

TESTIMONY OF ALBERT SHANKER  
PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS  
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY, AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Albert Shanker, and I am president of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO. This appearance is a welcome change from past ones when the priority of those of us with a commitment to a federal role in education was damage control. In the past, you have had to contend with an administration committed to vouchers, so-called private school choice and a very simplistic notion of how to create a movement for educational reform. With a new President in the White House dedicated to improving public schools, you in the Congress and we in the public education arena can consider changes and improvements in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that would not have been possible before last November.

Chapter 1 represents the largest government program devoted exclusively to the education of poor children. Since the program's inception in 1965, Chapter 1 has undergone many changes. In the beginning, Chapter 1 was a program akin to general aid, except for the requirement that its funds be spent on poor children. Over time, Chapter 1 was changed so that it almost exclusively supports compensatory education programs, virtually all of which focus on basic skills improvement. This focus on basic skills has produced results. Children most likely to be included in Chapter 1 programs have made significant gains, as measured by basic skills tests. Now, however, is the time to seek improvements in Chapter 1. Basic skills will always be necessary, but basic skills are not sufficient. We must have much higher aspirations -- standards -- for poor children, for all children, and that means much higher aspirations for Chapter 1. And if we don't want to leave low-income children behind in our drive to improve student performance, then improving Chapter 1 must be a central part of our strategy for achieving the national education goals.

Before we make suggestions for making Chapter 1 work better, I must ask for your attention to an emergency in our nation's cities that has resulted from the census-driven changes in the distribution of Chapter 1 funds. The change from the 1980 to 1990 Census data as the basis for distributing Chapter 1 funds will result in radical and disruptive shifts of money among and within states. By and large, money will shift from the eastern, midwestern and southern parts of the nation to the west and southwest. We have no doubt that the number of poor children in the regions that gain funds have increased. We are equally certain, however, that the number of poor children in the largest cities of the regions that lose funds has not declined; in fact, most of them are experiencing large increases in the number of poor children.

What this tells us is that the Chapter 1 formula needs to be revisited. Some elements of the formula -- for example, AFDC counts -- are essentially vestigial, while the poverty index seems outdated. In designing a new formula, it is important to remember that Chapter 1 is an education program, not a public works bill. Formula changes should take into account educational needs rather than regional advantages. And I can tell you that the cities that are about to lose substantial amounts of Chapter 1 funds -- cities that did not have enough relative to their students' needs in the first place -- will not be able to cope. They will not be able to achieve even the basic skills aspirations of the current Chapter 1 law, let alone the higher standards we want low-income children to achieve.

There are several ways to deal with the funding losses triggered by the changes in the census data. The most desirable one is to devote enough new resources to Chapter 1 so that eligible poor children everywhere can participate in the program, and we can stop robbing Peter to pay Paul when both are in great need. Since budget austerity is almost certain to be a continuing feature of government for the next few years, if we can't do the right thing then at the very least we should put more money into concentration grants. And with either case, we must still make changes in the Chapter 1 formula to update the criteria used for defining poverty in federal programs. Moreover, it may also be time to phase out some of the fiscal disincentives in the Chapter 1 formula, such as the 120% cap and 80% floor on state per-pupil expenditures. As we well know, there are vast regional differences in education costs and expenditures, and the earnings and contributions of taxpayers differ greatly from state to state. Chapter 1 should not punish states that make greater investments in education. Those states that do more for their school children should not be held back by an artificial limitation on per-pupil expenditures in the Chapter 1 formula.

How, then, to improve Chapter 1 to make it consistent with drive to achieve the national education goals? This reauthorization presents the Congress, the President and the education community with an opportunity to ask the most basic questions about the functioning of Chapter 1 in the past in order to get better results in the future. While recognizing the achievements of Chapter 1, the AFT nonetheless urges Congress to fashion a new Chapter 1 program that is very different from the program now on the books. We believe that much of the red tape associated with Chapter 1 in the past can be safely eliminated in favor of a program that is asked to justify its funding by the results it achieves. We urge that enforceable limits be placed in the new law on the amount of Chapter 1 money that can be spent on administrative costs. We have sent language to the committee that would cap administrative costs at 5%. It may be that even that figure is too high. However Congress chooses to do it, Chapter 1 must not continue to generate ever more administrators or

"specialists" or other such personnel who have little or no contact with children in the classroom.

Chapter 1 should also move away from its almost exclusive emphasis on low-level basic skills (though basic skills will always be a necessary part of every child's education). The Chapter 1 program must be part of the way we ensure that poor children are afforded the same opportunity as other children to learn according to high standards. They should not be expected to achieve less than their peers who are not poor and they should not be subject to different tests or more testing than other children. In short, Chapter 1 must be part and parcel of the movement to dramatically improve the achievement of all our students.

One of the ways to do this is to remove the main incentive for focusing Chapter 1 narrowly on basic skills, and that is using low-level, standardized tests to drive accountability. Another is to realize that, although pull-out programs can be excellent, pulling a child out of class for extra help means that the child is missing valuable class time. We want to supplement Chapter 1 children's regular education, not supplant it, and that's what pull-outs tend to do.

I am not calling for an end to testing or accountability in Chapter 1. But Chapter 1 children should not be tested more often than other children and with lower-level tests or test standards. And it is time to phase out these low-level, curriculum-free tests altogether and direct money toward developing and ultimately using better assessments that are based on high standards for what students should know and be able to do -- curriculum-based assessments similiar to the old New York State Regents exams or Advanced Placement tests for high school students. True, these tests are used at the high school level, while Chapter 1 is primarily an elementary program. But the focus on curriculum and rigor these tests have should be a model for all new assessments, and that includes Chapter 1 students at all levels.

