

THE Leader


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Educators Take a Stand Against Financing Guns

A group of California teachers is taking to heart the linkage of education and firearms inherent in the wake of the tragedy in Newtown, Conn., and is working to divest teacher funds of firearms-related holdings.

Following a unanimous vote by its members during a public meeting, the California State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS), one of the largest in the United States, began the divestment process. Educators agreed they did not want their pension funds mixed with such companies as The Freedom Group, Smith & Wesson and Sturm, Ruger that make semiautomatic weapons, much like the rifle Adam Lanza used to kill 26 people, including 20 children, at the Sandy Hook Elementary School.

"By doing this, we're showing everyone that we are not being silent about this issue," AFSA Executive Vice President James Dierke said. "The Newtown tragedy was one of several events that have occurred in the past year that brought this decision to the forefront. We as educators are on the front line against gun violence."

Smith & Wesson manufactured the weapon used by James Holmes in the July 2012 rampage in the movie theater in Aurora, Colo. The assault weapon used by Anders Breivik to kill 77 people in Norway in 2011 was made by Sturm, Ruger. Calstrs investments in these companies range from great to miniscule; nonetheless, all of these companies make guns citizens are not allowed to own in California.



Stocks for publicly owned gun makers also took a hit when Cerberus Capital Management, a major private equity firm, decided to sell its stock in The Freedom Group, which is responsible for roughly 50 percent of the sales of military-style semiautomatic weapons in the United States. Cerberus Capital manages an estimated \$20 billion, according to *The Huffington Post*.

The California teachers fund may have shed some light on the issue as cities and states move to reconsider if investing in firearms is an appropriate way to cover retirement costs of their workers.

"By doing what we did [divesting], it definitely gives people something to think about," Dierke said, referring to the domino effect that may occur with other institutional investors.

"The only way to affect change is to show people we're serious about this," Dierke said. "We had to put our money where our mouth is." ■

GEB Holds Inaugural Meeting of 2013

Immediately following the tragedy in Newtown, Conn., AFSA sent a letter to President Obama urging the creation of a national task force on school safety to provide information, best practices and procedures for school leaders to follow.

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Reflections on an Unspeakable Tragedy

In December, our country faced one of its greatest tragedies in recent history when Adam Lanza stormed into Sandy Hook Elementary on the morning of Dec. 14 in Newtown, Conn., and gunned down and killed 20 students and six school staff members. The tragedy shook the nation and forever changed the lives not only of those in the Sandy Hook community, but the lives of all Americans.

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Superstorm Sandy: Serving Above the Call of Duty

After Superstorm Sandy tore through the tri-state region leaving beachfront communities in shambles and killing more than 110 people, thousands remained homeless, trying to figure out how to rebuild—and, in many cases, if they should move.

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AFSA Members Respond About Their Concerns for Public Education

Recently we sent out a survey to AFSA members asking them about their views on the current landscape of public education. The survey provides a snapshot of what members consider the biggest challenges facing educators today.

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Challenging Double-Talk



AFSA President Diann Woodard

The impossible demands being imposed on us as school leaders are reflected in the inconsistent advice that President Obama apparently is getting from his secretary of education. How else can the chasm between the president's rhetoric and the policies of his Department of Education be explained?

"No single person can train all the math and science teachers we'll need to equip our children for the future," the president offered in his inspired inaugural address in January. True enough, but neither has the entire country been able to provide the number of teachers necessary in these disciplines, as several studies have shown. Yet the Department of Education continues to focus its demand for student achievement on science, math and technology courses and the test scores in these disciplines.

In his State of the Union address only two weeks later, the president declared, "Let's also make sure that a high school diploma puts our kids on a path to a good job," citing Germany, a country that focuses on graduating its high school students with the equivalent of a technical degree. Yet his Department of Education has perpetuated Bush administration policies, whose singular focus on STEM inevitably has caused cutbacks in vocational education in our curricula.

By urging calls for action contrary to policies already in practice, for which there are neither sufficient resources nor plans for change, the secretary comes dangerously close to advising the president to engage in double-talk.

The findings of a new national survey on the views of K–12 public school teachers and principals conducted by Harris Interactive indicate school leaders are keenly aware of the contradictory demands being put on us.

The survey, conducted for MetLife Inc., found that "three out of four K–12 public school principals, regardless of the types of schools they work in, believe the job has become 'too complex,' and about a third say they are likely to go into a different occupation within the next five years," owing to "enduring budget problems in schools and declining morale among both teachers and school leaders."

Nearly half of principals surveyed indicated they "feel under great stress several days a week." And job satisfaction among principals has decreased notably, from 68 percent indicating they were "very satisfied" in 2008 to 59 percent saying so in this year's survey.

Principals pointed to parent engagement and implementing the Common Core State Standards as significant challenges, as well as to challenges "outside of their control," including 78 percent who think they lack control of decision making about finances.

Little wonder school leaders are leaving our profession in droves.

While some of the challenges we face result from the stress being dealt with by single parents or the family dysfunction induced by poverty, others result from experiments imposed on us by federal

policymakers in the Bush and Obama administrations—policies, unfortunately, with more in common than not.

In fact, they share one constant. None of them is formulated by school leaders, who are told what to do if we hope to keep our jobs, rather than ever being asked what is likely to work, based on our experience.

The dictionary defines "ignorance" as "a lack of information or knowledge," and if ignorance is bliss, policymakers in the Department of Education must be euphoric by now; for, not long after school leaders are given one untenable "solution" to implement, the administration ponies up a new one that is diametrically opposed to earlier edicts.

And in no case are resources sufficient. Funding gets short shrift, whether the policy is on target, such as increased focus on early childhood education, or wildly off the mark, like the data-driven obsessions of No Child Left Behind.

Instead, states are thrust into competition for scarce resources, only to see the rules of the game for acquiring them trumped by a system of waivers that often has as much to do with election cycles as student performance.

