tive bargaining.

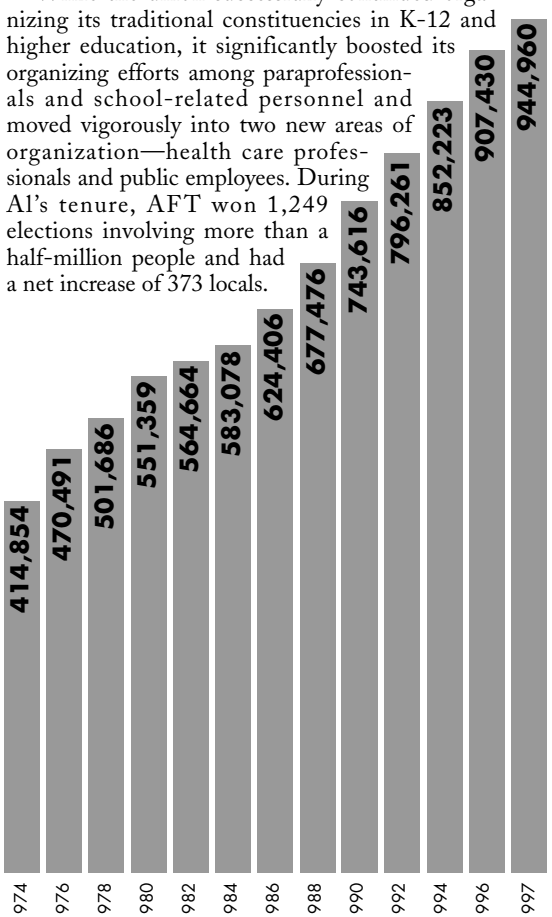
So, whether it's the hundreds of teachers and PSRPs who voted for AFT representation all over New Mexico to the point where we now bargain for more than 12,000 public school employees...

[Applause]

The Union Grew and Grew

Every year in his state of the union speech, Al recapped where the union stood. He told how many elections AFT had won—and how many new members came with each one. He recounted stories of some of the most hotly contested elections and talked about some of the tough ones we had lost. This part of the speech was always greeted with applause and cheers. And there was reason for the enthusiasm. While politicians and the media were talking about the death of the labor movement—and many other unions were dwindling year by year—AFT continued its dramatic growth. The bar graph below shows how AFT grew from 400,000 members in 1974 to nearly a million in 1997.

While the union successfully continued organizing its traditional constituencies in K-12 and higher education, it significantly boosted its organizing efforts among paraprofessionals and school-related personnel and moved vigorously into two new areas of organization—health care professionals and public employees. During Al's tenure, AFT won 1,249 elections involving more than a half-million people and had a net increase of 373 locals.



...or 1,900 PSRPs in Corpus Christi, 400 PSRPs in North Forest, two Texas school districts where without a bargaining law AFT locals fought and won the right to represent all school employees wall to wall, or 800 PSRPs in St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana, who like their brothers and sisters in Texas, joined with teachers for complete wall-to-wall AFT representation, again without a bargaining law...

[Applause]

...or the more than 1,200 part-time faculty at Milwaukee Technical Institute or 400 faculty at Pierce College in Washington or more than 1,600 health professionals at Rhode Island Hospital, that state's largest private-sector employer...

[Applause]

...or 3,600 fiscal staff state employees in Wisconsin or more than 1,600 workers in Baltimore County, all have chosen the AFT.

[Applause]

They've chosen the AFT because of the kind of organization we are. First, they know we're a union that pioneered collective bargaining before there was collective bargaining for public employees, they know we're experienced in effective contract administration, and they know we are a union that doesn't just come in and do things for people. We are committed to helping to improve the skills of members and leadership at the local level, and, with all of our members, to advance their careers so they can make a greater contribution to the success of the institutions in which they work.

Third, given the strong anti-union and anti-public employee attitudes that are surfacing within our society, we are cognizant of the fact that our institutions have shortcomings and we are committed to improving the quality of the services within those institutions.

Blaming Unions

Where We Stand / September 8, 1996

Robert Dole did not reveal his vision for education in his acceptance speech at the Republican convention, but he did find time to lash out at teacher unions and blame them for the failure of American education: "If education were a war, you [the teacher unions] would be losing it. If it were a business, you would be driving it into bankruptcy. If it were a patient, it would be dying." Unions were right up there, in Dole's speech, with notorious public enemies like Saddam Hussein, "Libyan terrorists," "voracious criminals," and the U.S.'s old adversary, the Soviet Union.

In making his accusations, Dole was careful to separate teachers from their unions: "I say this not to teachers, but to their unions." But who started teacher

unions? Who pays the dues that keep them going? Who elects the officers and determines union policies? Teachers do not have to join the union—although in some districts nonmembers must pay a fee because they benefit from the contract as much as members do. And if a majority of teachers did not support the union in their school district, they could vote it out and choose or form another union—or decide they did not want a union at all. Individual teachers may not always agree with what their unions do, but separating the two is like separating a church from the members who support it with their money.

Unions developed because teachers thought they needed them. Before unions, teachers were paid far less than other educated workers. Unions helped raise the pay scale to a decent level, though it is still far lower than the scales of other professionals like doctors or architects or accountants. Before unions, teachers were often compelled to punch a time clock and bring a written excuse from a doctor if they were sick. They were routinely ordered to give up lunch periods to monitor the cafeteria or the toilets. If a teacher disagreed with a principal at a faculty conference, the teacher could be sure he would be loaded up with additional unpleasant duties. Before unions, teachers could not take part in politics on their own time, and in most places, they couldn't even have a beer in a pub. If individual teachers sometimes differ with their elected union representatives about policies or actions, you would nevertheless have a hard time convincing them that an attack on their union was not an attack on them and on the fundamental rights that, through the union, they have won.

Another version of the Dole argument that attempts to dissociate teachers from their unions goes like this: *Teachers* would like to make changes, but their unions prevent them. There is no question that teachers and unions sometimes oppose change, and no wonder. All too often in education, changes are pushed through without any evidence that they will work—or would be useful if they did. Teachers have seen so many "innovative" or even "revolutionary" programs come and go, it should be no surprise that a large number are cynical about the likelihood of real improvement.

Unions sometimes also resist change—and for the same reasons—but contrary to what Dole says, they lead it, too. A report issued by the RAND corporation several years ago found that the more established a union is, the more likely it is to take the lead in introducing positive change. Cincinnati and Toledo, with their peer review programs, which provide mentoring for new teachers and assistance for tenured teachers whose teaching is not up to par, are good examples. The unions pioneered and developed these plans, and union leadership was able to bring along the teachers, who, as I've indicated, are skeptical of change for very good reasons.

Teacher unions are an easy target for political rhetoric like Dole's, but the evidence just isn't there. In 1994 and again this year, a number of D.C. schools could not open on time because of serious fire code violations. Was that the fault of the teacher union? Is the union responsible for the fact that millions of dollars from the D.C. school food program have disappeared without a trace? Is it the fault of the union that school districts across the country were unprepared for the surge in enrollment that hit the schools this month and are now forced to hold classes in hallways and closets?

In the 1970s, when American automobiles were losing out to foreign imports (made by union workers), and especially to the Japanese, can you imagine a Bob Dole acceptance speech that blamed the plight of the automobile industry on the union? People would have laughed and asked, "Does the union design the cars? Does it run the plants? Does it hire and fire the workers?"

It would be foolish to say that teacher unions do not make mistakes. But it is even more foolish for Bob Dole to lay the blame for everything wrong with our schools at the unions' feet. There are far more eligible candidates.

