

THE Center for Education Reform



1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 204 • Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202-822-9000
Fax 202-822-5077

MEMORANDUM

TO: Education Reporters
FROM: Lissette S. Bishins, Director of Communications
RE: Questions to ask the NEA and the AFT
DATE: June 27, 2000

This weekend, as we celebrate the anniversary of our nation's independence the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) will both convene. The NEA will hold its annual convention in Chicago, Illinois July 1-6, 2000 and the AFT will hold its annual convention in Philadelphia, PA July 3-7, 2000. During these conventions reporters will no doubt be faced with a barrage of interesting but often competing view points from which to craft a story.

The Center for Education Reform is once again pleased to provide you with some simple tools that will help you determine whether or not the actions of the unions are consistent with their expressed views and stated objectives. What follows are nine questions that you should ask either group, six questions specifically for the NEA and two questions for the AFT. We hope these questions will assist you in crafting your reports on the changing face of education.

The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization founded in 1993 to provide support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others who are working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For further information, please call (202) 822-9000 or visit our website at www.edreform.com.

1. What is your response to presidential candidates who support increasing the number of charter schools?
2. Teacher strikes are bad for kids. Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Why or why not?
3. Currently, there are failing public schools and there are children consigned to them. There are many public school teachers who send their children to private school and many politicians whom you support who make the same choice. Do you see a contradiction in your opposition to school choice?
4. Should parents and the public use test results to evaluate, in large part, teachers and schools year to year? Does a teacher matter to the education of a child?
5. There has been dramatic growth in non-union alternative education associations. Today more than 250,000 teachers belong to an association. Is this development healthy and how do you square their growth with your own membership?
6. What is to be done with students who haven't learned the basics, with teachers who cannot teach the basics, with school administrators who manage failing schools?
7. Of your total membership, how many (and what percentage) are teachers and how many (and what percentage) are non-educator school personnel?
8. Teachers recognize that education degrees are often a barrier to attracting quality teachers into the classroom. Is your organization prepared to use its political muscle to make certification requirements more flexible so that qualified professionals can obtain alternative certification and join your ranks?
9. You argue that teachers make less money than engineers and computer scientists. Engineers and computer scientists who cannot do the job are usually let go while the successful ones earn high salaries. This is not the case with teachers. Are you willing to exchange collective bargaining agreements for high pay based on performance?

Six Questions for the
National Education Association (NEA)

1. The NEA has disclosed that, this year, it has a budget of \$4.9 million to spend on "organizational partnerships with political parties, campaign committees and political organizations." How often and in what manner is this political activity reported to your two million members?

2. In light of all the talk about campaign finance reform, will the recent disclosure of the extent of the NEA's political involvement in any way undermine public perception of the NEA's sincerity and integrity with regard to education reform?
3. Your organization opposes high-stakes testing that holds individual students, teachers, and schools accountable. What is the point of testing if there are neither rewards for success nor penalties for failure?
4. The NEA proposes testing college students before they enter education programs, but not after they complete the programs. Because education programs vary so much in terms of content and quality, shouldn't prospective teachers be tested again after they complete these programs and before they begin teaching?
5. According to the NEA, "The existence of chronically low-performing schools means that the district, state and national stakeholders are not meeting the needs of significant numbers of children." Pennsylvania agrees and this year enacted a law that allows states to remove failing teachers from their perch in low-performing schools. The state affiliate PSEA opposed this bill. What do you say to them if the NEA is genuinely concerned about failing schools?
6. The NEA has characterized private businesses wanting to get involved in schools as "ideologues and profiteers." How do these management companies differ from textbook publishers, manufacturers of school supplies, bus companies, and even tutoring firms that contract with schools to deliver goods and services?

Two Questions for the
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

1. The AFT describes voucher programs as failed experiments. Wisconsin's independent, non-partisan Legislative Audit Bureau and other research studies have found that voucher programs serve primarily low-income, minorities who are more satisfied with their child's new school, inspire teachers in traditional public school to introduce innovative programs in the classroom, and lead to improved test scores. Where is the failure?
2. The AFT claims that "financial incentive plans," such as merit pay, that tie teacher pay to student performance lead to "the possibility of educators' cheating or using other tricks to raise test scores." What evidence do you have to support that claim?