In other instances, sound policy is undermined by rigid and ill-advised demands for implementation. For instance, the Common Core State Standards have merit, but achieving them is undermined by the obsessive demand for standardized tests, which prove excessively time-consuming and are especially ill-suited in

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GEB Holds Inaugural Meeting of 2013

Members Discuss Issue of School Safety with DOE Representative

Immediately following the tragedy in Newtown, Conn., AFSA sent a letter to President Obama urging the creation of a national task force on school safety to provide information, best practices and procedures for school leaders to follow.

To kick off the New Year, the General Executive Board met in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 8 and 9. School safety was a key topic of discussion.

In attendance as a guest speaker during the weekend's events was David Esquith, director of the Office of Safe and Healthy Students for the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), who presented the education-related components of President Obama's "Now Is The Time" (NITT) plan.

The four major goals of the education components, which aim to protect children and communities by reducing gun violence, include:

- ensuring every school and institution of higher learning has a comprehensive emergency management plan;
- creating a safe and positive climate at schools across the country;
- making sure students and young adults get treatment for mental health issues; and
- ensuring schools are safe.

Starting in May 2013, the Department of Education will provide schools with a model for developing and implementing a comprehensive school safety plan that works best for them. While excited to see action from the Obama administration on school safety, several members discussed their concern about whether the NITT components sufficiently address the issues facing educators.



David Esquith, director of the Office of Safe and Healthy Students, speaks with GEB members at their inaugural meeting of the year in Washington, D.C.

Esquith emphasized that while he did not want to diminish the importance or the weight of the tragedy in Newtown, he sees NITT as a step in the right direction. "Is the goal here to come up with things that would prevent Newtown," he asked, "or is the goal here to make our schools safer and more positive, to use this tragedy in a way that moves us forward on a lot of these different fronts?"

In addition to NITT, AFSA is working with the Department of Education to offer members a comprehensive webinar training of school emergency management planning, with an emphasis on school culture and climate, followed by a question-and-answer session.

AFSA was pleased with the DOE's effort to work toward a solution and its effort to include AFSA in the planning process.

Legislative

Because Congress was unable to reach an agreement on deficit reduction, sequestration was triggered on March 1, 2013. This will result in an approximately \$85 billion across-the-board cut for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2013, and approximately \$2.3 billion in cuts to the Department of Education.

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GEB HOLDS INAUGURAL MEETING OF 2013

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To counter Republican demands for deep spending cuts and so-called reforms to Social Security and Medicare, AFSA has signed on to a letter with the entire nondefense discretionary community urging Congress to take a balanced approach to deficit reduction. Sample letters to Congress and letters to the editor were created to help AFSA members communicate sequestration's effects on their schools to local papers and representatives.

The GEB also is working toward creating a list of recommendations for principal training and evaluations, which will be delivered to the Department of Education once finalized.

Scholarships and Endorsements

The committee agreed to extend the scholarship deadline until the end of March 2013, and to designate a scholarship in honor of AFSA Local 113's Dawn Hochsprung, the principal who

gave her life protecting her students at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

The GEB also voted to officially endorse the work of The National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, which offers counseling services for students and schools.

Professional Development Opportunity

The committee discussed plans to offer a two-day training workshop in July for members on negotiations. The workshop will take place in Connecticut. ■

Shutting the Doors on Our Children

The School Closure Epidemic

It is no secret the charter school model is spreading like wildfire across America, and public school students and administrators are getting burned as a result in big cities and small towns alike. School systems that have long gone underfunded or mismanaged are like kindling for the blaze, and the needs of the public school students in those systems largely are being ignored.

Students in Washington, D.C., possibly have been the most affected by this firestorm. Facing a heavy budget crunch and the competition of numerous public charter schools in the district, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Chancellor Kaya Henderson announced plans in January to close 15 public schools in the next year.

Despite evidence that public school closures negatively affect the performance of students of all ages, officials insist the closures are necessary to balance the district's budget. The closing of public schools means students must travel further to school on a daily basis, many times resulting in poor performance from young students.

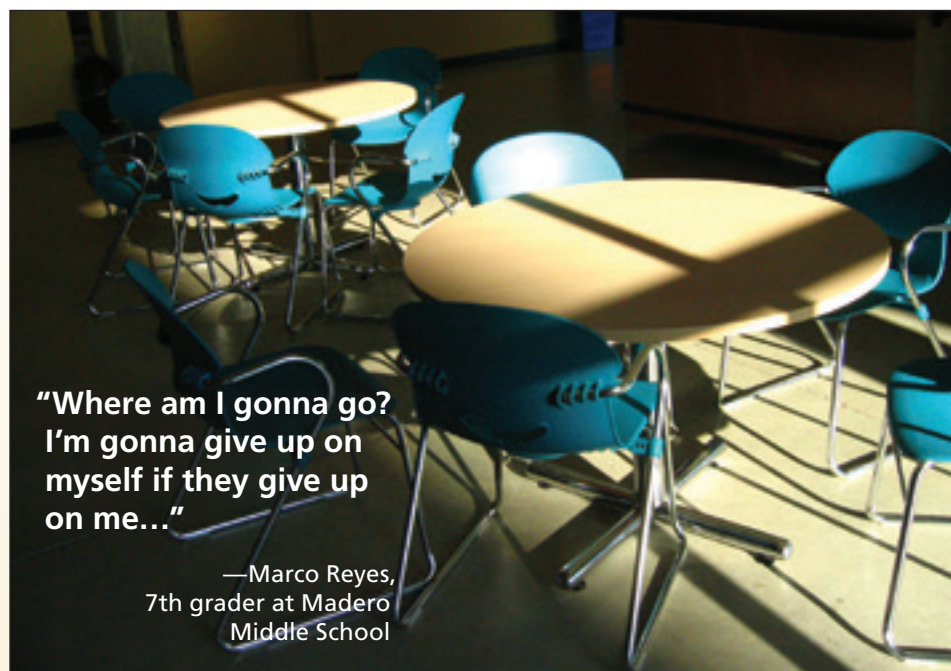
With the influx of numerous charter schools and the low enrollment now suffered by so many underserved and

underfunded public schools around the country, public officials claim they have no choice but to further press upon our nation's public school children.