A Successful Union

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania / August 1992

Years ago when I was sitting around sort of having a bull session, people raised the question, "What makes a union successful?" Somebody said, "Well, I know what makes a union successful. Look at..." and he named a few unions. He said, "You know what makes a union successful? It's a union that can really deliver lots of stuff for its members." Then he mentioned some union that had just gotten a big salary raise and pension benefits and all sorts of other things.

Somebody else who was sitting there said, "You know, I think you're wrong. It's really good if the union can deliver all sorts of things, but that's not what makes a successful union. A successful union is an organization that figures out what people's hopes are, what their dreams are, what they want." That's right. A successful union is a union that gets people to believe that these need not be mere dreams. Furthermore, it shows them that the difference between dreams and reality lies in making the dreams shared, because, individually, we can't realize them, and they remain mere dreams.

A union is an organization that takes people's dreams and gets people to understand that, if they work together, they can achieve those dreams.

Building the Profession

Al receives President's Award at FEA/United Convention, Tallahassee, Florida, 1990.

Without a Strong Union...

Local Presidents' Q&A / AFT Convention
Chicago, Illinois / July 1986

We'd never be sitting at the table talking about professionalism if we didn't build a strong union, if we didn't have collective bargaining, if we didn't have contracts, if we didn't have strong political action. We wouldn't count.

That's Very Unprofessional, Mr. Shanker!

From Reflections
Phi Delta Kappa, 1991

I have spent almost 40 years as a teacher and a trade unionist. The majority of those years were spent in fighting to gain collective bargaining rights for teachers and in using the collective bargaining process to improve teachers' salaries and working conditions. But during the past decade, I've devoted most of my time and energy working to professionalize teaching and to restructure our schools. Some of the people who hear me speak now seem to think this represents an about face on my part. They are surprised at this message coming from a union leader—and one who has been in jail for leading teachers out on strike, at that—but they probably put it down to my getting mellower in old age or maybe to wanting to assume the role of "elder statesman." Some union members, too, believe they are seeing a shift in my positions. Perhaps so. But it's not that I have abandoned any of my former views, and it's certainly not an attempt to go back to the good old days before collective bargaining when teachers and administrators in a school were supposedly one big, happy family; and teachers behaved in a "professional" manner. As a matter of fact, memories of those days still make it hard for me to talk about professionalism without wincing.

The word *professional* was often used then to beat teachers down or keep them in line. I can remember my first exposure to it as a teacher. I started in a very tough elementary school in New York City and had great doubts that I would make it; the three teachers who had preceded me that year with my sixth-grade class had not.

After a couple of weeks, the assistant principal appeared at my classroom door. I remember thinking, "Thank God! Help has come." I motioned him in, but he stood there for what seemed like a very long time, pointing at something. Finally, he said, "Mr. Shanker, I see a lot of paper on the floor in the third aisle. It's very unsightly and very *unprofessional."* Then the door closed and he left.

Soon after that, I went to my first faculty meeting. In those days, not many men taught in grades K-8; there was only one other male teacher in my school. The principal distributed the organizational chart of the school with a schedule of duties—who had hall patrol, lunch patrol, and so forth, including "snow patrol." By tradition, snow patrol, which involved giving up lunch period and walking around outside warning kids not to throw snowballs at each other, was a job for a male teacher. And, sure enough, Mr. Jones and Mr. Shanker found themselves assigned to it. Mr. Jones raised his hand and asked, "Now that there are two men on the faculty to handle snow patrol, would it be okay to rotate—you know, the first day of snow, he goes and the next day I go?" The principal frowned at him and replied, "Mr. Jones, that is very *unprofessional.* First of all, the duty schedule has already been mimeographed, as you see. Secondly, I am surprised that you aren't concerned that one child might throw a snowball at another, hit him in the eye, and do permanent damage. Its very unprofessional of you." That was my second run-in with this new and unusual use of *professional* and *unprofessional.*

Of course, I subsequently heard principals and others use these words many times, and I became accustomed (though not reconciled) to the fact that, in the lexicon of administrators, "professional" had nothing to do with teachers exercising "professional judgment" or conforming to "professional standards." The words were—and still are—used to force teachers to obey orders that go against their sense of sound educational practice and, often, their common sense. Professionalism, in this Orwellian meaning of the word, is not a standard but a threat: Do this, don't say that, or else.

Many teachers were also victims of their own definition of professionalism. They believed it was somehow unworthy and undignified (unprofessional) for teachers to try to improve their salaries and working conditions through organizing and political action. I came up against this definition of professional when I went from school to school as a union organizer, arguing that teachers ought to have a right to negotiate. At first, very few teachers would even come to meetings. I remember that Brooklyn Technical High School had 425 teachers, and only six showed up at the meeting. One of them explained it to me: "We think unions are great. My mom and dad are union members. That's why they

had enough money for me to go to college. But they sent me so I could do better than they did. And what kind of professional joins a union?"

This professionalism was not professionalism at all. It was the willingness of teachers to sacrifice their own self-interest and dignity—and the interests of their students—in order to maintain a false feeling of superiority. The issue was really one of snobbery; and in those days, when I was trying to persuade teachers to join the union, I often told Arthur Koestler's version of the Aesop Fable about the fox and the sour grapes.

According to Koestler, the fox, humiliated by his failure to reach the grapes the first time, decides to take climbing lessons. After a lot of hard work, he climbs up and tastes the grapes only to discover that he was right in the first place—they are sour. He certainly can't admit that, though. So he keeps on climbing and eating and climbing and eating until he dies from a severe case of gastric ulcers.

The teachers who heard this story usually laughed when I told them that it was the sour grapes of professionalism the fox was after. He would have been better off running after chickens with the other foxes—just as they would be better off joining a union with other workers—instead of continuing to eat the sour grapes of professionalism that were filled with lunch duty, hall duty, snow duty, toilet patrol, and lesson-plan books.

The basic argument for unionism and collective bargaining is as true today as it was when I went around to New York City teachers talking about the fox and the grapes. School systems are organizations, many of them quite large; and individual employees are likely to be powerless in such organizations. They can be heard and have some power to change things only if they are organized and act collectively.

Can anyone doubt how teachers felt about themselves when school boards, superintendents, and principals could do whatever they wanted without consulting teachers—or even notifying them? Some teachers would be assigned to be "floaters" in a school and had to teach in a different classroom each hour. A few teachers were always given the most violent classes, while other teachers were out of the classroom most of the time on "administrative assignment." Some teachers got their pay docked if they were a few minutes late because of a traffic jam, but others could come late as often as they wanted because they had friends in high places. Some teachers were always assigned to teach the subject they were licensed in and were given the same grade each period so they would have the fewest possible preparations. Others almost always taught several different grades, often out of the fields in which they were licensed.

So there should be no hankering to go back to the good old days, because they weren't good at all. The spread of collective bargaining has not made everything perfect, of course. Some people even blame the growth of teacher unions for the problems in our schools and the difficulty we are having in getting school reform. But if that were so, schools would be much better in states where there is no collective bargaining (like Mississippi or Texas) than in states where it exists (like California or Connecticut), and that's plainly not the case.

Teachers made great gains in the early years of collective bargaining. There were substantial increases in salaries. In addition, teachers were able to limit and reduce the old indignities because contracts required that undesirable chores and assignments be shared by all the teachers in a school. And grievance procedures meant that management had to use its authority more prudently because it was usually subject to external and independent review.

But even in those days, it became evident that the bargaining process was severely limited in its ability to deal with some of the issues that were most important to teachers. In addition to the traditional union goals of improvements in wages, hours, and working conditions, teachers wanted to use their collective power to improve schools in ways that would make them work better for kids. Most teachers entered teaching knowing they wouldn't be well paid; they were looking for the intrinsic satisfaction derived from doing a good job for their students. So they were concerned about conditions that would allow them to enjoy this satisfaction. But as soon as the words "good for children" were attached to any union proposal, the board would say, "Now you're trying to dictate public policy to us," and that was the end of that proposal.

