Leading the Profession:

NEA's Three-Point Plan for True Education Reform

Statement by NEA President Dennis Van Roekel

December 8, 2011

For years, Americans have talked about "the global economy of the 21st century." Now we're beginning to truly understand what that means.

It means we face real competition in the world today, and we can no longer coast on our past accomplishments. If the United States wants to regain the prosperity we enjoyed for much of the past century, we must take bold steps.

The education system we created in the 20th century served our nation well. We led the world in universal high school attendance and in higher education attainment. But this is a different century, and we must respond with the tenacity and conviction required to meet the needs of all students.

When I began teaching math, some students carried slide rules; now they might carry a library's worth of books on a mobile device. Today's students come from different backgrounds, diverse not only in language and culture, but also in learning styles that vary from subject to subject. And the nation needs all students to succeed. Students must compete in a global world and should have strong academics, cultural and global awareness, the ability to collaborate, and digital literacy, among many other skills.

This environment requires teachers to have a wide range of skills and strategies to keep students engaged and learning beyond the basics. Now, more than ever, we will not meet the challenges that confront us without a highly skilled and effective teaching force.

Unfortunately, too many experts and policymakers who have proposed ideas to promote effective teaching have neither taught nor experienced firsthand the complexities, the challenges, and the rewards of teaching. And too often that has led to policies that make no sense for students or teachers. Not only is that a disservice to students, but there is a real danger that proposals that seem promising on the surface inadvertently threaten both the quality of instruction and the profession itself.

Unlike lawyers or doctors or CPAs, teachers have never had significant authority over the processes and systems that govern the teaching profession. What minimal influence teachers ever had, has waned over the last two decades.

If we want to create an education system for the students of the 21st century, we must transform that system, including the teaching profession. Since teachers know best about what we do, teachers should take responsibility for leading the transformation of our profession.

Today, as the representative of more than 3 million teachers and education support professionals, the National Education Association accepts that responsibility.

For a number of years, NEA has been learning about what works from the ground up. We have learned from the experiences of members in local and state affiliates endeavoring to find new, better ways of improving instruction. NEA has examined quality research about teaching and learning and the data about teacher training and practice from top-performing education systems in other nations.

The steady accumulation of this work prompted me in the summer of 2010 to call for an independent Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching (CETT).

More than 250 teachers and education leaders were nominated for this panel, and NEA selected 21 based on their accomplishments in the classroom, leadership, and service to their communities. As an independent voice for teachers, the CETT was unique. NEA's goal was to obtain the unvarnished thinking of classroom professionals. So although NEA sponsored the work of the Commission, the Commission remained a fully independent body. The Commission's accomplished teachers and leaders deserve both our gratitude for their commitment and our respect for their wisdom, knowledge, and experience.

Even as the CETT work was underway, NEA also listened to thousands of our own members. Over the past year, NEA conducted dozens of hearings and meetings to engage teachers in a dialogue about their profession. We asked teachers how they define effectiveness and what role teachers and the union must play to transform the profession.

Our members told us there are too many obstacles and not enough support for teachers. Teachers said the profession has become bogged down in paperwork and process and is treated too much like a 19th century line job, not a 21st century profession founded on expertise and decision-making. Teachers are eager to meet professional standards, but want professional respect, more say in decisions about instruction, ongoing training and professional development, opportunities for advancement within the profession, and the time to collaborate to better meet students' needs.

NEA sought ideas and solutions that would strengthen the teaching profession and help students learn. We wanted ideas that had been tried and tested. We also wanted ideas we could actually implement in the real world today. We weren't interested in magic wands; teaching is hard work and our education system is complex, and anyone who promises that a single, simple policy can fix everything is just wrong.

Above all we looked for ideas that have the power to positively affect students in their classrooms and transform their daily experience at school.

With the receipt of the CETT report, NEA reached a tipping point that will alter our course. Reflecting the desires of our members and state leadership, I am setting as NEA's guiding star the advancement of a profession of teaching that centers on the success of students.

NEA understands we have to set achievable goals to move our agenda forward. We therefore are focusing on policies and actions that are within our power to change, or at least influence, including changes for our own Association.