In D.C., a rising number of charter schools in the district, coupled with policies that encourage families to move to these new schools, has led to low enrollment in many of the district's public school facilities. Rather than endeavor to improve enrollment

at these schools, DCPS has decided to begin closing public schools.

Families in Philadelphia and Chicago are fighting the school closure battle as well. Philadelphia is slated to close several public schools in June, reflecting the national trend with school closures being concentrated in mostly poor areas of the city and with a disproportionately affected population of minority students. While 55 percent of the overall



**"Where am I gonna go?
I'm gonna give up on
myself if they give up
on me..."**

—Marco Reyes,
7th grader at Madero
Middle School

Photo by Benny Lin

student population in Philadelphia is African American, 79 percent of the students in schools projected to close are African American.

In Chicago, similar school closures are being pushed forward behind claims the schools are underutilized and suffer from low enrollment. On Thursday, March 21, Chicago Public School officials announced plans to close 54 elementary schools, displacing about 30,000 students, the majority of whom come from low-income families. In the meantime, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) district has approved the opening of multiple new charter schools.

Chicago Families Outraged

Chicago Public Schools has held several public hearings in recent months to discuss the closures. The public has responded loudly in many instances, with multiple events drawing crowds of more than a thousand. Police were forced to appear and keep the peace at one such hearing on Feb. 6. Many

parents and community members were heard chanting “Justice!” The meeting was in such disarray that at one point Marco Reyes, a 7th grader at Madero Middle School, walked right up to the members of the board and said it was not fair for them to close his school. After he spoke to the board, he asked, “Where am I gonna go? I’m gonna give up on myself if they give up on me...”

Even if school closures actually improved overall public school funding, public school officials still would be ignoring the inequity of taking public education away from a struggling student in order to provide for other learners. Tim Cawley, CPS chief operating officer, has said publicly, “If we think there’s a chance that a building is going to be closed in the next five to 10 years, if we think it’s unlikely it’s going to continue to be a school, we’re not going to invest in that building.”

This is essentially an admission that Chicago Public Schools intends to let struggling schools drown instead of

investing in life preservers. This sort of thinking violates everything AFSA educators believe in.

Strong Opposition

AFSA President Diann Woodard expressed her fervent opposition to this ideology. “The idea that we should close schools instead of helping them to improve the quality of the education that they provide their students is appalling. The very fundamental principle of public education is that we should provide an equal opportunity to learn to all students regardless of their race or how much their family can afford.

“I think it should be obvious to all persons genuinely interested in improving public education that shutting down schools in need is not the answer,” she said. “We have to provide funding to struggling schools, as well as ensure that quality teachers and administrators are not turned out when their students need them most.”

AFSA has called on public education officials to address the funding disparities in cities like Chicago and Washington, D.C., for years. Those calls largely have been sidestepped or ignored. Now that the budget crunch is coming down harder than ever, we cannot allow the toll to be taken out on our students.

This trend of closing schools to alleviate budget pressures is unjust, and AFSA educators cannot allow it to stand. ■

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—AFSA President Diann Woodard

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learning environments in which chronic underachievement, ESL issues and poverty are prevalent.

Where do the contradictory demands being put on school leaders leave us, other than between a rock and a hard place? As our success in the election showed, it calls on us to exercise our role as community leaders in organizing opposition to ill-informed policies, whether they are those of Mitt Romney

or the Obama administration’s secretary of education.

Our only recourse, it would appear—other than abandoning the profession to which we’ve devoted our professional lives—is to rally parents and the communities we serve to demand a voice for school leaders in shaping policies that will give all children a reasonable opportunity to succeed, and will give us the

practical tools and financial resources to achieve what is demanded of us.

That’s what Karen Lewis did in order to carry the day in the Chicago teachers’ strike. She took the fight outside the classrooms and into the community. And as daunting as it may seem to confront that challenge, the ignorance of federal policymakers has left us little choice in the matter. ■

Concerns Loom Over Evaluation Pilots in New Jersey

A New Jersey teacher and principal evaluation system that initially was piloted in the 2011–2012 school year has expanded to include additional teachers and principals through 2013, and will expand to include all state school districts in 2014.

Based on recommendations released in a March 2011 report from the New Jersey Educator Effectiveness Task Force established by GOP Gov. Chris Christie, the new evaluation system claims to provide meaningful, actionable feedback to educators and district leaders as they strive to help all students succeed.

The 2012–2013 expansions included 12 new districts and 14 principal evaluation districts, designed to help teachers and principals become more effective.

Many educators remain highly skeptical. “There is a general concern among educators that the evaluations are not being conducted fairly,” AFSA Regional Vice President and President of the

New Jersey State Federation of School Administrators, Dr. Leonard Pugliese said. “Now that [evaluations] can lead to expedited tenure charges, the stakes become much higher.”

Christie’s task force began by recommending an evaluation system based on measures of teacher effectiveness broken down into two categories: student achievement and teacher practice. Each category is weighted 50 percent, but 70 to 90 percent of the student achievement portion is based on student improvement on state standardized tests.

Emphasis on Standardized Tests

“The evaluations differ from previous evaluations because they add student achievement in as part of the assessment process,” Pugliese said. “There is still a large emphasis on standardized tests.”

In a Sept. 1, 2011, *Huffington Post* article, Associate Director of Research and Economic Services for the New Jersey Education Association Rosemary Knab, Ph.D., said the new evaluation program still places too heavy an emphasis on standardized tests, and said “these tests were never meant to be used in this way.”

In the same *Huffington Post* article, Manchester Township (N.J.) Board of Education President Donald Webster Jr. described the tests as “poorly designed” and said “They neither provide districts with a true picture of where our students stand academically nor do they give us information as to where they are deficient.”

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—Dr. Leonard Pugliese
AFSA regional vice president and
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—Donald Webster Jr.
Manchester Township Board of
Education president

In the end, this is only a pilot program meant for revisions. Teachers and administrators will have the opportunity to work together and develop an evaluation system that better informs instruction, improves student learning and that addresses the professional development needs of educators.