The first time I sat at the bargaining table in New York City, the union submitted 900 demands, many of which were designed to improve learning conditions for students. We were shocked when representatives from the school board told us that they would deal with demands about improvements in wages, hours, and working conditions for *teachers* but would not entertain any demand justified as being good for *students.* The reason? Because we were elected by teachers to represent teacher interests, not by students to represent student interests. After all those years of being told by principals and superintendents and school boards that it was *unprofessional* to join a union because our primary concern should be the welfare of our students, it came as a shock when we were told that we could not, as a union, deal with educational issues, that they were not bargainable.

Critics have often said that a teacher union can't really be interested in educational issues and that the union's involvement in current discussions of reform are just a ploy for getting bigger salary increases. But from the earliest years of collective bargaining, issues of educational quality were part of the UFT and AFT agenda.

Why 'Merit Pay' Plans Don't Work

Where We Stand / March 14, 1982

One of the age-old issues in education is "merit pay." Should teachers who do an exceptionally good job receive extra pay? Should teachers who are "unsatisfactory" or merely "satisfactory" be denied salary increases granted to the rest of the teaching staff? Hundreds of such programs were adopted by school boards during the decades before teachers were unionized, and, with maybe one or two exceptions, all were abandoned—not because of the organized power of teachers (in those days) but because of the shattering impact merit pay plans had on morale and on the efficient functioning of schools.

Some of the merit pay issues were explored in a syndicated *Washington Post* column by William Raspberry, published last Wednesday. As Raspberry points out, nobody has trouble with the idea of providing rewards for the outstanding teacher, but, "Teachers, and especially teachers' unions, don't like merit pay—not because they are interested in protecting mediocrity but because they fear such a system would open the door to favoritism and politics."

Raspberry comments on a proposed agreement between the Washington, D.C., school board and the teachers union that would deny raises to sixth-year teachers unless they were rated as better than merely "satisfactory." The plan is supposed to provide incentives to teachers to work harder and better, but Raspberry notes: "The incentive piece is a ghost. It assumes that the financial threat is enough to induce mediocre teachers to outstanding performance—or else weed them out of the system. It will do neither. Incompetent teachers aren't incompetent because they wish to be but only because they don't know how not to be. The lure of $700 won't show them how. And if they could earn more in another field, they wouldn't be teaching in the first place. They won't leave; they'll stay in the system, incompetent and embittered."

Those who defend merit pay often use the analogy of the encyclopedia salesman who works hard and often late at night because the only way to make more money is to sell more books. No doubt there are many other fields where direct monetary incentives have the desired effect. But there are fields where they do not. Presumably, the salesman would rather work shorter hours, take it easy, and is willing to give up comfort and ease for reward. But it's different with teaching.

The effective teacher works hard—and is immediately rewarded with order in the classroom, attentiveness, student achievement, respect, sometimes affection. The ineffective teacher is immediately punished by the children in the room. They are restless and inattentive, willfully disobedient, often noisy and unruly. And there is a hostile relationship. The teacher lives in constant fear that someone—the principal, visitors, parents, or other teachers—will pass by and see the unruly pupils yelling, running, fighting, flying paper airplanes. The ineffective teacher is much more physically and emotionally exhausted at the end of the day. To offer this teacher a bonus for better performance or to threaten the punishment of withholding a raise is beside the point. To offer rewards or mete out punishment to such teachers will be as effective as such measures would be in encouraging someone to sing better. Usually people sing and teach as well as they can at a given point in time. What is needed if they're to do better is help.

It's too bad the merit pay issue is still around because it diverts us from some of the real answers. One is to select our beginning teachers carefully. That has to start with tougher programs in university schools of education. Once prospective teachers graduate, they ought to be tested before they're hired. It's true that a test can't tell you who's going to make an outstanding teacher, who's going to be average or less—but a test can tell you if the math teacher knows math, if every teacher can read and write English, if the French teacher is fluent in that language: A teacher who has to work hard just to keep a couple of steps ahead of the class is going to have all the normal problems of teaching compounded—and is probably not going to be very effective.

New teachers need plenty of help from the very first day. There ought to be a period of internship, much like that of doctors. There's nothing in college that really prepares teachers for that first experience in front of a class, all on their own with very little to guide them and no other adult in the room. Internships would offer a strong bridge between the two worlds. The new teacher needs other kinds of day-to-day help, too, but if, in spite of this special help, a teacher isn't making it, he or she ought to be let go—early, well before the teacher has invested half a life in the career.

Teachers should be assisted to do a good job throughout their careers. The New York City Teacher Centers, which are being funded by the Board of Education now that federal funds have been denied, are good examples of the right approach. They offer one-on-one, teacher-to-teacher help where the teachers are, in schools, in classrooms; courses and workshops to solve the real classroom problems teachers face, and places for teachers to share their successful techniques with each other. This kind of cooperation among teachers is a far cry from the frustration and bitterness merit pay can engender. It works—and merit pay doesn't.

Does Pavarotti Have To File an Aria Plan?

Where We Stand / February 6, 1983

Everyone now knows that there's a severe shortage of math and science teachers. But most people don't know that there will soon be a general shortage of teachers because very few are preparing to enter the profession. There's a good deal of discussion about the lack of financial rewards and the need to meet the competition if we're to attract and retain teachers who can qualify for better-paying jobs in the business world. All that is good, but it doesn't go far enough.

Even if we manage to get to the point when choosing teaching as a career will not represent great financial sacrifice, there's another reason many will not go into teaching; or, if they do, will leave very quickly for some other job. (Remember back in 1977, how the Board of Education had to go through the names of 9,000 teachers who had been laid off before it found 2,500 who were willing to return?) Aside from money, the other big issue is the way teachers are treated by their supervisors. In many ways they are treated like children.

One example is the practice of requiring teachers to prepare lock-step lesson plans. New York City high school teachers are in a state of great demoralization because most principals require them to prepare detailed plans written according to a particular management-by-objectives approach. This is another clerical chore, another time-consuming ritual.

Of course, teachers need to plan, and most of them do, in their way, especially at the high school level. But does every teacher have to do the same amount of planning and in the same format? Do all the plans have to be inspected on the same morning? But, more important, what are plans for? They are supposed to help teachers improve their instruction. But now, in many of our schools, teachers are not given a satisfactory rating, no matter how good they are as teachers, unless they have complied with the ritualistic planbook requirements. This is clear management incompetence. Would anybody rate Pavarotti a poor opera singer because he failed to fill out bureaucratic forms telling management how he intends to approach each aria?

The irony is that in many of our schools the outstanding teacher who refuses to do ritualistic paperwork is rated unsatisfactory, while the marginal teacher–or perhaps even one who is truly unsatisfactory–who submits to all the rituals is given high marks.

All of this reminds me of that morning some 30 years ago when I appeared for the examination to become a New York City public school teacher. Several thousand of us assembled promptly at 9 a.m. in the cafeteria of a high school. A few minutes later someone in charge appeared, blew a whistle, ordered the applicants to stand and form a double line. We were marched down a hall, and as we were to approach a stairwell we were to use, we heard shouts ordering that our double line become a "single file." Throughout this march from the cafeteria to the classrooms in which we were to take the test, we continued to receive instructions. "Keep in single file." "Hurry up." "No talking." "Stop whispering." It was clear from the start that we were back in school. Even though we had gone to college and received our degrees, we were being treated very much like children again.

Rigid requirements for lesson plans are like that. They treat educated adults, veteran teachers among them, like children, requiring them to jump to a whistle and "keep in single file." Even after we have solved the problem of providing adequate financial rewards, we are not going to get good teachers or keep them so long as school management rewards blind obedience to authority above creativity and excellence.

