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By Sandra Feldman, President  
American Federation of Teachers**

## **INTRODUCTION**

- I'm particularly gratified to be here because the subject of America's cities, city kids, and public schools – past, present, and future – is near and dear to my heart. I've spent my entire life with urban kids; in fact I'm one myself.
- I grew up in a poor, troubled family, in a tough neighborhood in Coney Island, New York. If a good public school hadn't been available and accessible a short walk from the city-owned slum I lived in, I wouldn't be standing here today.
- So before talking about schools of the future, I think it's important to acknowledge – despite today's problems – the great contribution our public schools have made, and the progress we've made in serving more and more of our children. Forty years ago, with about a 50% dropout rate, we were serving less than half; children with disabilities simply weren't

offered schooling, and only a relatively elite group even took the SAT. So – we’ve made a lot of progress and we should acknowledge that.

- But it doesn’t mean we ought to pat ourselves on the back.

Doing much better than yesterday in general, (which we are) or pointing to the extraordinary academic gains of minority youngsters in particular, -- and the gains are there -- is simply not good enough to meet today’s needs, in a society so much more complex, let alone tomorrow’s, and all the advances it will bring – especially in science and cybernetics.

- And we know that the economic, political, and social fate of our cities – and therefore, all of America – is inextricably linked to the condition and fate of our public schools – where 90% of our kids are, and where they will be.

So, let me start with the easier part of the question:

- The schools we want for the future.

- Let's first establish this; that we want quality, universal public education (something we can no longer take for granted.)
- We want schools in which every child is learning up to the highest worldwide standards; where teachers are the smartest, best-prepared people in our nation; where technology is as easily accessible as good books are, and where students, parents and educators are happily there by choice – because every public school is a school of choice.
- How we get there is more complicated – though very doable. So I want to spend my time on that issue -- to put it as crisply as I can: we should do what works.
- We know a great deal more now about what works to improve learning, because we have a body of research over a period of years that shows the way. This research clearly points to several bedrock fundamentals. And they happen to correspond to the desires of parents and the public, across all

demographic groups, as well as of teachers and students, according to many different reliable polls and surveys.

- The first is obvious: well-maintained, well-equipped schools.

All communities should be able to take this for granted; a decent learning environment says so much about how we value children. Unfortunately, very few poor children can take this for granted. I believe the Administration's school infrastructure proposal is so necessary, practical, and innovative that I cannot understand any impediment to passage, except for political partisanship.

- Second, we must invest in poor children at least as much as we invest in advantaged children. The disparities between what we spend on poor children and advantaged children are well-documented, as are the acute needs of poor children that justify our greater investment. And I am not talking about "throwing money at our problems" – something no one ever says about more advantaged children. I am talking about

spending more wisely, about investments to support the basic mission of our schools. That also takes good school management – something we need a lot more of.

- Another bedrock need is for safety and order in our schools.

That is perhaps the foremost concern of parents, the public, teachers, and students alike. And let me point out that violence is not the main problem in our schools. Though even one incident is one too many, the fact is that our urban schools – notwithstanding the contrary impression conveyed by the media – are the safest, and I might add, often the warmest, environments our children have. And the vast majority of our urban youngsters – again, notwithstanding, the contrary impression from the media – tough as they seem, are the sweetest kids you'll find. (M&M) Most of them are trying to, and succeeding at, doing the right thing under often desperate circumstances. And that is why sustained attention to safety and discipline is so important.

- And it can be done; it is being done in the majority of urban schools.
- The next fundamental – it's so obvious, but unfortunately, we still need to emphasize it – is high academic standards. And it's not just a matter of expecting more of our kids – they will produce when we do. It's a matter of making those expectations understood, grade by grade; developing rich curricula that embody those standards and an adequate supply of materials to support them. And high standards also involve good tests that are actually based on what students are supposed to be taught, and instant, meticulous help for kids who show signs of falling behind.
- Most children flounder at some point in some subject or skill. Our poorest, most vulnerable youngsters are no different on that score. What's different is they often don't have the luck to be born into families or live in communities that can provide out-of-school support. Middleclass parents will pay for tutoring

if they have to; poor parents cannot. So it's essential that we enable families, communities, and schools to provide that extra support.