“Both boards of education and educator groups have many questions regarding the implementation of the new law,” Pugliese said. “As with any new and radical change in the law, many of the critical questions will be answered along the way.” ■

New Study Finds Test Scores Not a Valuable Way to Evaluate Teachers

Placing more than 50 percent weight on test scores is not a reliable way to determine a teacher's effectiveness, according to the final installment of the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) study released in January 2013.

Over a three-year period, the MET project gathered 3,000 volunteers, all teachers, across seven districts in the United States, from Denver to Dallas to Hillsborough County, Fla. With a \$45 million budget, the project set out to find the best way to evaluate a teacher's effectiveness. The project was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as part of an ongoing effort to give teachers the tools they need to improve student achievement in public schools across the United States.

The MET Project recognized that current measurement tools for teacher effectiveness do not reflect the complexity of each teacher's unique situation, but saw a three-pronged approach using peer observations, standardized test results and student perception surveys as a viable option for measuring teacher success in the classroom and for giving school leaders a better understanding of a teacher's impact.

The study found that basing more than half of a teacher's evaluation on test scores resulted in volatile predictions, and that the optimal weight for test scores in a teacher's evaluation is one-third to one-half.

The study also found that student surveys and classroom observations are equally valuable in evaluating a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom, and this method proved to be more reliable than only considering a teacher's level of education and years in the classroom.

Weighting all three measures equally produced the most reliable results in predicting student gains from year to year, whereas giving teachers incentives to narrowly focus on one aspect of their evaluation motivated negative methods, such as teaching to the test.

This study provides a good first step for moving away from seeing our students as test scores and focusing our concerns on how to successfully teach them through engaging methods such as project-based learning. Highlighting the pitfalls in evaluating teachers and administrators based on test scores is important, but there also needs to be a focus on improving professional development opportunities and making sure our evaluation processes reflect the unique environments of our educators. As there is no standard way to learn, there is not a uniformly correct way to assess our nation's schools. Until this is fully recognized, we cannot successfully evaluate our students or our educators. ■



Reflections on an Unspeakable Tragedy

In December, our country faced one of its greatest tragedies in recent history when Adam Lanza stormed into Sandy Hook Elementary on the morning of Dec. 14 in Newtown, Conn., and gunned down and killed 20 students and six school staff members. The tragedy shook the nation and forever changed the lives not only of those in the Sandy Hook community, but the lives of all Americans.

In this edition of our newsletter, we reached out to our members in Newtown asking them to share their thoughts and feelings about what the events that day mean for all of us moving forward. Paul Stringer, vice president of the Connecticut Federation of School Administrators, and Anthony Salvatore, president of the Newtown Association of School Administrators, Local 113, shared their experiences leading to and following the tragedy.

'Rest in Peace, My Friend'

As I emerged from a conference I had attended, I learned of the events of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. Colleagues mentioned that children were among those killed; numbness and disbelief overwhelmed me—This cannot be happening! The killing of children! No, it can't be happening! Now, two months later, I can wholeheartedly agree with one of the students who managed to escape the horrors of that day, who said, "Evil visited my school today."

The Connecticut Federation of School Administrators (CFSA) had the honor of attending the funeral for our member Dawn Hochsprung, the Sandy Hook principal who gave her life protecting her children and staff. Having arrived early, I was allowed to enter the funeral home before the family arrived. As families entered, I was privy to their endearing comments about their mother, sister, aunt, etc. My heart endured a roller coaster of emotions. There were times that I smiled and there were times that I had to hold in the tears. The honor of participating in the "homecoming" of a colleague is and will remain dear to me. Closing my eyes, I can envision Dawn sitting

down with all 20 of her students, going over the lessons for the day. Rest in peace, my friend!

—Paul Stringer

'This Event Rocked Humanity'

I wear many hats in Newtown—middle school assistant principal, president of the Newtown Association of School Administrators, Local 113, District Safe School Climate coordinator, Building Safe School Climate specialist, Newtown Prevention Council member, Newtown Rotary Club member—to name a few.

Last year, I was the assistant principal at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Due to a budget cut, I moved back to the middle school where I began 14 years ago in Newtown. It seemed natural to work with Dawn Hochsprung at Sandy Hook because she had been my assigned mentor when I began in Newtown in 1999. That's how we first met. Then, three years ago she was hired as principal at Sandy Hook Elementary School and we renewed our professional friendship. Her first words to me about my responsibility at Sandy Hook Elementary School went something

like, "Now, remember, your main job is to keep me out of trouble and to tell me when I should be quiet or stop me from doing something that I shouldn't; just give me a sign or something." And we laughed, because both of us knew that Dawn would do what she wanted, when she wanted, especially if it was good for kids.

I find it difficult to talk about the students and staff who were killed that day, partly because I find my mind wandering in so many different directions, so often, every day. I forget simple things like why I walked into a room or where I put a file. The other day I opened a file and saw Sandy Hook School Psychologist Mary Sherlach's name on it as well as Anne Marie Murphy's name. I sobbed uncontrollably for a few minutes behind closed doors and then resumed my work. I just received an e-mail from a Sandy Hook parent asking me for a picture of her 4th grade daughter and Dawn that I took at last year's Sock Hop fundraiser. I, of course, said I would send it to her but did not say how hard it would be for me to look through the pictures of that event knowing that many, many pictures of the victims also would be there. But, I will do it.

A colleague asked me for a picture from last year when Dawn and I went to every classroom with Dawn dressed up as an alien and me dressed up as an astronaut to support the importance of reading. It was an important picture, so I did it. I replay the daily conversations I had with Mary Sherlach as we did parent pick-up duty at the end of the day. Mary talked about retiring this year with her husband, and we would share pictures of our ideal retirement setting. Dawn and I also shared pictures and stories of retirement days—not that we didn't love our job, but it provided some respite from the daily, hectic school day we all know and love. It was nice to think about sitting on a porch in a rocking chair, sipping a refreshing beverage while overlooking the water for a few minutes of silence and reflection before answering the phone ring from a parent with a question. Life goes on.