Real Tests, Higher Grades, Better Pay

Where We Stand / June 19, 1983

Everybody is talking about excellence in education, but do they really mean it or is it just political rhetoric? Recently a private school in Orlando, Florida, tested its sixth-grade students on a representative sample of the reading and math questions used on the competency examination the state of Florida gives to prospective elementary school teachers. The results? The sixth graders scored better than many who took the exam to enter teaching in Florida. The youngsters' lowest score was 70 percent, the highest 100 percent. Last year, of 14,000 prospective teachers who took the exam, 85 percent passed on the first attempt and another 5 percent passed on a subsequent attempt. Since prospective teachers know that there is a test in Florida, it's reasonable to assume that teacher applicants who worry about doing well on a test don't even bother to apply in that state.

What does this tell you? First, in states that require no test at all (only 20 have such tests), many who are now going into elementary school teaching do not themselves know the arithmetic they will need to teach their students—and perhaps can't themselves read well enough to produce students who read. Second, in states like Florida, which does have a test, the passing mark is set so low that many who become teachers are at the

same level of competence as the students they're supposed to teach.

This is clearly a disaster. In any subject, when a student fails to understand something, it's the teacher's job to approach the subject from many different angles until the student gets it. But a teacher who is at the student's level is not going to be able to do that. The result will be that thousands of students don't understand, and thousands—indeed, millions—will not go on to elect math or science or literature courses in high school or college. Or, if they're forced to take these subjects, they'll spend their time in remedial classes, where they will have to study basics they should have learned in elementary school.

Is there an answer? Sure, and a simple one, too. Test teachers. But don't test them at the elementary students' level. Rather, require an examination of at least equivalent toughness, let's say, to the SAT and demand a test score of prospective teachers that is at least the average of all the college students in the country who took the SAT.

Could this be done? Yes! And with great ease. Regulations should be adopted by state school officers and state boards of education. State legislatures should act, and local school boards should adopt policies that prohibit the hiring of new teachers who are not at least "average" college students on the basis of national exams. Even the president and Congress could act, by barring any federal aid to school districts that do not meet this standard for prospective teachers. The standard, by the way, is not particularly high.

Will it be done? I doubt it. Why not? How many "average" college graduates are going to seek teaching jobs at $10,000-$12,000 a year? Almost none. The examination would create a huge teacher shortage. How might the shortage be addressed? One answer would be to raise the starting salary to between $15,000 and $18,000, or to whatever point it takes to bring in enough qualified teachers. Let the market decide.

But this approach might cost lots of money. Instead, we're likely to continue pursuing other ways of recruiting new teachers. We can continue not to give any test and hire those college graduates who can't get jobs paying more. We can give a test but set the passing mark low enough to ensure that we get a sufficient number of bodies into the classroom. Or, we can set a decent standard, but when the inevitable shortage occurs, hire emergency, temporary or full-time substitute teachers who can't pass the test.

When there's a shortage of doctors, we don't allow emergency, temporary or substitute doctors to practice, nor do we lower entry standards in medicine. But that's because we really are concerned about health care. Do we really care about excellence in education? Are we really concerned about "a nation at risk"?

For the answers to these questions, you can ignore all the speeches about merit pay, all the rhetoric about making it easier to fire bad teachers, everything but this: Watch to see whether we set a reasonable standard of entry—and pay whatever must be paid to bring in enough teachers who meet the standard.

Taking Responsibility for Our Profession

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention
Washington, D.C. / August 1984

It is nice to have slogans about professionalism; it is a lot more difficult when we get to the issue of how professionalism works.

I think we ought to spend some time looking at programs like the one that has been developed by our own local in Toledo. In Toledo, there are teachers who have been selected because they are outstanding—there is a recognition that some teachers are excellent, some are very good, some are good, and some are terrible. These outstanding teachers are trained to help probationary teachers in a kind of an internship program. But they not only give tremendous amounts of help to new teachers; they also play a role in making the decision about which probationary teachers should be granted tenure and which ones should not.

Now, that is a very unusual role for teachers to play although it is common in other professions. There is peer review in higher education; in some colleges and universities it works, and in some it does not work. But if we are talking about not having somebody standing over us making rules and telling us what to do, and if we are talking about gaining some control over our own profession, then one of the things we will have to do is enter into the kind of program that Toledo has because it says, "Look, we don't have to be told what to do."

We, as teachers, can do what doctors and lawyers and other professions do. We can select outstanding practitioners from our own ranks. We can recognize excellence without needing some principal or superintendent to point it out for us. We can pick people, not on the basis of popularity, not on the basis of favoritism—yes, not even on the basis of union activity. We can pick them on the basis of excellence to do certain jobs that need to be done.

Now, we have several problems. One is that we have to do a lot of thinking about how to create independent professional groups of teachers, who are most likely union members but who can function independently to make certain professional judgments. We'll get a lot of questions—like how can teachers who are members of the union be involved in saying that another union member shouldn't be retained as a teacher? Isn't it the union's job to protect and defend and provide due pro-

cess? Is it possible to do both of those things at the same time? Can we see to it that teachers have due process and have their rights protected and at the same time, as teachers who are members of the union, make a decision that somebody should not be retained?

That is one of the big questions we will have to answer if we want to enter into an era of professionalism. There are other questions, too. For example, will we lose our right to collective bargaining if we involve ourselves in a process of peer review?

One of our major problems is the fact that teachers, because of the way we have been treated throughout the years, have very weak professional egos.

I want to cite two pieces of evidence. A poll that was done a number of years ago asked teachers and school superintendents this question: To what extent do you think that parents and the general public ought to determine what textbooks should be used in schools and how the curriculum should be organized? If you asked doctors, dentists, and lawyers about the extent to which their clients should determine what pills they give and what operations they perform or what legal advice or strategies they use, people in those professions would say, "These are professional decisions. We were trained; that is why patients and clients come to us. There should be no role for the customer in a professional decision." However, in the poll of teachers and school administrators, the majority agreed that parents and the general public ought to have a *controlling* power in deciding about textbooks and the curriculum.

Or take a second poll, a recent one that was done by Louis Harris just a few weeks ago. Teachers were asked, would you rather be evaluated by fellow teachers or by your principals and superintendents? The majority of the teachers answered they would rather be evaluated by their principals and superintendents.

So we have a very serious problem before us. The governors are going to act—not necessarily this year but within the next year or two or three years. Then we will have round two in school reform, and it will be one of two things. One possibility is that we will improve the profession ourselves and find ways of selecting and training teachers—and, yes, even some ways of removing people who shouldn't be in the profession. And we will determine what the best textbooks are—not all teachers, but those teachers who have been trained and who have developed an expertise in evaluating textbooks.

If we do not do these things for ourselves, we are going to get more rules, more regulations, more oppressive supervision, perhaps even private contractors imposed on us from above. If we are successful in doing these things, we will develop a type of power for teachers, and we will develop something else. Part of what teachers don't like is being locked in a room with a bunch of kids for their entire lives and having very little of a life with other adults. Working with other teachers in these professional activities would make the life of a teacher much more attractive than it is today. It would be a total change because it would provide for activity and work with and recognition from colleagues that does not exist at the present time.

Now, making these changes is not going to be easy. They will not happen over night, but the choice is very clear. We can take responsibility ourselves for our profession or we can wait for what happens *to* us in the second round of school reform.

And it may very well be that if we can consider a movement toward professionalizing teachers, we will be able to show other workers and other unions that it is possible to create a model where a union is looked upon not merely as an institution devoted to protecting jobs and self-interest. We'll show that a union really has two faces: one is for protection and security and economic well-being—and there is nothing wrong with those; they are part of the American way of life—but the other side represents standards and excellence, and professionalism, which includes participation and self-governance.

