work.

Now, however, we are examining a new concept that has promise as a strategy for retaining good teachers. That concept is now called a Master Teacher Plan. One such plan has been advocated by Gov. Alexander of Tennessee. It is clear that in the case of the Tennessee plan much is different from the old merit pay schemes.

Most teachers will qualify for advancement--not one out of 40 or one out of 100.

Dollars will not be taken from the many and given to the few. New money is is being proposed.

Evaluations will be conducted outside the jurisdiction of the immediate supervisor by a state board with no axe to grind.

Peer evaluations will play a major role in the selection of senior and master teachers.

New responsibilities and educational roles are being contemplated for master teachers.

There are problems with the Tennessee plan. And we have not endorsed every aspect of it but clearly this approach is something different. The Master Teacher concept is something new and it could be an important contribution to teacher retention; it cannot, however, work without a substantial boost in entry level salaries. No potential teacher will go into the profession on the chance that 5 years later someone may decide they are worthy of a living professional wage. Teachers are entitled to that up front and no progress will be made until that fact is established. Only

after we take this step to attract quality people will new retention plans pay long-term dividends.

In summary, we believe that the reports now before our country can stimulate an exciting movement for educational progress. Much needs to be done at the federal level to improve existing programs such as Bilingual Education Act to insure that the teaching of English is achieved as effectively as possible. A new focus on quality must become a federal concern alongside the traditional federal concerns of equity and access.

Changes are needed in other federal programs to stimulate quality; the leadership role of the federal government should not be underestimated when it comes to influencing change in our educational institutions. Strengthening curriculum and establishing graduation and college entry requirements are also part of the solution. The bottom line, however, is improvement in the status, pay and professional development of teachers. The AFT was founded to make this fight when no one else would. We stand ready to assist this new effort to raise standards and improve the education of all our children.

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