This event rocked humanity around the world at its core. The outpouring of love, compassion and support has in itself been overwhelming. And I guess that was its purpose—to overwhelm the pain of such a loss of life and potential of so many children and adults.

Even after two months, which seem like two days, the scenario still plays over and over again in my head, from the first moment I heard about the shooting and our school went into lockdown. Reading the testimony this morning in the newspaper from yesterday's Senate hearing on gun control brings it all rushing back again. Reading the descriptions shared by Dr. William Begg from Danbury Hospital of the impact the bullets had on the young bodies is sobering, especially when he noted that everyone had at least three to as many as 11 bullets strike their bodies, leaving no chance for survival. Every day, there is a reminder on television, in the newspaper, on the Internet—everywhere. And my conversation with Columbine Principal Frank DeAngelis suggests it will continue for many years to come. He should know, because even after 14 years, he still relives the experience. I found it helpful to speak with him and others who shared similar experiences. As Frank said to me: "It's a different conversation than with someone who has not gone through a similar experience." And he was right. There are many things that don't need to be said because we know what we mean.

Some people say we don't have enough silence in our lives to understand who we are and what we need. These days, I relish silence. It has made me a better listener to myself and to others. We have become too busy and noisy and have no sense of who we are as individual human beings and what our place is in this world. When noise replaces silence, then we have a hard time thinking.

Sandy Hook Elementary School is a place where children and adults engage in finding out who they are and the potential they have for making their mark in this world. They also begin to understand they always have choices in their lives and loving support around them. I hope that humanity adopts the same understanding of how we all need to support each other every day, because there are no guarantees there will be a tomorrow, even without experiencing a horrific tragedy. The silence was shattered that day. Thinking was displaced by reacting; thriving was displaced by surviving; pain will be replaced by resilience.

My haunting question is, "Will we learn anything as a human race from this tragedy?"

—Dr. Anthony Salvatore

Photos courtesy of Tony Salvatore



During happier times at Sandy Hook, Dawn Hochsprung's dedication to her students shined as she visited classrooms dressed up with Tony Salvatore to get students excited about reading.

Superstorm Sandy

Serving Above the Call of Duty

Anne Silverstein and Yuridia Peña

After Superstorm Sandy tore through the tri-state region leaving beachfront communities in shambles and killing more than 110 people, thousands remained homeless, trying to figure out how to rebuild—and, in many cases, if they should move.

Michael Ranieri, principal of PS 191 in Floral Park, lives in a second-floor apartment in Seaford, N.Y., on a canal, and was evacuated on Oct. 28 by police after water poured into the building, filling the basement and the first floor. When he returned, he said, “It looked like a bomb went off.” Oil tanks, boats, parts of houses lay strewn in the streets. He lost about \$10,000 worth of possessions—clothing, furniture, luggage and sporting equipment—stored in the basement. “I feel lucky even though I am without a place to live,” he wrote to the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators, CSA Local 1, New York, in the days after the storm... “I know others have suffered worse than I.”

In the days following the storm, administrators and school staff members all around the city shifted into high gear. Catherine Morrissey and Erica Griffith-Ogis, two assistant principals in the New York City area and CSA members, were named site managers within hours of their arrival at Franklin D. Roosevelt High School in Bensonhurst simply because neither of them balked at the responsibility. They just kept calling the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and any other city agency they could find. With the help of three other volunteers and the school’s custodial staff, they unloaded one of three tractor-trailers that had arrived filled with cots, water, diapers and other supplies. It was their initiation into chaos, said Morrissey, and it was up to them to create order.

Heroic Leadership

In 12 days, they helped hundreds of people, many of whom arrived after escaping their homes with little more than the wet clothing on their backs. Some arrived without their medication, others arrived with newborn babies. All were hungry, cold and despairing. Many spoke little English and Morrissey and Griffith-Ogis searched for volunteers or evacuees who could translate and help them determine what was needed.

“They came from Coney Island, Brighton, Breezy, Seagate, the Rockaways, Staten Island, Gerritsen Beach,” Morrissey said. “They found their way there in different ways. We had heard about someone who was using boats to get people out—it was unbelievable.”

Reflecting on their circumstances, Griffith-Ogis noted that neither she nor Morrissey had ever run a shelter before, and she said it was life-changing. “Catherine and I were a phenomenal team...It was an experience I will treasure for life...I would say that I was honored to have been in that position, to help the city the way we did,” she said.

Despite the storm’s destruction, only 10 schools remained closed three weeks after the storm, most of them in the Rockaways. When PS/MS 42 became one of the first schools in Rockaway Beach to re-open, only about 50 percent of the students returned. The majority of the school’s population had experienced massive devastation to their homes, forcing them to leave.

Ongoing Aid

The students who remained in Rockaway Beach were in desperate need of help. Principal Patricia Finn of PS/MS 42 recalled a student who was



Photos courtesy of Council of School Supervisors and Administrators, Local 1

unable to return to school because he had no clothing. This is when the school staff stepped into action, starting with a teacher who asked for donations of food, clothing and supplies on her Facebook page. Within days, the school received \$20,000 worth of food and supplies from Donald Trump Jr., which included 80 boxes of blankets and 2,000 bags of toiletries, which were shared with IS 53. Donations also included 26 trays of pasta and broccoli, and rice and peas.

Finn said the boy who needed clothing was so moved by all the help he received that he and his family volunteered to help others in the following days and the school became a hub of relief efforts. “The entire free world started calling me,” she said. “Everyone has been very supportive and helpful,” said Finn, a Far Rockaway resident herself who was not severely affected by the wrath of Sandy.

The actions of Finn, Morrissey and Griffith-Ogis are just a few examples of the many ways administrators go above and beyond the call of duty. Superstorm Sandy devastated these communities, but the leadership of its educators is contributing to the rebuilding efforts in these areas. ■

School Voucher Programs Create Inequality

The storyline of legislatures pushing for privatization in education is familiar. Instead of focusing federal support efforts on ensuring all students receive equal opportunities for a quality education, legislatures choose to funnel support into private schools, essentially forcing taxpayers to support two school systems instead of one.

