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AFT News Release

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“In the absence of congressional reauthorization, the administration is responding to the calls for change from parents, teachers and administrators. But waivers remain an imperfect solution.”

Statement by AFT President Randi Weingarten On Granting of NCLB Waivers to 10 States

Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oklahoma and Tennessee receive flexibility from federal mandates in exchange for implementing reforms.

Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is long overdue. Given that, we understand President Obama's decision to proceed with a waiver package and offer temporary relief to states. In the absence of congressional reauthorization, the administration is responding to the calls for change from parents, teachers and administrators. But waivers remain an imperfect solution.

To receive flexibility from No Child Left Behind, the administration insisted states must focus on student learning, not simply on test scores, by requiring states to adopt plans to implement college- and career-ready standards to prepare students for a 21st-century knowledge economy. We also note that in announcing the waivers today, the administration stated that teacher evaluation systems should include multiple measures—such as principal observation, peer review, student work, and student and parent feedback— and not be based simply on test scores.

Evaluation systems, properly constructed, are a vital tool for continuous improvement in teaching and learning. We remain concerned that some states may use these waivers to simply put metrics on top of poorly constructed and implemented evaluation systems, as well as use them as test-based sorting mechanisms for getting rid of teachers without legitimately discerning teachers' effectiveness and how to help them improve their skills. That would reinforce, rather than move away from, the test-based culture that now exists in too many schools.

Time will tell if the waivers granted today actually improve education for students most in need. The waiver application process has been opaque with little opportunity for input from all stakeholders. Effective school accountability systems, and teacher development and evaluation systems, need to be developed and implemented thoughtfully with involvement from teachers and other stakeholders.

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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