The job that we face in the future will be as difficult as the one we faced in the past. But as I see it, the professionalization of teaching in the next 10 or 20 years is life or death for the future of public education—just the way building the union 20 or 30 years ago probably gave us the ability to protect public schools over the period.

I am sure that all of you who have taken unpopular union positions before, after debating and after rethinking these issues, will champion this, at present, unpopular cause and help us to build education not only as a strong place for us as a union, but as a great and respected profession.

[Standing ovation]

The Birth of the National Board

"A Call for Professionalism"
National Press Club / January 1985

Thank you very much. During the reception that preceded this luncheon, one of the reporters came up to me and said, "Well, the last time you were here, it was just the last minute in the question period that one of us managed to prod the news from you." That was a warning, so instead of waiting until the last minute, I think the time is now, at the very beginning, to state that I am here to do something that I believe no national organization in American education has done before, and that is to call for a national teacher examination.

There have been organizations—ours included—favoring the idea of some examination for teachers. There have been localities that have developed their own tests; some states have developed theirs; and a national teacher exam does exist. But this is a call for something quite different.

The context of this call for a national test for new teachers is the reform movement of the past few years. While we have a few differences with a few of the proposals, we in the American Federation of Teachers support the overwhelming majority of specific proposals called for in the various reports that came out. And even on those we do not specifically support or those with which we have some reservations, we believe the movement for reform is so important that the AFT is willing to talk of compromise on those issues.

Central to the issue of educational excellence and improvement is a staff, specifically teachers, who are capable of carrying out the program outlined in these reports. Many of the reports do call for examinations, and a number of the states have now adopted examinations. But the current examining process is inadequate.

First, current exams for new teachers would be considered a joke by any other profession. For the most part, they are minimal competency examinations for teachers. What does minimum competency mean? Well, in a state like Florida, minimum competency for an elementary school teacher in mathematics is measured by passing an examination on a sixth-grade mathematics level. There are similar examinations involving English, involving history, involving the other subjects.

Now, this would be the equivalent of licensing doctors on the basis of an examination in elementary biology or licensing accountants and actuaries on the basis of some type of elementary mathematics examination. I don't wish to criticize the states that have adopted these tests. It was difficult for them to do it. They met a great deal of opposition. In many cases, they met court challenges. What they have done is to take the first step. But it's important to distinguish a necessary first step from an adequate program of testing, which is quite different.

I think the second problem, aside from the nature of the examination, is that we are about to face once again the traditional crunch: the conflict that exists at the state and local level between quantity and quality. We know what's coming. We've seen the statistics. Depending upon whether you take a more or less optimistic projection, it's quite likely that, even in fields other than mathematics and science, we will be experiencing within the next five years a substantial national teacher shortage.

In fields like medicine, if one experiences a shortage of doctors, you do not find states or hospitals giving anyone a substitute emergency medical license to go out and practice. We don't do it in law or dentistry or in any other field. But our local education agencies will be faced with the usual tough choices as this shortage emerges and grows. They could do the equivalent of what most other professions would do, and do indeed do. That is, after the children come to school and after each teacher's class is full, they could turn to the remaining students and parents and say, "Sorry, there is a shortage of teachers, and those of you who could not be accommodated this semester will be given the first opportunity to take the first grade next semester or next year."

The schools won't do that. There is a custodial function to schools, and there is no place in the country where the children will be sent home. They will be permitted to enter.

And so the local education agency is then faced with other choices. They can stand tough and say, "We will not employ anyone who is not qualified by whatever standards have been established. We will not employ, even on a temporary basis, anyone to be a teacher who does not meet these standards."

Of course, that would mean the number of teachers now available would have to divide among themselves the additional number of students. We would see class size going up each year or each semester in the coming years until, perhaps, we had classes in this nation at a level of 40 or 43 or 44 or 45. That too, is unlikely. Teachers will complain. Union contracts will undoubtedly be violated in many cases, and parents would complain that the quality of education is deteriorating because the number of children in the class is too large.

And so, of course, school boards and states will do what they have always done. They will ignore the standards that they established. They will at first make believe that they're not ignoring them because they will claim that the people who are being employed are not really going to be there very long. They will be temporary teachers or substitute teachers or emergency teachers, and they will be about as temporary as the temporary buildings that were set up in Washington, D.C., at the end of World War II.

These temporary teachers will be around, and they will become members of the teacher union in the district and will constitute a large number of people in the state who will teach one, two, three, four, five, six, and seven years. Eventually they will constitute a political bloc powerful enough to go to the state legislature to get some type of legislation to get themselves the right certificate. Because, after all, it's unfair to use someone day in, day out, exactly as though they were qualified, keep them there for all those years, and then tell them they have no right to a pension or no right to some other benefits.

So, in the midst of all these reports and all this talk about excellence and quality, we're actually about to lower standards and lower the quality; because the minute we relax standards, quality suffers.

Of course, there is another alternative I haven't mentioned: When local school boards or states find they are not able to attract the necessary number of qualified teachers, they could turn to the public and say, "We obviously are not paying enough, or we're not treating our people well, or those who are now here are leaving in great numbers, and we ought to do something about that." This also is not likely unless something new happens. Certainly in the past this was not the way it was done.

And so I want to return to this notion of a national teacher examination. I want to make it very clear that I am not talking about a national teacher examination established by the United States government. I don't think that's the right place for such an examination to evolve. There are other professional groups that essentially do have national types of examinations (though there may be some regional variations). There are examinations given to doctors and to actuaries. There is a bar exam that contains important national components. And none of those is established or created or maintained by the United States government.

A process similar to that which established testing procedures and examinations in other professions could, and indeed should be, developed in education. Now, whenever you start something, there is not the great certainty that exists after something has been in place for 30 or 40 or 50 years and people can say, "Ah, that's obviously the way to do it, and it's simple." However, a start should be made. Within the next six months a group of leaders of educational organizations, college presidents and, perhaps, leading professionals in other fields who have had some experience with entry-level tests should convene and constitute themselves as an independent group, nongovernmental—an American board of professional education. The name is not important, but the notion is very clear.

It would be a group that would spend a period of time studying exactly what a teacher should know before becoming certified and the best way to measure that knowledge. It would seek to have instruments established. It might be that existing testing agencies would create such instruments to be looked at and evaluated by this board. Over a period of time, I would hope the board would eventually be controlled by the profession itself, even if it didn't start completely that way.

I believe that in a period of three to five years such an instrument could be created, and it would most likely include three general areas. One of them obviously is the subject matter that a teacher needs—and I hope that would not be tested at the sixth-grade level. It is important that the teachers know more than the students they're teaching—much more. If you can't reach a student the first or second or third time, you have to find a different way of approaching the subject, and the only way to know a different way is to know a lot more than what you're teaching at that given moment.

But I would go a step further to say that, even at the earliest grades, the motivation of a teacher to teach a child to read could not be very great if the teacher has not personally experienced the joy of reading great books; motivation in teaching the elements of arithmetic could not be very great if at some point the teacher has not experienced the power of that language. So, subject matter knowledge is first.

Second, something that is missing from almost all such examinations now and that is tested in other professions is the ability to make judgments to justify instructional decisions. There is a knowledge base in education. It's right to do certain things, it's wrong to do others, and it's even important for prospective teachers to know what is not known. Just as it's important for a doctor to know those diseases for which we as yet have no cure, it's important for teachers to understand what is known and what is not known. Professional examinations generally consist in testing the ability to apply certain general principles and research to specific situations. At the present time, there are no teacher examinations that do that.

The third aspect of an examination, before someone finally gets the ticket, ought to be an internship program. Teaching is the only profession I know of where a person begins the first day with the same responsibility that he or she will have the last day—a profession in which practice and performance are certainly as important as intellectual knowledge, but it's just assumed that you can take someone who has been to college for four or five years and throw him into a classroom the first day to sink or swim. I know of no major corporation, I know of no law firm—and certainly not the medical profession—that introduces people that way. Any other profession that involves any complexity is different.