While legislatures claim these measures are meant to “improve” schools, low-income students pay the price, receiving financial help that covers only half or partial tuition to schools that often are far away from their homes. This increases the challenges facing these students and widens the opportunity gap that plagues our education system. While legislatures continue to rally around vouchers, evidence continues to mount showing voucher systems not only are unfair, but short-sighted and ineffective.

A recent joint study from the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution and the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University revealed voucher programs did not translate into higher rates of success for students anywhere. In New York, school vouchers made no statistical impact in numbers of students attending college; Wisconsin public school students are outperforming their voucher recipient peers; and New Orleans’ voucher students are learning things that simply are inaccurate.

The study followed college-going behavior through 2011 of students who had received school vouchers for first through fifth grade in the late 1990s. Results found that the offer of a voucher only increases college enrollment by an estimated 0.6 percentage points. The New York School Choice Scholarships Foundation offered 1,000 scholarships to low-income families with non-charter or privately schooled elementary-age

children. The scholarships were worth up to \$1,400 and were good for three years. However, the average tuition in New York was higher than the value of the scholarships, and the difference in cost was placed on the family. The story is much the same in Milwaukee and New Orleans.

“Like ‘right-to-work’ laws that promise more jobs and a better economy—but that actually bring down wages and make working conditions worse—school ‘reform’ schemes are built on a lie...the big lie behind school reform is that putting public money into private education plans improves education, especially for poor students,” writes Ruth Conniff in her February 2013 article in *The Progressive* titled “Flunking School Reform,” in which she discussed upcoming legislation in Wisconsin in comparison with other voucher programs across the United States.

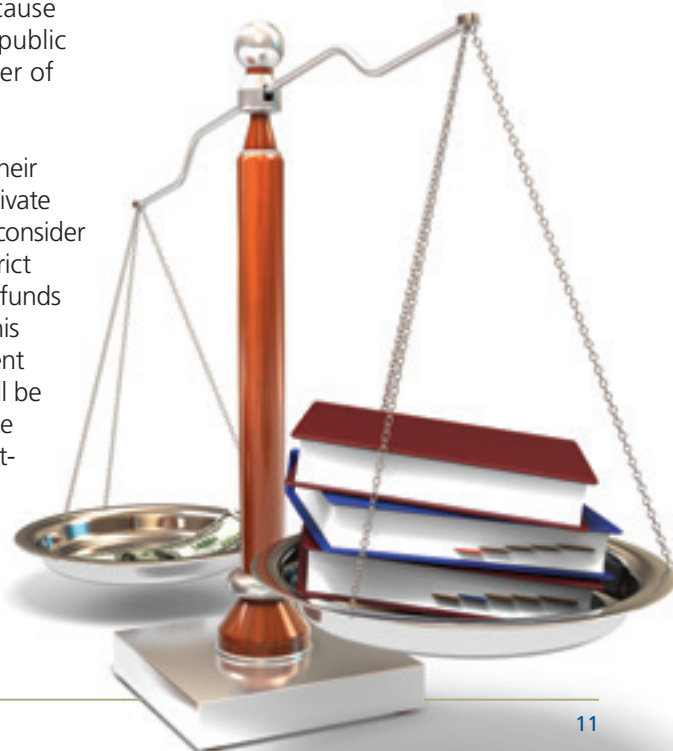
Aona Jefferson, president of the Council of School Officers and AFSA Local 4 in Washington, D.C., writes in an e-mail to AFSA discussing school vouchers: “They are a detriment to public education in that they cause a reduction to the funding of public schools by reducing the number of students attending.”

In Wisconsin, Republicans and their sponsors plan to extend their private school voucher program and reconsider the idea of a charter school district that would pump public school funds into an online charter school. This means money that could be spent improving the public schools will be redirected into private and online charter schools. Instead of investing more money into kids’ futures in public schools, this plan invests less money in the public school system. Students in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

performed more poorly than their public school cohorts on standardized reading and math tests. While private and charter school students did score higher than public school students in reading, science and social studies, the public school students did better in math and language arts, according to the 2011 test scores. The school choice program was implemented to help improve results for poor city children in failing public schools by allowing them to attend higher-performing private schools with publicly funded vouchers.

New Orleans faces a different problem, with unaccountable schools receiving voucher students. The ridiculous curriculum of some of these schools includes “dragons were real, the Ku Klux Klan was a charitable organization, and creationism is science,” Conniff writes. Not only are these ideas out of line with traditional education, these schools are partially funded by taxpayer dollars.

The arguments supporting a school voucher program mostly involve wording such as “the public schools are terrible,” “my child can receive a better education elsewhere” and “there are better resources at a charter or private school.” However, we could have the same resources, discipline and perceived quality of education if we simply invested the same amount of time, commitment and money into our public schools. ■



ARE YOU PREPARED?

Common Core Standards Coming

In 2009, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Chief Council of State School Officers (CCSSO) initiated the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in an effort to better prepare students for higher education and professional careers.

Today, 45 states and the District of Columbia have accepted and begun implementing these new educational guidelines. The next step comes in 2014–2015, when the current standardized tests will be replaced with two new assessments determining whether educators and students are meeting the goals laid out by the Common Core.

"These new standards are an organized and measurable approach where there is common understanding," AFSA Executive Vice President James Dierke said.

Some are concerned we are headed down the same path of creating yet another system that focuses curriculum around testing instead of content, but thousands of schools across the country see Common Core State Standards as a clean slate—an opportunity to clear up the mess standardized testing has created in our classrooms.

"We needed to cut down on standardized testing," Dierke said. "We're testing kids too much and this is a solid foundation to build off of."

While the majority of schools still are in the planning process, some already are implementing the standards to prepare for the new tests, which Dierke sees as a key element to ensuring the success of CCSS.

"Everyone needs to get adjusted to these new standards," Dierke said. "It takes time and we need to make sure people are implementing them correctly."

Two states leading the country in early implementation are Kentucky and West Virginia, which had every district commit to the standards in 2011. Following their commitment, the schools gradually introduced the standards to their kindergarten classrooms, with plans to have all schools and grades fully immersed in the standards by the 2014–2015 school year. By implementing these new concepts early on, these states hope the transition to the new assessments will be much easier on students.

