

## Statement from the American Federation of Teachers On Professional Integrity

We at the American Federation of Teachers believe that professionals who serve the public have a crucial contribution to make—by ensuring not just that we do the work but that we do it well and make changes when necessary to improve services. The simple fact is that the people who do the work care more than anyone else, know more than anyone else, and can do more than anyone else about improving public services that are essential to Americans' safety, well-being and success.

Workers organize unions to give voice to our individual and collective aspirations, defend workplace rights, advance social and economic justice, and protect the integrity of individual workers. The result is that workers then have more power to improve the quality of services they deliver. Together, we fight for a teacher concerned with reducing class size; a nurse seeking adequate staffing levels; a college faculty member working to protect academic freedom and ensure proper staffing; a school aide seeking to become a respected and valued part of the school team; or a state employee struggling against cutbacks. As workers and union members, we share the same values. We care passionately about building a profession that is the very best it can be. We strive to promote and uphold the highest standards of personal conduct, professional practice and service to the community.

Whether the issue is education reform, healthcare reform or governmental reform, policymakers' efforts will fail unless they are built on a foundation of respect for the professionals who do the work. We know what

is effective and what isn't, what to keep and what to change. And our union gives voice to the ideas and practical proposals we believe will help us do our best work for the people we serve. When professionals are accorded the respect, recognition and rewards we rightfully deserve, there is no limit to what we can accomplish.

The AFT is and always will be a union that confronts injustice, embraces the excluded, questions conventional wisdom, challenges the status quo, and works 24/7 to improve the institutions where our members work. No matter what, we will fight for what is right for the people and the communities we serve, in a manner that respects the dignity of the hard-working people we represent.

As a union of public service employees, we are a convenient target for those who take potshots at the public schools, the labor movement and the very concept of government serving a greater good. We often have been called a "special interest." But we will never apologize for that, because our special interests are the students we teach, the patients we care for and all the people we serve. They are worth fighting for.

We stand ready to work with public officials and administrators to improve public institutions. We stand ready to work with parents and taxpayers to improve public schools, colleges, hospitals and state governments. And, most of all, we stand ready to ensure that educators, nurses and all those who serve the public have what they need to excel in their work, including security, dignity and a voice in the workplace.

The AFT represents more than 1.4 million pre-K through 12th-grade teachers; paraprofessionals and other school-related personnel; higher education faculty and professional staff; federal, state and local government employees; nurses and healthcare workers; and early childhood educators.