Now, of course, this idea takes an investment. It's going to be difficult to get an internship at a period of shortage because, instead of taking new individuals and giving them a program right away, you have got to employ more new people since the new person isn't going to be teaching a full program. Or it means that an experienced person is going to have to be relieved of some teaching time to help some of the new people.

Unless we make the investment, we will be getting people who don't know their subject matter. We will be getting people who have no knowledge of what is known in education or how to apply it. And we will not really be giving anyone any help in terms of practical and performance matters. Then, in a few years, we will grant them tenure, and they will be with us for a long, long time.

What would make the very existence of such an examination effective? How do we know that anybody's going to pay any attention to it? So what? So a bunch of educational leaders, college presidents and others sit

together, figure out what it ought to be and eventually they say, "This is it. This group has invented or created the right instrument." I suggest a number of things can be done on a voluntary basis that, over time, could have a substantial effect on boards of education and on states throughout the country.

First, I would say there ought to be just publicity. Such a board of professional education could publish, on an annual basis, a list of all those states that agree to employ only those who have passed the examination. So each year there would be a certain number of states in compliance and a certain number of states where the general public knows—and it will be headlined in each of those states—that this is one of the states hiring people who are below a standard set by a group that has some national recognition.

Second, I think there would be movements in states and in local districts that did not comply. There would be movements to pass laws in the states, laws that would do for teaching what is already done for other professions; namely, that any school board member or school superintendent who knowingly employs anyone who has not met the standard is subject to criminal prosecution. We'd have to do it slowly or the jails would be full. *[Laughter]*

By the way, I think the mere publication of the list would have an effect. After all, the number of Michelin stars that a restaurant has is important, and if some chefs and restaurant owners have been known to commit suicide in losing one star, we might find that some school boards could be motivated in the same way. *[Laughter]*

Third, I would say that the teacher organizations could play an important role. I am prepared to say that within three years after such an examination is established, the American Federation of Teachers would not accept into membership any person hired as a teacher who had not met this standard, and we would urge the National Education Association to establish a standard for membership in exactly the same way. *[Applause]*

We believe this would have a very great impact. There would be pressure on states to adopt a standard that is high enough. The existence of such an examination, with large numbers of people taking it, would provide an interesting barometer on an annual basis. Just as we now have SAT scores and ACT scores and LSAT scores and others, we would have a national barometer that would tell us on an annual basis the caliber of the people who are applying, and in what numbers, to the profession—a piece of information that we do not have at the present time.

Finally, I do not believe that the traditional objection that such an examination would cause all colleges and universities and schools of education to offer exactly the same lock-step curriculum is any more valid in the field of education than it is to say that the existence of medical examinations or bar examinations means all law schools and all medical schools have exactly the same curriculum. They don't. There are different ways of preparing people for those professions, and there will continue to be different ways in ours.

This, then, is our proposal. We in the AFT believe strongly that the benefits of education reform will soon go down the drain as standards are lowered to meet the teacher shortage—unless a new and better exam is created. We are willing to do something that's very difficult for us—to refuse to accept future teachers who do not meet that standard. We will work hard to make this become a reality. *[Applause]*

David Hess, President, National Press Club: Mr. Shanker, we're close to the end of the program, I would like to present you with this certificate of appreciation for coming to the club to speak today and a National Press Club windbreaker to ward off the slings and arrows of the NEA. *[Laughter, then applause]* And the final question, sir—when will you run for public office? Isn't it time for a teacher president? *[Laughter]*

Shanker: Well, I thought of that once. In 1969, I negotiated a contract with Mayor Lindsay, and every place I went taxicab drivers wouldn't charge me a fare, newspaper vendors would give me a free copy of the *Times* in the morning, and it really went to my head. Then I thought of the contract I had just negotiated, and I decided against running because I didn't want to have to pay for the contract. *[Laughter]*

Hess: Thank you, Albert Shanker. And that concludes today's National Press Club luncheon.

Education's Dirty Little Secret

Where We Stand / October 27, 1985

In most states there are new and tough requirements for student graduation and promotion. This we applaud. No longer will students decide what subjects they will take (few took math or science in the last decade); rather, they will be required to take a specified number of years of English, math, science, social studies, foreign languages, etc.

The public has supported these reforms and the business community has in many cases led the movement for tighter requirements and higher standards. Throughout, there is the assumption that these required courses will be taught by teachers who know their subject. After all, don't we require teachers of a given subject to take many courses in that subject? And isn't it true that most states now require that teachers take and pass an examination in the subject they are to teach? All this gives false assurance to the public be-

cause there is a "dirty little secret" in education—that very large numbers of teachers who are indeed licensed, examined, and qualified in one subject are assigned to teach subjects that they may never have taken, have never been examined on and are totally unfamiliar with.

A national survey showing the extent of the problem and a failure of states to deal with it was sponsored by the Council for Basic Education and the American Federation of Teachers.

The report calls the misassignment of teachers "a scandal in the making for the entire profession....Individuals originally certified in English may be assigned to teach science; a vocational education instructor may teach a social studies class."

"Nationwide, thousands of teachers stand before thousands upon thousands of children, charged with instruction in disciplines not their own.... The consequences for the nation's students, supposedly being educated in these basic subjects, are enormous."

The state-by-state survey shows some subjects with 20 percent, 30 percent, or 40 percent of the students taught by teachers not qualified in those subjects. But this survey just scratches the surface. While it uncovers the fact that misassignment is very common, it is unable to document the exact numbers involved because most states do not require accurate reports on the extent of the problem and "rules and sanctions against misassignment are rarely enforced."

States don't take the problem seriously: "The frequency of routine examinations of schools appears to be five years, on average, and state education officials concede that a school could misassign teachers undetected between reviews."

Why does misassignment occur? There are a number of reasons. First, there are some principals and superintendents who believe that knowledge of subject doesn't matter and that "a good teacher can teach anything," or "We don't teach math and English, we teach children." Fortunately, these supervisors are in a small minority.

The second reason is that there are periodic shortages of teachers in specific subjects. In this case misassigning teachers is a cover-up designed to convince the public that the school system has no shortage of math or science teachers by misassigning teachers to cover these programs.

Third is the problem of breakage or underload. When all the English classes have been assigned to the members of the English department, Mr. Jones, an English teacher, is given the last two English classes. Since a teacher is expected to teach five classes a day, Mr. Jones will have to teach three in some other subjects or he will have nothing to do for three periods, in the view of the school administration. (Of course, classes could be rearranged, and class size lowered, from 30 to 27, but most administrations find it more efficient to fill all classes to maximum and assign the teacher to teach a different subject.)

Even where the numbers of misassigned teachers look small and reasonable, the results can spell disaster for many children. Think of 30 children in a math class who are taught math for two years in a row by an unqualified teacher. These 30 students may fall two years behind and forever give up hope of learning math.

It's time to end the misassignment that constitutes malpractice in education. What can be done? Here are a few suggestions:

- Require full disclosure to the public by state law.
- Each classroom should contain a certificate showing what subjects the teacher is qualified to teach, just as other professionals hang their certificates in their offices.
- Require written permission from parents for a child to be placed in a classroom with a misassigned teacher.
- Pay for additional college courses for teachers who agree to become qualified to teach in subjects where teachers are in short supply.
- Give additional salary to teachers who are qualified to teach more than one subject since this allows greater flexibility in programming schools.

Unless the problem of the misassignment of teachers is made public and solved, most of the other education reforms will fail.

Five Components of Professionalism

from "Futrell and Shanker Face Off"
Instructor Magazine / October 1985

A professional is someone who by virtue of his or her expertise has a high degree of decision-making power, and five things go with this.