It will take a lot of work to transform our profession, but we must begin somewhere – and we must begin now, because our teachers and the students they serve can't wait.

After listening to the advice of our members and leaders, NEA identified three areas where we believe steps can and should be taken to transform the teaching profession. Now we are taking concrete, specific actions in each of those areas.

1. Raising the bar for entry

The first step in transforming our profession is to strengthen and maintain strong and uniform standards for preparation and admission. More than 1.6 million new teachers are expected to enter the profession within the next decade, and we must ensure that they are effective practitioners *before* they are assigned as teachers of record.

Drawing from recommendations of the CETT report, NEA will advocate the alignment of teaching standards across higher education institutions and state licensing agencies.

NEA also will advocate that no candidate enter the teaching profession prior to demonstrating proficient classroom performance based on universally accepted standards and practices.

I realize that NEA is not the first to call for stronger teacher preparation. Within this last year, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education took on the quality of teacher preparation through its *Blue Ribbon* panel, which laid out a comprehensive vision of proposed changes. The report offered recommendations focused on strengthening candidate selection and placement; revamping curricula, incentives, and staffing; strengthening partnerships; and expanding the knowledge base.

Also, the new teacher standards developed by the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium could serve as a basis for nationally accepted standards that would cross state boundaries and develop a national standard of teacher quality.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education looked at teacher preparation. NEA applauded the Department's focus on this issue and agreed with a number of its recommendations.

To ensure that every candidate receives high-quality preparation and can meet high standards of practice, NEA will advocate that *every* teacher preparation program and *every* state licensure system have at least the following two elements:

Examples of Excellence: Mentoring Programs that Work

Georgia State's Network for Enhancing Teacher Quality (NET-Q) program is a paid teacher residency in metro Atlanta. While receiving a living stipend of $25,000 through a federal grant, potential math, science, and special education teacher candidates spend one year as residents working with a mentor teacher. Candidates commit to work in Atlanta for three years and participate in ongoing induction opportunities.

The University of Maryland's Master's Certification (MCERT) program is a long-running example of a teacher residency-like model. Teacher candidates complete coursework while simultaneously working with a mentor teacher from the day teachers report at the beginning of the school year through the last day for students. At the end of the 16-month program, candidates earn a master's degree and are recommended for Maryland certification.

(1) Every teacher candidate should have one full year of residency under the supervision of a Master Teacher before earning a full license.

An in-classroom clinical experience with actual students is crucial to prepare a teacher candidate for the realities of the classroom.

A carefully designed and demanding residency necessarily calls for qualified mentors who can serve as the "teachers of teachers." This is an extraordinary opportunity for talented and experienced teachers to follow a career path as a mentor, which is now often unstructured and only occasionally available.

A mentor should meet demanding qualifications that demonstrate that he or she is a highly accomplished teacher.

(2) Every teacher candidate should pass a rigorous classroom-based performance assessment at the end of his or her candidacy.

A strengthened profession demands a serious commitment to ensuring that every teacher walks into the classroom fully prepared to teach from day one. And teachers themselves want no less.

An end-of-candidacy assessment will be a checkpoint on candidates' application of best practices, such as the ability to use data; understanding how to address the range of student needs; classroom management techniques; the use of new technologies; and practices that re-imagine the use of space, time, and resources to stimulate students' creativity and critical thinking.

The idea of new teacher performance assessments is not new, but promising new approaches are being developed to create carefully crafted, standards-based assessments that look at actual classroom practice and can serve as reliable predictors of future performance. NEA is an active participant in the Teacher Performance Assessment Consortium (TPAC) and is encouraged by other efforts to develop meaningful assessments of practice.

Action

NEA will immediately move to advance this vision of meaningful clinical preparation and assessment for candidates.

