

Statements of Support

On The Front Lines of Schools

“The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) knows that teachers choose education as a profession because they want to help students learn, grow and succeed in life. “On the Front Lines” makes an important contribution to what must be a collective and ongoing discussion about how to improve our schools. We agree that all educators must hold high expectations for students in order to ensure they succeed. What the study calls the “expectation gap” is in reality what educators—both new and veteran teachers and principals—know are the numerous barriers to achievement placed between students and educators and their goals. The AT&T Foundation’s new study sheds light on the challenges facing our students and schools, and provides an educator-inspired road map to improving education for all.

“On the Front Lines” demonstrates teachers’ understanding of the multiple factors that contribute to dropout rates, including low parental involvement and support at home; boredom; lack of connection between coursework and the “real world”; excessive absenteeism, personal issues; and lack of early academic preparedness. Moreover, many of the responses given by teachers and principals about needed changes are consistent with elements of the AFT’s platform for education reform: challenging and interesting curriculum aligned to strong academic standards; early reading intervention; reduced class sizes; wraparound social services; and increased participation from parents and mentors.

“On the Front Lines” is a reminder that improving our schools is the responsibility of the entire community. When our teachers have access to needed resources and supports, they are in a better position to educate students. When parents are engaged with their children’s school, the home, as well as the classroom, becomes an environment for learning. When communities ensure that all children have necessary health and social services, students will come to school better prepared to learn. We all have a role to play in building stronger supports and schools for students. Together, we must work to make it happen.”

- **Randi Weingarten**, President, *American Federation of Teachers*

"On the Front Lines of Schools reflects the real frustrations of teachers, many of whom do not have sufficient support to help at-risk students stay in school and succeed. The report reveals complex reasons that students drop-out and the imperative that all of us must work together to take on every aspect of the issue. NEA has launched a 12-point Dropout Action Plan that aligns with many ideas suggested by the report: early intervention, providing training and resources to teachers, community engagement, and calling for a more accurate reporting system for dropout and graduation rates. Our work, along with our ongoing collaboration with committed organizations such as Civic Enterprises, AT&T Foundation, and America's Promise Alliance, is the kind of effort students must have to thrive."

- **Dennis Van Roekel**, President, *National Education Association*

"On the Front Lines of Schools provides a piece of the puzzle that was missing -- the voices of teachers and principals in the high school dropout debate. There are opportunities and challenges and we are serious about both. As the America's Promise Alliance moves forward on more than 100 Dropout Summits in all 50 states over the next few years, this report greatly advances our efforts to engage schools and communities in addressing head-on their dropout challenges."

- **Alma Powell**, Chair, *America's Promise Alliance*

"By hearing the perspectives of teachers and principals, this report puts all of us foursquare on the front lines of education. When joined with The Silent Epidemic's previous survey of high school dropout attitudes, we gain a complete---and challenging---picture of issues faced in thousands of classrooms. The data itself is revealing; what is glaring is the report revealing the vastly differing perspectives between teachers and students. By highlighting these differences in attitude, On the Front Lines of Schools shows policy makers that ending the "achievement gap" largely depends on narrowing the "expectation gap."

- **Bob Wise**, President, *Alliance for Excellent Education*

“This important study shows that we have a long way to go to overcome a lack of understanding about the urgent dropout crisis facing our country, starting with our educators. Until we address the soft bigotry of low expectations that this study reveals, our efforts to address the dropout crisis will not succeed. No Child Left Behind is a powerful catalyst in this effort to hold ourselves accountable for meeting the needs of every child.”

- **Margaret Spellings**, *Former US Secretary of Education*

“On The Front Lines of Schools presents sobering data about how the nation’s dropout problem is perceived in our schools. But educators and policymakers must not ignore its findings or its recommendations because the evidence and the imperative is clear: We can and must do much better for students than we are today. High expectations, challenging and engaging work, and real supports for students offer a path toward more effective and equitable schools.”

- **Andrew J. Rotherham**, *Founder, Education Sector*

“This report provides governors with key information they need to address the high school dropout problem,” says Dane Linn, Director of Education at the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. “Governors need to know that there are high levels of teacher and principal support for high school reform, but that too many educators still think that dropping out is an acceptable option for some students.”

- **Dane Linn**, *National Governors Association*

“On the Front Lines is a powerful reminder that teachers and principals have a vital role in realizing dramatic gains in student achievement and ensuring that all young people graduate from high school ready to succeed in college. But America cannot close our crippling student achievement gap until we address the alarming expectations gap between educators and students. Our work with our partners has shown that even the most disadvantaged young people can succeed academically when they are engaged, challenged, and held to high expectations, and when educators are empowered and supported with the tools they need to do their jobs effectively.”

- **Vicki Phillips**, *The Gates Foundation*

"In the ongoing effort to improve outcomes for all students, particularly those who are at risk of dropping out, it is critical to hear the voices of those who confront these enormous challenges on a daily basis. Their message, as reported in this significant study, challenges us to keep educators actively engaged in the conversation over school reform and its importance for our economic, social and civic future. .NASSP is proud to have played a role in advancing middle level and high school reform through its ongoing Breaking Ranks framework, which promotes changing school culture to serve each student. We applaud the authors of *On the Front Lines of Schools* for supporting recommendations that build the capacity of middle and high schools while holding them accountable for the performance of their students."

- **Gerald N. Tirozzi**, Executive Director, *National Association of Secondary School Principals*

"One the Front Lines of Schools is both a rigorous analysis of teacher and principal perspectives on America's dropout challenge and all to human story about the importance of relationships in our public education system. High expectations for all students embedded in their relationships with teachers, principals and parents are the key to moving a progressive education agenda including expanding learning time, finding and retaining highly effective teachers and principals, and promoting national standards, accountability, and fiscal equity. Understanding the voice of our teachers and principals is yet another step on our national journey to address America's education challenges in the global economy and the lingering achievement gap for minority and low-income students."

- **Louis Soares**, Director, Economic Mobility Program, *Center for American Progress*