One, all professionals are tested before entering the profession with a national exam devised by a national board. Teaching will never be a profession unless we have the equivalent of the bar or medical exam. We have to say to the public, "We don't know if all who passed the exam are good teachers yet, but we can tell that they're damn good in their subject matter and they know a lot about education; we'll have to see if they make it as teachers."

Two, professionals have a concern for their clients. Collective bargaining has done a lot for teachers, but it has raised the question that teachers are only concerned with self-interest. If teachers have decisions to make, will we make decisions so that life is easier for teachers or will we make decisions that are good for children? So, we as professionals, individually and collectively, must demonstrate to ourselves and to the public that we will make decisions that are good for our clients—in this case, the children.

Three, teachers will increase in professionalism when we stop thinking we have to do everything, and start making decisions based on what we know how to do. For example, textbooks shouldn't be selected by teachers just because they're teachers; they should be selected by those teachers who have studied what a good textbook is and what it isn't. Not every doctor does surgery. Only those who've been trained. Professions have areas of specialization. We need to acknowledge them in teaching.

Four, professionals have a concern for quality. That means not only bringing in good people but removing those who are incompetent, with due process. We must set up procedures that show it's not just the principal or superintendent who controls this process.

Five, professionals have peer relationships. There's no profession without them. Teachers need time to develop those.

Why Not 'Alternative' Surgeons?

From remarks to the Louisiana Federation of Teachers New Orleans / November 1985

The interesting thing is that we have a shortage of teachers. How can you tell? You can tell because, when Baltimore gave an examination this summer to prospective teachers and a lot of them failed, Baltimore turned right around and hired all the teachers who failed the examination, as well as those who passed it. The reason they hired those who failed was that there wasn't anybody else around who wanted to teach.

New York is up to 13,000 uncertified teachers. They even went over to Spain to hire a few teachers. You should meet them now. Spanish teachers do not know how to deal with American kids; they are not like the kids in Spain. These teachers are all buying their airline tickets ready to go back.

Los Angeles has a large number of uncertified teachers, and Houston. But they don't call it *uncertified* anymore. They give it a fancy name. They talk about an *alternative certification procedure.*

I wonder what we would think if there were an alternative certification procedure for surgeons. You know, you have a shortage of surgeons and you go out there and get somebody who hasn't gone to medical school but has taken a few courses in biology, and you say he is an alternative doctor. Or what about alternative lawyers?

Let us face it, these alternative schemes are ways of violating and abrogating regulations and standards that the states themselves have put into place. We didn't put those regulations into place; the states did. And now because they can't find enough people, they have created these alternatives.

So not only do we have thousands and thousands of teachers who don't meet minimum qualifications; we also have a massive situation in the country where teachers are misassigned.

You have an English teacher, but you don't really need an English teacher; you need a math teacher. So, of course, that person who is an English teacher—and probably a very good one—but doesn't know any math, ends up teaching math.

This is happening all across the country: We have uncertified teachers and teachers teaching out of their field. And the situation is going to get worse unless we do a number of things to stop it.

Professionalism Under Fire

Where We Stand / October 26, 1986

What should be the response of educators when one of their number does something that is foolish, unprofessional, or outrageous? School superintendents have great power under state law, but they have this power not just because someone has to be in charge but because they are supposed to know more about what works in education and how to manage and organize schools in accordance with an accepted knowledge base. In St. Louis, Superintendent Jerome B. Jones last year announced that teachers in the district would be rated unsatisfactory and lose their jobs unless their students reached specific levels of achievement or improvement on standardized achievement tests. According to the experts, these tests cannot be used to measure whether teachers are competent or not or whether they should be retained or dismissed.

The issues involved are technical, but they can be compared to what happens in other professions. If a large percentage of patients do not improve after visiting a given doctor, or even take a turn for the worse, what does this tell us about the quality of the doctor? Not much. Before we could answer that question we would need a good deal of additional information. Did the patient suffer from a disease that a doctor could do something about or was the disease incurable? What course of action did the doctor prescribe? Was it the same that most others would prescribe on the basis of medical knowledge? Or was it unorthodox? Did the patient purchase and take the medicine? Did he rest, stop smoking, and follow the special diet?

No one would want to deprive a doctor of the right to practice merely because his patients did not fare well.

We would still have to answer the question: Was it the doctor's fault? Did he do everything a good doctor could be expected to do even though the patient was not cured? Similarly in law, there are cases where the lawyer on the losing side did a better job than the lawyer on the winning side. Should a lawyer who loses a certain number in a row or a given percentage be disbarred?

Such a proposal, if it were acted on, would be viewed as foolish, unprofessional or outrageous. In law, as in medicine, it is possible for a professional to do everything that can possibly be done and still lose the case for reasons beyond his control.

In St. Louis, Superintendent Jones just looks at the test scores of the students in a teacher's class. Either the numbers are good or out with the teacher. No one bothers to ask if the teacher did everything possible to help the students. Did the students fail in spite of what the teacher did because they didn't pay attention or do outside reading or homework? Or did a particular teacher just happen to get a group of students who always scored poorly and made very little progress no matter who the teacher or what the educational program was? And what about the home life of the students? Do they have the right kind of supervision by their parents or the appropriate environment for study and homework?

Unlike most leaders in the fields of law and medicine, Mr. Jones is not only a professional educator, but, since he has to be elected by the school board to the superintendency, he is also a politician. He will undoubtedly get some cheers and votes for playing to the grandstand with his "Off with their heads!" approach and for pushing the simplistic notion that only results count.

But where is the rest of the profession? Why should the teachers and the teachers' union be left to fight this issue as though it were merely a labor-management dispute? Thousands of principals, superintendents, college professors, researchers, testing experts, and their professional organizations should be out on the frontline taking a stand and telling the world: "Maybe some of those teachers should be fired. But we need more information, particularly since on all other indices the teachers involved were rated satisfactory by their school principals. But the information that we do have raises grave doubts about the effectiveness of a school administrator who is either unaware of the relevant scholarly knowledge or for some reason chooses to ignore it. In either case, we publicly condemn the St. Louis teacher evaluation procedure as a violation of all accepted professional principles."

Such an action would do much to enhance the legitimacy of school management and also help to attract teachers into a profession in which knowledge counts as against the old-fashioned factory model school system in which all that matters is pure power.

Ninety-two Hours

Where We Stand / January 24, 1993

There is lots of talk about changing education with "break-the-mold" schools or with alternative or restructured schools, but when you look at restructuring in a major company, you're likely to find that business has a much better idea of how to carry out this kind of change. The Saturn project is a case in point. Several years ago, General Motors and the United Auto Workers agreed to work together on a project that involved rethinking all their preconceived ideas about making a car, including the assembly-line process and the traditional labor-management structure. Now, after six years of work, they have a car that is selling as fast as they can produce it and a new model of automobile production.

What you usually hear about in connection with Saturn is the change in the distribution of power. Labor and management share the responsibility for all decisions and have from the beginning. But altering who makes the decisions is only part of the story. There's nothing that says a labor-management committee couldn't build an Edsel. The real importance of the Saturn experiment lies in the changes that have been made in the production process.

At the heart of these changes are Saturn's self-managed teams. In the old production line, every worker had a single, carefully specified job to perform. The Saturn line, as Beverly Geber describes it in "Saturn's Great Experiment" (*Training,* June 1992), is made up of work stations, each with a multi-step operation to perform and staffed by a team responsible for "deciding how to set up and work its station most efficiently." This means scheduling, budgeting, and monitoring performance.

For instance, one person checks scrap and receives weekly reports on the amount of waste. If the line of the chart is rising, she reminds everyone...that they need to be more careful. Since team members know the cost of each part, they know how much money their scrap costs the company. Once a year, the team forecasts the amount of company resources it plans to use in the coming year. Each month team members get a report on what they budgeted and how much they spent. The teams even get a monthly breakdown on their telephone bills.