The new standards also will present a challenge for educators because

they focus on fewer concepts in much greater depth. West Virginia will be using project-based learning (PBL) to implement the new standards, which teaches subjects through real-world applications and challenges educators to get more creative not only in their lesson plans, but in the assessment of their students. PBL assessments steer away from standardized tests and push students to demonstrate their knowledge in more creative ways.

To prepare educators in Kentucky, teachers were asked to attend workshops to help them understand the standards and then translate them into tangible learning objectives. Lesson plans and learning exercises based on the Common Core were created and shared among districts and schools.

With strong support from the Obama administration and the federal government, the Common Core provides an opportunity to tie up the loose ends of academic standards that were scattered across states for years. With these standards united, our students will be better equipped to compete in the competitive global economy. ■

Woodard and Spina Meet with Representatives from the Department of Education

Ending 2012 on a productive note, AFSA President Diann Woodard and Government Affairs Director Nick Spina met with Eric Waldo and Tyra Mariani, both deputy chiefs of staff for

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. The meeting was both a follow-up to the October 2012 AFSA General Executive Board meeting, where Eric Waldo met with AFSA's leadership,

and an opportunity to discuss other key education issues.

During the meeting, Woodard emphasized the importance of meaningful input and involvement from organized principals when developing education policy, especially regarding evaluation systems and training programs for school leaders. Waldo and Mariani stated the Department of Education is making an effort to involve all

stakeholders when considering education policy, and expressed interest in AFSA's education priorities and recommendations for principal evaluation and training. AFSA is finalizing recommendations for these areas.

Woodard also discussed the importance of:

- a collaborative effort among all stakeholders, including teachers,

parents, students, principals and superintendents;

- preparing and training new leaders to fill the positions of retiring administrators; and
- succession planning to ensure the well-being of schools after principals leave or retire.

Woodard urged the Department of Education to play a more active

oversight role in monitoring how states spend federal education dollars and to hold them accountable for providing supports to schools.

AFSA thinks education policy—and public education—will be stronger and more effective through increased collaboration between school leaders and the department. ■

Sequestration Continues to Threaten Education Funding

At the end of last year, Congress passed the American Taxpayer Relief Act, H.R. 8, to avoid going over the “fiscal cliff,” while also delaying sequestration until March 1, 2013, and adjusting tax policy and rates to raise approximately \$620 billion toward deficit reduction over 10 years.

Because Congress was unable to reach an agreement to reduce the federal deficit, sequestration took effect on March 1. According to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), sequestration will require a 5.0 percent reduction in non-exempt defense discretionary funding for the remainder of Fiscal Year (FY) 2013. For the Department of Education, this will result in a total cut of approximately \$2.278 billion, the largest cuts to education in our nation's history. For local school districts, especially the largest districts, this could mean millions of dollars in lost revenue.

Meanwhile, Congress agreed to suspend the nation's \$16.4 trillion debt ceiling until May 19. The measure requires the House and Senate to pass an FY 2014 budget by April 15 or their salaries will be withheld until they pass a budget. In addition, the continuing resolution, which currently funds the federal government, is set to expire March 27, 2013; both the House and Senate are expected to release their FY 2014 budget plans shortly.

There were deep policy divisions among members of Congress as to how to avert the automatic spending cuts. In early February, President Obama called on Congress to delay the pending

sequestration cuts though a balanced plan of revenues, entitlement reforms and other spending cuts. The president also said Congress should delay the sequestration for several months if reaching an agreement on a larger package was not possible. Republicans immediately rejected the idea of any increased revenue, and supported more spending cuts and entitlement reforms to reduce the deficit.

In February, AFSA signed on to a letter with the “nondefense discretionary” (NDD) community calling on Congress to take a balanced approach to deficit reduction that does not make further cuts to discretionary programs, which already have been cut by \$1.5 trillion while revenues have contributed only \$600 billion.

In addition, AFSA sent out Action Alerts providing members with sample letters to the editor and sample letters for their members of Congress that can be personalized to demonstrate the harmful impact of the cuts on their school, community and students. AFSA will be closely monitoring the debate over sequestration, the CR and the FY 14 budget proposals, and will continue fighting to protect education funding. ■



AFSA Members Respond About Their Concerns for Public Education

Spring Survey Results

Recently we sent out a survey to AFSA members asking them about their views on the current landscape of public education. The survey provides a snapshot of what members consider the biggest challenges facing educators today.

When asked about U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, more than 49 percent of the respondents said they felt negative or very negative about Duncan's reappointment.

The responses showed dissatisfaction with Duncan's push toward charter schools. One respondent commented, "He is an advocate for privatization, not public education....He focuses on criticizing rather than highlighting what great teachers and administrators do so that it can be replicated."

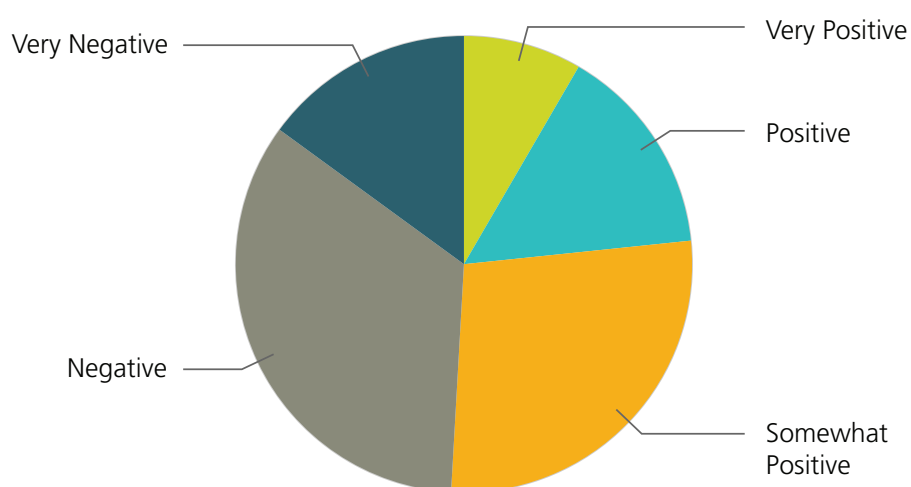
Principal and teacher evaluations, standardized tests, and the opportunity gap were selected by respondents as the top three concerns facing public education. Other issues submitted

included sufficient teacher preparation opportunities, the privatization of schools, adequate support for ELL and special needs students, and the overall funding of public education. Members also expressed concern about the challenge of holding on to quality teachers.