- **NEA will work with institutions of higher education, districts, and interested foundations to establish residency programs. NEA commits to supporting the training of high-quality teachers to serve as clinical faculty, cooperating teachers, and mentors to ensure that candidates receive the clinical preparation they need.**

Examples of Excellence: Assessment Models

The Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) is currently being piloted by numerous institutions across the country. Four states have been deemed "accelerated" because they have begun to change state policy to include pre-service performance assessment. However, these different states are choosing to use the assessment in different capacities. In the state of Washington, all teacher candidates will be required to have a passing score on the TPA in order to be eligible for initial state certification. Minnesota will require that all teacher preparation programs have an aggregate passing TPA score to receive program approval.

NEA will collaborate with higher education and other partners to support the implementation of at least 50 high-quality residency programs over the next several years and teacher performance assessments in at least 10 state licensure systems.

- **NEA will strongly advocate for new state regulations in the 26 TPAC pilot states and others to require teacher candidates to pass a performance assessment before becoming a teacher of record.**

2. Teachers Ensuring Great Teaching

Once we raise the bar for entry into the profession, the profession itself must ensure that those who are in the classroom maintain a high standard of practice.

The teaching profession should focus on supporting teachers, providing them with career options and helping teachers improve throughout their careers. Learning how to teach does not stop at the beginning of a teaching career. Teachers continually confront new challenges as they work with their students. They must refine their strategies and techniques to ensure that their students learn. During this process, time to collaborate with colleagues, as well as get the feedback and guidance of expert mentors and coaches, is essential.

On paper, the current U.S. education system might appear to offer instructional leadership through principals and other administrators. In fact, too many principals lack the time and/or training to provide consistent, high-quality evaluation, and many times there is no evaluation at all.

This has been the case for years, and the current burdens of economic cutbacks are fueling additional stresses on principals' time for informed, tailored, and routine feedback.

Rather than hoping that principals alone will provide the necessary support for the ongoing excellence of teachers and teaching, NEA chooses to follow a more effective path—and aims to put teachers in charge of the process.

I see this as the essence of a true profession: putting teachers in charge of the quality of their profession. Taking responsibility for the quality of teaching is essential not only to teachers but to the students they teach.

Creating a Profession with Career Choices

Currently, our education system acts as if a teacher is a teacher is a teacher. But teachers are not all the same; they have different interests, knowledge, skills, weaknesses, and strengths. They need more than a one-size-fits-all career.

Out of respect for teachers and regard for students, NEA will advocate a new system of different career paths, support, and evaluation that acknowledges the diversity of knowledge, skills, and interests among individual teachers, as well as teachers' need and desire to consistently develop their skills.

While the concept of career paths has been given lip service for years, the needs of today's students demand that we act now to restructure the profession. To promote and nurture effective teaching, the profession should offer quality training, well-designed career paths, time to work together on the best ways to help students, quality evaluations that help teachers in their development, professional development based on identified needs, and fair accountability processes.

Steps along this career path include the Novice Teacher, the Professional Teacher, and the Master Teacher.

Newcomers to the profession will be **Novice Teachers** with a different set of responsibilities; they should not be assigned to more challenging students until they have proven themselves. Novice Teachers will have mentors and time to collaborate to compare their practice to that of their more experienced colleagues.

Professional Teachers will earn more and work more hours because they have demonstrated that they are effective. Some will work in planning instruction; some will teach summer school for students who need it; others will foster opportunities and time to bring together colleagues to collaborate on strategies that will help students learn.

Training and feedback do not stop the instant a teacher enters a classroom. As in other professions, teachers need ongoing input, information, and coaching throughout their practice.

Master Teachers will work both as classroom teachers and as mentors, peer reviewers and teacher leaders. Master Teachers could work year-round as they help teachers plan, develop, and integrate curricula in ways that strengthen student learning of content and 21st century skills, such as designing lesson plans that combine technology, foreign languages, and economics. Master Teachers can help prepare colleagues to implement Common Core standards.

Such well-crafted collaboration is especially needed in schools serving low-income populations. In fact, in a recent study NEA conducted of educators in NEA's Priority Schools Campaign, time for collaboration was among the top requests of teachers and support professionals in those schools.

If a teacher is struggling, Master Teachers and other qualified teachers will help that struggling teacher become more effective.

Creating Professional Accountability

With regard to the complex issue of evaluation, NEA has recognized that current systems are inadequate. For that reason, in July 2011, NEA adopted a new **Policy Statement on Teacher Evaluation and Accountability** calling for high-quality evaluations of teachers.