Reducing the Chapter 1 program's reliance on low-level testing should also be a signal--to states especially--that more is required from Chapter 1 than basic skills instruction. Nothing serious in regard to raising standards in the Chapter 1 program will occur until directions change on the state level. States, currently the major regulator of Chapter 1 programs, have created a basic skills mold into which programs must fit in order to be assured of state approval. Incentives to teach low-income children the same curriculum as other children await a change of direction from the state level.

One way to move the process along is to enhance the role of the Committee of Practitioners on the state level. Using the existing committee and expanding its role so that more of the educational decisions driving the Chapter 1 program come before

this group would be a good start in the process of redirecting the goals of the Chapter 1 program. In addition, AFT supports the lowering of the threshold for school-wide projects from the current 75% to 50%. Lowering the threshold can be a major factor in reorienting the Chapter 1 program toward a more comprehensive educational approach for low income children.

Other problems need to be addressed in this reauthorization, such as schools' losing Chapter 1 funds when they succeed in raising the achievement of their students. This situation occurs because Chapter 1 functions at its core as a triage system. A triage system attempts to assist those most in need and can lead to making choices that are reasonable given the constraints within which Chapter 1 must function but are not educationally sound for many low-income students. This is especially true as it applies to eligibility for Chapter 1 funds. When a school starts to succeed with its students, it is in danger of losing funds to schools that are still struggling; after all, money is scarce. The possibility of a marginally successful school again losing ground due to the loss of Chapter 1 funds then presents itself. If adequate Chapter 1 funds were available, such choices would not have to be made. But until that day comes, a better way of determining Chapter 1 eligibility should be a top priority. The AFT intends to explore this issue further, and you will be hearing from us on this matter. But make no mistake: Money makes a difference for all students, and it especially makes a difference for poor children. Only adequate funding can stop this triage system of shifting funds from marginally improved schools to schools doing even worse.

This is not to say I favor having Chapter 1 be the tail that wags the dog of equalizing our crisis-laden, politically charged system of school finance. Chapter 1 from its inception has had an equalizing effect on school funding and has altered our notions of equitable education funding for the better. The growth of need based education formulas can be traced to Chapter 1. But Chapter 1 must retain its focus on improving the educational performance of disadvantaged children. If Chapter 1 improves the efficacy of the schools poor children attend, it will be achieving its most important goal.

Improving Chapter 1 programs will also depend in large part on new and meaningful investments in staff development. Professional development must be tied to helping staff help children to achieve higher standards in the subject areas outlined in the national education goals. School staff -- teachers, administrators and paraprofessionals -- must be allowed maximum flexibility in determining their needs for staff development and the providers of those services. This is because current staff development programs are typically poorly connected to the needs of children in schools or to the strengths and weaknesses of the staff in those schools. This disconnect does not serve the needs

of the students in Chapter 1 programs or of the professionals who are trying to improve their knowledge and skill in reaching their students. Staff development programs must also provide for more time for peer relationships because working together sharing insights is one of the best ways to improve professionals' performance. Every other profession uses collegial relationships as a basis for improved knowledge and performance. It's time for education to do so, too. (A column I wrote on this subject is attached.)

We urge that at least 20 percent of new Chapter 1 funds above the current funding level be used for staff development and that these funds be augmented with state dollars. Programs for staff development should be approved at the school site with decisions regarding the type of program, who provides it and its content made by staff at the site, consistent with Chapter 1 goals. Where appropriate, Chapter 1 funded professional development should include administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals at the school site participating in staff development activities together.

Chapter 1 can play an important role in leveraging school reform, restructuring and improvement. The program presently allows up to 5 percent of basic grant monies to be spent on innovative activities consistent with program objectives. I would urge an increase in this percentage to 10 percent and mandate that states match the federal dollars. School systems nationwide are caught between the need for reform and the constraints posed by state and local fiscal crises. Criteria for how funds for innovative activities can be used should be flexible, with needs determined by states and localities. Funds for innovation also can be an important factor providing schools that are performing poorly with special, expert assistance and intervention. If improvement still does not occur in those schools, a district could use the innovative activities funds to reorganize a school -- including shutting it down and reopening it as a new type of school.

While program improvement is important, one necessary element of student success is increased parent involvement. Parents are an invaluable resource in encouraging and assisting the learning activities of their children and in otherwise supporting and contributing to schools. The Even Start program provides an excellent intergenerational model for helping parents help their children and should be encouraged throughout Chapter 1. Chapter 1 requires schools to provide a means for the active involvement of parents, and the AFT strongly supports such involvement of parents, grandparents or guardians with children currently in the school's Chapter 1 program. Parental involvement also should include training for parents in how they can best help their children succeed in school. And all programs involving parents should stress the Even Start model of providing activities and strategies for parents to use at home to reinforce their children's education.

Greater emphasis on high-quality, early-childhood programs is also a sound direction for future Chapter 1 programs. There is a strong demand from working parents for affordable, high-quality preschool programs, and early childhood education is far more successful and cost effective than delayed intervention in dealing with the problems of disadvantaged children. Class size standards developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children should be used for children in Chapter 1 programs through grade three. Follow through programs should be expanded to ensure that the gains made in preschool programs are maintained. Headstart should be encouraged in public schools. Even Start should be funded so that all school-wide-project-eligible schools could participate in the program. In addition, Congress should provide funding for the coordination of early childhood services in each school-wide project eligible school.

It has long been the policy of the federal government to assume responsibility for the impact that certain federal activities have on local educational agencies. Federal immigration policies have placed millions of poor children with no or limited English proficiency in our nation's schools. Many new arrivals of all ages and without any previous education are enrolled in our schools. State and local school budgets cannot accommodate the many needs of these children. The federal government should therefore reimburse school districts for the severe fiscal hardship these policies have placed on them.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.