But teams do more than keep the line running. If they suspect that there might be a better way to install a door, for instance, it's their job to figure out how to change the existing process, with the help of a department that has a simulated assembly line and a staff of engineers. So the production process is constantly

being monitored and improved.

How did Saturn find these smart, flexible, and disciplined workers? It didn't *find* them; it used an impressive training program to give workers from 136 other General Motors plants the information and skills and ongoing help they needed to participate in this new way of running an automobile plant.

The original team members received more than 400 hours of training within their first few months at Saturn, and even now, new employees take part in a kind of internship. During the first two or three months, they split their time between classroom and on-the-job training. Furthermore, every employee at Saturn is expected to spend at least 92 hours a year in training—about 5 percent of their total work hours—and 5 percent of their salary depends on their doing so.

A central training group offers nearly 600 different courses, and as procedures are changed or new ones developed, new courses are also designed to assist employees in learning them.

Imagine what a training program like this would do for people trying to restructure their schools. Or, put another way, imagine trying to change things as basic as the culture of a school and the way people teach with a couple of days of inservice training a year and some hours stolen from class preparation periods. But that's about what most teams that are trying to restructure their schools have in terms of time and resources.

It is ironic that a bunch of people whose business is building cars understand so well the importance of educating their employees, whereas people in education seem to assume that teachers and other school staff will be able to step right into a new way of doing things with little or no help. If it takes 600 courses and 92 hours a year per employee to make a better automobile, it will take that and more to make better schools. And if we're not willing to commit ourselves to this kind of effort, we are not going to get what we want.

She Failed 'Too Many' Students

From "The Wrong Message"
Where We Stand / July 11,1993

You'd think American parents would be raising the roof. Instead, according to a 1991 Lou Harris poll, 56 percent of the parents whose children went to work right after high school considered their kids "well prepared" in writing, and so did 77 percent of the parents whose children went on to college. Why? The vast majority of these students are passing, and many of them are getting good grades. That's hard to understand when you look at the NAEP examples, but perhaps there's a clue in the story of Adele Jones, a high school algebra teacher in Georgetown, Delaware.

According to columnist Colman McCarthy (*Washington Post,* July 3, 1993), Ms. Jones's school board fired her last month for "incompetence" because she failed "too many" of her students—27 percent in 1991-1992 and 42 percent in the previous academic year.

What does this mean? There's no evidence that the board has ever fired a teacher for passing students who should have failed, but in this case they fired a teacher for failing students, even though the students themselves have a lot of respect for her high standards. Over one-third of the kids in her high school walked out in protest when she was fired, and there were signs reading, "I Failed Ms. Jones's Class and It Was My Fault" and "Students Fail Themselves" and "Just Because a Student Is Failing Doesn't Mean the Teacher Is."

The board is clearly much more interested in good PR than in student achievement. When "too many" kids fail, this looks bad for the school system, and parents are likely to complain. Ms. Jones mistakenly thought her job was to teach algebra and grade her students fairly, passing those who learned the material and failing those who did not. The school board has set her straight on that.

Stories like Ms. Jones's do not appear in print very often because most teachers have already gotten the message. With the firing of Ms. Jones, we can expect that the rest will, too. The students have also gotten the message. And as long as school boards and parents act as though it's the teacher's job to give every kid a passing grade—no matter what the kid knows and can do—it should not surprise us if the achievement of our students stays right where it is—in the cellar.

Beyond Merit Pay

Where We Stand / January 15, 1995

How can excellent teaching be recognized and rewarded? We've been waiting a long time for a good answer to this question, and last week we finally got one. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards awarded its first certificates of advanced competency. The recipients were 81 middle and junior high school teachers from across the country who had demonstrated that they knew their stuff in a grueling, year-long series of assessments.

Some heroic souls will do their best no matter how little recognition they get. Most people, though, respond to external incentives, and teachers are no different from the rest of us. But if you don't get the incentives right, you are likely to make things worse instead of better.

Merit pay has been the usual strategy for recognizing and rewarding excellence in teaching, and there's nothing wrong, in principle, with giving people pay for performance. However, most teachers oppose merit pay because it often has nothing to do with merit and everything to do with how well you get along with the principal. Good teaching is not the same thing as being willing to take extra bus duty or prompt in getting paperwork back to the central office. And the one or two hasty classroom visits that most principals pay in the course of a year may not be enough to show who *is* doing good teaching.

Another problem with merit pay is that it encourages teachers to compete rather than collaborate. Research and common sense tell us that teaching improves when teachers work together to share ideas and problems. With merit pay schemes, where a limited pot of money is shared by a limited number of people, the incentive is to keep good ideas to yourself: Why reveal a successful strategy for teaching a math topic to a "competitor"? It's easy to see who loses in this kind of arrangement—the kids.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards proposes a totally different model for assessing and promoting excellence in teaching. Over the past eight years, the board, a majority of whose members are K–12 teachers, has been developing standards for what teachers should know and be able to do. And it plans eventually to offer board certification in more than 30 teaching specialties at every level and in every field. As the assessments taken by the middle and junior high school generalists who were certified last week demonstrate, board certification will not be a rubber stamp.

The first stage involved submitting a portfolio of work and included videotapes of classroom lessons along with extensive written material describing and analyzing how these teachers help their students learn. Applicants reported spending an average of 100-plus hours getting their portfolios ready. Next, they traveled to an assessment center where they faced two days of oral and written assessments. They evaluated videos of other teachers and discussed their own practice; they created elaborate lesson plans and they demonstrated their knowledge of the subject matter they teach. The assessments were not the machine-scored, minimum-competency tests we often associate with evaluating teachers: They required the kind of mastery achieved by people at the top of their profession.

The National Board does not represent a reform imposed on teaching from outside. Rather, we have a profession defining its own high standards for excellence and creating a national credential to recognize practitioners who meet the standards—the way physicians and lawyers and architects have already done.

The existence of this new credential could have an enormous impact on classroom teaching. There are currently few ways of rewarding and encouraging excellent teaching. As a result, the best teachers often accept promotions into administration, and an important resource is lost to the classroom and the profession. Board certification can provide an incentive for these teachers to stay in the classroom where they can go on giving kids the benefit of their knowledge and skill—and where they can help other teachers improve the way they teach.

But board certification is only half the story. The other half depends on what school districts do. Will they recognize the achievement of teachers who gain the certification by offering them higher salaries? Will they seek them out when they are looking for new teachers? Will they see certification as an important professional achievement and offer these teachers responsibilities commensurate with their expertise?

Hiring new teachers is, to a large extent, a question of supply and demand. It is dependent on things over which a district may have little control—the number of students who will be showing up next year and the availability of teachers. But retaining excellent teachers depends on recognizing who they are and giving them adequate financial and professional incentives. The National Board gives us a way of identifying outstanding teachers. This could be a turning point for the profession. But it depends on what happens next.

A National Database of Lessons

From statement to the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities / October 1995

There are many things that the communication and data-gathering aspects of computer technology can do for us. For example, they offer an alternative to having 2.8 million teachers trying to decide on the best way to explain a concept in math or science or a historical event. With computer technology, we could have some of the best teachers figure out two or three of the best ways of teaching a lesson on the Gettysburg Address. They could offer a lesson plan that they had perfected or questions or examples that they know will work in presenting this topic. These suggestions could be put on a database available to teachers all over the country. Then, when teachers in Albuquerque or the South Bronx were preparing to teach the lesson, they could download the suggestions and adopt or adapt them for their own class. In many cases, that would give them a better way of presenting a difficult or complicated idea and better resources than if they sat down on a Friday night or Saturday morning and tried to plan this lesson, along with the 25 or 30 others they had to teach the