FIGHT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Ensure equitable educational opportunities and safe schools for every student

The statistics:

- In the United States, the richest nation on Earth, one in five children live in poverty — 20 percent or 15.5 million. (Source: *Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2010)

- “The vast majority (about 60 percent) of the differences in student test scores are explained by individual and family background characteristics.” (Source: Dan Goldhaber, *The Mystery of Good Teaching*, *Education Next*, Spring 2002)

- Teachers are the most important school-related factor in student achievement, but how children live and what they experience when they are NOT in school — even before they start school — play a much bigger role. (Source: Paul Barton and Richard Coley, *Parsing the Achievement Gap II*, Educational Testing Service, 2009)

- While teachers play a large role in student achievement, they are not the only factor. “Researchers concur that the bulk of student achievement differences can actually be attributed to factors outside school, such as poverty and parents,” as Linda Perlstein, public editor for the Education Writers Association wrote on March 12, 2011.

- The out-of-school factors most likely to limit student success are highly correlated with poverty: low birth weight; prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol; inadequate medical, dental, and vision care; food insecurity; exposure to mercury, lead, and other pollutants and poisons; family breakdown and stress; and neighborhood violence. (Source: David Berliner, *Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success*, National Education Policy Center, 2009)

Some solutions:

- Disaggregated data on student achievement must continue to be collected, published, and available to the public — for example, accessible on the World Wide Web. To help close achievement gaps, wraparound services should be provided and parental engagement encouraged — successful approaches include outreach programs and making materials available in a second language such as Spanish. In addition, some parents may need to be made aware of behaviors correlated with higher student achievement — for example, reading to young children daily, avoiding excessive television-watching, and attending school every day. (Source: Paul Barton and Richard Coley, *The Family: America’s Smallest School*, Educational Testing Service, 2007)

- To fulfill America’s promise of equal educational opportunity for all, we must address the full range of factors that drive student achievement — for example, combat hunger with free school meals; promote physical and mental well-being with programs and curricula that help kids develop good
eating and exercise habits; reduce bullying, harassment, and discriminatory practices in schools; ensure that all students have access to health care; and provide targeted programs for special populations such as English-language learners and students with disabilities. See NEA’s Criteria for Great Public Schools.

- Education is a civil right. To ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn in all fiscal climates — strong as well as strained — the federal government must guarantee all students access to four core resources: (1) early childhood education; (2) highly effective teachers; (3) college preparatory curricula; and (4) equitable instructional resources. (Source: Schott Foundation, Lost Opportunity: A 50 State Report on the Opportunity to Learn in America, 2009)

- To transform every high-poverty school in America into a high-performing school staffed by effective teachers, we must pursue a four-pronged strategy: (1) recruit and prepare teachers to work in high-needs schools; (2) take a comprehensive approach to teacher incentives; (3) improve the right working conditions; and (4) define teacher effectiveness broadly, in terms of student learning. (Source: Barnett Berry, Children of Poverty Deserve Great Teachers, Center for Teaching Quality and the National Education Association, 2009)

- In 2006, the New York Court of Appeals found for the Campaign for Fiscal Equity in CFE v. State of New York, ruling that every child has a right to “sound basic education,” defined as “a meaningful high school education,” and that consequently, New York State needed to increase funding for New York City public schools. The State Education and Reform Act of 2007 provided a historic $7 billion increase in school funding, to be phased-in over four years; a new foundation aid formula, based on need; and unprecedented accountability and transparency measures. See www.cfequity.org/.

- The federal government must ensure that comprehensive data on education funding is collected, published, and widely available — transparency is essential to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to learn. States should be required to submit comprehensive equity and adequacy plans that lead to action and level the playing field — for example, by correcting imbalances in the funding, facilities, and offerings of schools in rich and poor neighborhoods. See NEA’s Legislative Recommendations for Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

NEA’s complete Message to Congress on ESEA reauthorization addresses the federal government’s role in public education, the purpose of public education, and asks: How will we fulfill that purpose? The answer has three parts: (1) Champion student success: Prepare all students to thrive in college, careers, and life; (2) Elevate the profession: Support great teachers and education support professionals; and (3) Fight for social justice: Ensure equitable educational opportunities and safe schools for every student.

For additional information, go to www.educationvotes.nea.org and click on the “resources” tab.