

## RESOLUTION 48

# Public Education: A Civil Right, a Shared Responsibility

Submitted by AFT

Referred to the Legislation and Policy Committee

### **A HIGH-QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION**

makes it possible for all students to gain the tools they need to reach their full potential and become responsible citizens, prepared to participate in a strong, inclusive and vibrant democracy. Access to a quality public education is a civil right without which no other rights can be exercised to their fullest. The American labor movement has long supported public schools, recognizing in them the avenue through which our children and all children would be given the tools to achieve the American dream or to build their own dreams. And the American labor movement has always supported efforts that protect and enhance the exercise of our civil rights; its support for public education is in line with that proud tradition.

Delivering public education is not a “sometimes” duty of government, it is a full-time responsibility, funded by taxpayers. The schools that educate fully 90 percent of our country’s students must be supported and challenged at every level to deliver to each student, regardless of his or her ZIP code, a rich, rigorous education. A strong foundation is absolutely essential as students move into the workplace or on to postsecondary education in community colleges, four-year universities, apprenticeships and other adult learning opportunities.

This commitment to a strong public education system has seldom been as important as it is now, when pressures of an economy under stress would lead some to disinvest rather than invest in our schools, from pre-K through college. But

a strong public education system and a strong economy are inherently connected. We must, therefore, support all efforts to invest in our schools and resist efforts to right the economic ship by disinvesting in our children’s futures.

We strongly urge all stakeholders, elected leaders, union leaders and members, teachers, faculty, school and college staff, parents and other community leaders to take on this shared responsibility and support investment in an education agenda that puts a laser-like focus on the needs of students and their communities and that includes:

- A universal program of early childhood education for all children, particularly for disadvantaged students. Every study of how children learn demonstrates the value and effectiveness of early educational intervention.
- Continued support of need-based education programs designed to provide additional educational support for children from poor or disadvantaged backgrounds. Programs such as Title I of ESEA and IDEA have a track record of success and should be expanded and fully funded so that all eligible children can receive appropriate services.
- Support for community schools that focus on student success and that use strategic partnerships to bring together a wide range of services and supports that students and families need. Closing the achievement gap requires addressing the services gap

for all students, but especially our most disadvantaged and low-performing students.

- A considerable increase in funding for federal programs that provide access to postsecondary education for millions of Americans. In particular, we join the Obama administration in supporting major increases in the Pell Grant program.
- Support to bolster the nation's community colleges and increase retention and completion of college coursework at all levels. The Obama administration has proposed a much-needed American Graduation Initiative to achieve these purposes.
- Support for education and training in highly skilled, high-demand fields such as green jobs. Our economy is quickly evolving into new areas and demands job skills that didn't exist a few years ago. Community colleges paired with apprenticeships and other adult learning will be a critical source of the education and training needed for the new jobs being created.

- Improved support for school, college and university capital improvements. The federal stimulus package was a good start, but more is needed. Every child has a right to an education in a safe and healthy school and every school employee has the right to work in a school where teachers can teach and staff can do their jobs properly.
- Efforts to ensure college students receive a well-rounded education. One critical element of this is ensuring that students have the stable instructional support they need to succeed in college by turning around the overreliance on part-time faculty in our higher education institutions. Committed, highly trained and equitably compensated faculty, whether part-time or full-time, are key to helping students meet the needs of our evolving economy.

Our students and the women and men to whom we entrust their education deserve not simply programmatic support. They deserve respect and a joint commitment from all those with a stake in the education of our children that we will be partners with them to ensure that they are prepared to be good stewards of their and our country's future.