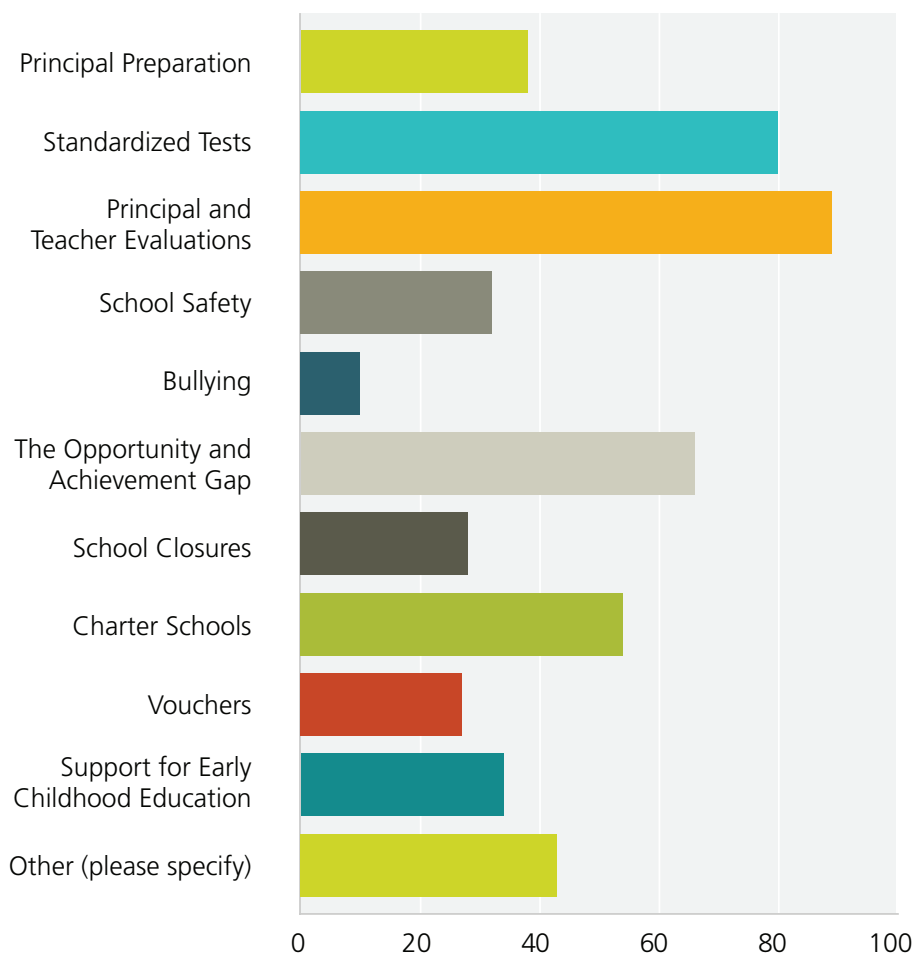
Ensuring schools serving disadvantaged students have adequate resources was the No. 1 issue selected by members when asked what they were most concerned about regarding the reauthorization of ESEA. Parental engagement came in as the issue of least concern, with only 13 percent of survey takers listing it as a top issue.

Stay tuned for more surveys! ■

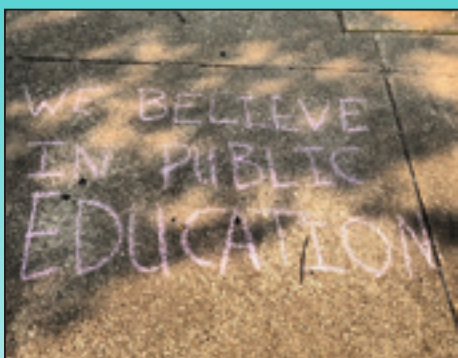
How do you feel about the reappointment of Secretary Arne Duncan?



What do you consider to be the biggest challenges facing public education? Please select your top three concerns:



AFSA Submits Letter to 113th Congress Outlining Education Policy Priorities



Legislation on education policy often relies on teacher and superintendent input while failing to acknowledge the voice of the principals implementing these policies in our schools. Leading up to President Obama's inauguration, in an

effort to make our voices heard as school leaders, AFSA drafted and sent a letter to the 113th Congress discussing the following education priorities moving forward:

- Improving support for school leaders through better professional development opportunities and increased time for implementing strategies to avoid unrealistic turnaround timeframes that accomplish nothing.
- Creating a national task force on school safety to ensure school leaders and teachers have the federal resources they need to be sufficiently trained and the security they need to keep students and faculty safe.
- Reauthorizing No Child Left Behind with input from school leaders to

create evaluations that fairly and accurately assess educators using multiple indicators for success and clearly defined leadership rubrics.

- Investing in early childhood education to increase literacy and high school graduation rates and decrease the opportunity and achievement gap.

Our input and insight as school leaders will help guide the way to effective legislation and meaningful change in our nation's education system.

Check out the full letter online at AFSAAdmin.org/letter_to_congress. ■



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UPCOMING EVENTS

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|-------------|--|
| April 9–10 | AFL-CIO Northeast Region Conference,
Sheraton Philadelphia Downtown Hotel |
| April 19–21 | AFSA General Executive Board Meeting, Washington, D.C. |
| April 20 | NASSP Annual Conference, San Diego |
| July 11–13 | NAESP National Conference, Baltimore |
| July 24–25 | AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting,
AFL-CIO Headquarters, Washington, D.C. |
| Sept. 12 | AFL-CIO Quadrennial Convention, Los Angeles |

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