

## Resolution 35

### RECLAIMING THE PROMISE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

HIGH-QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION is an economic necessity, an anchor of democracy, a moral imperative and a fundamental civil right. Without the foundation a strong education provides, our other rights can never be fully realized. We believe in and stand ready to fight for public education because it is the means by which we help all children dream their dreams and achieve them.

All children—those who have abundant advantages, and those for whom every day is a struggle; those who worry about getting into a good college, and those who worry about their parents getting deported—deserve the opportunity to succeed. The people who work in schools—teachers, support staff, administrators—help students build lives of great purpose and potential by instilling essential knowledge and skills, including critical reasoning, problem-solving and the ability to work with others, and by promoting civic participation.

We are at a critical moment when we must reclaim the promise of public education—not as it is today or was in the past, but what public education can and should be if we are to fulfill our collective obligation to help all children succeed. Americans across the country are waking up to the fact that decades of top-down edicts, mass school closures, privatization, attacks on collective bargaining, high-stakes student testing with sanctions instead of support for teachers, and other “market-oriented” education experiments haven’t moved the needle—at least not in the right direction.

Reclaiming the promise of public education means fighting to ensure that neighborhood schools are safe, welcoming places for teaching and learning—and for the students, families and people who work

there. Reclaiming the promise means ensuring that teachers are well-prepared, supported, and given time to collaborate with their colleagues. Reclaiming the promise means enabling educators to teach an engaging curriculum that includes art and music and the sciences. Reclaiming the promise means making sure that kids have access to wraparound services that meet their emotional, social and health needs. We need to ensure that schools are accessible to families, and that parents are welcomed and supported as partners in the education of their children. Finally, we need to ensure that we keep the “public” in public education, and support schools as fundamental components of our communities’ infrastructure.

Taken together, these actions reflect our prescription for ensuring that all kids have the opportunities they need and deserve. This vision may look different community by community, but it has a few common elements. *Reclaiming the promise will bring back the joy of teaching and learning.* It’s the way to make every public school a place where parents want to send their kids, teachers want to teach and children want to learn. It makes our public schools the center of the community and fulfills their purpose as an anchor of our democracy and a propeller of our economy.

Our movement can be the centerpiece of this vision for our children. Not only are the individuals who work in schools and the education system members of AFL-CIO-affiliated unions, but union members are also parents, grandparents, school volunteers and active participants in their communities. In short, all of us are connected to public education. The AFL-CIO is uniquely positioned to join with our affiliates, parents, community and civic leaders.

Therefore, we resolve as a labor movement to meet the needs of all children and working families by:

- Fighting to ensure that all children have the opportunity to attend great schools that provide a safe and welcoming environment in their own neighborhood, and uniting local labor bodies with parent groups and others to oppose mass school closings that seem to target our most impoverished communities. We will stand together to oppose the failed strategies of so-called market-oriented reforms of privatization, de-professionalization and profit seeking, and instead stand in support of efforts to fix, rather than close, schools; work for safe schools and communities by backing initiatives to reduce gun violence and prevent bullying; and advocate for environmentally healthy buildings that are equipped to support the integration of technology in instruction.
- Educating union members and working families about the importance of engaging curriculum by promoting a greater understanding of the Common Core State Standards and what they mean to their children's education; mobilizing our members to advocate for implementation of the standards in a way that is fair and fully supported at the federal, state and local levels; raising awareness around the obsession with high-stakes testing and test preparation and the negative effect it is having both on students and on the quality of the overall curriculum; and expanding existing union programs that provide curriculum supports, such as Share My Lesson and First Book.
- Advocating for investment in the teaching profession to ensure that teachers are well-prepared and supported—by working for comprehensive teacher development and evaluation systems that do not deny teachers their due process; increased opportunities for ongoing professional development so they can improve their skills; and providing fair compensation systems.
- Educating our members about the role of community schools and joining with education unions and others to increase the number of community schools—places that bring together wraparound services to help meet the social, emotional, health and nutrition needs of students and families.
- Advocating for a comprehensive, multi-provider system that ensures voluntary access to high-quality, affordable early childhood education and care from birth forward, so our youngest children are ready to succeed when they enter school; and advocating for equitable wages for the early education workforce.
- Mobilizing our members to fight for federal, state and local legislation, policies and funding that ensure our children have the great public schools they deserve.
- Encouraging all unions to seek contract provisions that enable parents and guardians to participate fully in their children's education, including family and parental leave to attend school meetings and to volunteer in schools.