- That brings me to the issue of class size. I don't think there's a parent or teacher in America who doesn't passionately want smaller class size so that children can get as much attention and help as they can. Let's face it, smaller class size is one of the greatest appeals of private schools. We have to do far better at making sure that class size for poor children is at least as small as it generally is for more advantaged children.
- But what's definitely attainable now – and what the research most supports – is substantially lowering class size in the early grades, especially for poor children. The achievement benefits for all children are clear, but the benefits to poor children – academic gains that last throughout their school career, – are substantial.

- Despite the talk we sometimes hear of the good old days when classes were huge and kids learned anyway, smaller class size is something that all parents want for their children and a benefit that most advantaged parents do secure for their children. We cannot continue to deny it to our city kids. Here again, government at every level can help – states, federations.
- And that brings me to the topic of teachers...because not only will we need more of them to reduce class size – we need the best of them and there is real danger we won't get them in the future. And, no matter what technology wonders we invent for the future, and technology is important -- good teaching will always be one of the bedrock fundamentals of a good education. Without caring, well-prepared teachers who themselves meet high standards and are continuously given the professional development they need, there is no future to quality education – and it's frightening to think of what would mean for our children.



- This list isn't trendy: good school buildings well-equipped with technology and books; more equal and wise investment – especially in poor neighborhoods; safety and discipline; high academic standards; small class size; and well-qualified teachers. I would add: choice for parents among all public schools, including public charter schools that meet high standards; greater parent involvement; rich early childhood education programs; and after school programs.

But before concluding, I want to talk a bit more about teacher quality. Because our teaching force is “maturing.” We're on our way to replacing two million experienced and skilled teachers – most of them women who didn't have lots of options when they entered teaching.

We're already experiencing serious teacher shortages – especially in places where our children need the best. Salaries aren't competitive, conditions are poor, and the profession isn't treated respectfully – as it is in all the countries we're competing with.

We need to improve teacher education, keep entry standards for the profession high, stop issuing emergency credentials and misassigning teachers to fields they aren't trained for.

Now, we've been making progress. (There is cause for optimism.)

- Academic course-taking, including Advanced Placement courses, is up, achievement is up, and drop-out rates are down – and this includes, most especially, our minority students.
- In New Orleans, the number of students taking the SAT increased 117 % from 1995 – 97.
- In Pittsburgh, the ACT scores of high school seniors last year exceeded the national average.
- In NYC, there has been measurable improvement in reading and mathematics...most markedly, in New York's poorest inner-city schools.

- In Chicago, schools are improving on state criteria at a faster rate than the state as a whole.
- I can recite similar stories about Miami, Boston, Minneapolis, San Francisco...and many, many other urban school districts – all of them dealing with huge problems.
- What's particularly extraordinary is that we've taken our children this far despite America's childhood poverty rate – still the highest in the industrialized world, notwithstanding this period of relatively prosperity.
- Schools can't do it alone – they need the support of business, of government at every level, of parents, of one entire community.

More and more, in cities across the nation where children are doing better, Mayors have become involved in supporting the schools.

More and more businesses are not only supporting individual schools, lending expertise, contributing hardware and software,

mentoring students, -- but lobbying for investment in education – for smaller class sizes in the early grades, high quality school-to-work programs, infrastructure bond issues.

Governors are playing a leading role in pushing for higher state standards.

We need to build on the growing consensus and the progress we're making, and work together across party lines for the sake of our kids. Adult conflict doesn't help the children.

- I believe it is our imperative, our obligation, to stop being distracted by sideshows like vouchers for a few and to focus relentlessly on working together to bring quality proven programs to **all** our children.
- I believe it's irresponsible to ignore the evidence about what works when it gives us the power to make real and immediate changes to improve student learning.
- I believe every school in every city should be a school we'd willingly send our own child to: that's the highest standard.

- The children in our public schools – the overwhelming majority of America’s kids – are great kids. We’re counting on them to build our homes and take care of us when we’re ill, to invent the next generation of high-tech miracles, to teach our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We’re counting on them to keep America great.

And I believe that if adults do their job – our kids will meet the challenge.

Thank you.