We are clear that the primary purpose of evaluation is to improve teacher quality and effectiveness. Improving student learning drives all of us in education, and evaluation must advance that goal with a keen focus on ensuring teacher quality. The Policy Statement also asserted that, if needed, dismissal should be transparent, fair, and expeditious.

The Policy Statement also advocates Peer Assistance and Review (PAR)-based evaluation systems.

Some NEA affiliates have long-established PAR programs, including Columbus, OH, and Montgomery County, MD. These programs include structured mentorship, observation, and rigorous standards-based evaluation of teachers designed to develop great teachers who can advance student learning.

As you might know, NEA has not always been a strong supporter of PAR. Some of our members believed that peer review – teachers evaluating teachers – would lead to divisiveness and a lack of trust among colleagues.

Yet the evidence from years of implementation – particularly in strong teacher association locals – makes a compelling case for supporting PAR. And when such powerful evidence exists, NEA will support changes that help students.

If designed and implemented carefully, in partnership with teachers and their union, peer assistance and review programs can be rigorous, help teachers grow, and hold them accountable, all while keeping a keen focus on what helps students learn. Peer review can also strengthen teacher collaboration, engage the union in meaningful education improvement efforts, and strengthen union-management relationships.

Good peer review systems work because they do more than classify and label teachers. The process actually does what an evaluation should do – it helps teachers improve their practice. And that's the essence of a system that serves professionals.

According to a recently released report, peer review is far superior to principals' evaluation in terms of rigor and comprehensiveness. It gives teachers ample and supported opportunities to improve their practice and to be successful.

For those who do not or cannot improve, the evidence generated throughout the process provides a compelling rationale for school administrators to take action. The integration of support and evaluation can be a more effective approach to improving instructional practice than isolating one from the other.

Finally, the union-management relationship in PAR districts can create cultures of collaboration and forge bonds of trust and mutual respect, which enable the districts to make more effective decisions on teacher performance and evaluation.

Action

- **Consistent with the NEA Policy Statement on Teacher Evaluation and Accountability, NEA is developing training and materials for all local and state affiliates to use as they develop quality evaluation systems and fair dismissal policies.**

- **NEA also concurs with the CETT report on PAR programs, and as part of NEA's national training effort, NEA will advocate for the expansion of Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) programs. NEA is disseminating best practice descriptions, research, and other information for use in promoting and adopting new programs, and NEA will implement training through its national UniServ Program beginning in January of 2012.**

NEA will work with willing state and local affiliates that have the capacity and resources to establish at least 100 new Peer Assistance and Peer Assistance and Review programs over the next three years.

3. Providing Union Leadership to Transform our Profession

I did not get into education to be a member of NEA. I came to NEA because it helped me as a teacher. The union gave me a voice. There is nothing more frustrating for a classroom teacher than to be denied a respected place to offer ideas to help your students, improve your practice or your school, or strengthen your own profession.

I came to NEA to join with my colleagues and to be heard. I wanted – and my colleagues wanted –to make a difference for our schools and the students we teach.

Now NEA has a new opportunity to speak up as the voice of teachers. Our new responsibility is to cultivate and support teachers' dreams of what the teaching profession should be – and make those dreams come true.

Students deserve the best—and teachers want what is best for students. Rather than hope that someone, somewhere will fix the problems in our profession, I am announcing that NEA is taking that responsibility. I am taking actions to use the scope and power and talents of NEA to transform the profession of teaching.

I know that setting new expectations and making big changes will not be quick or easy. It will require that teachers have a voice in decisions that affect their own professional practice. For this transformation to be successful, teachers and their unions must play leadership roles.

NEA needs to do more to make teachers' voices and ideas heard on the local, state, and federal levels of policymaking. I am talking about teachers like Courtney Johnson of Ohio, who became the face of K-12 teachers across the state of Ohio because she would not accept policies that harmed her students or their classroom. Our union must support individual teachers like Courtney who speak for their profession.

NEA also needs to do more to ensure that teachers play the leading role in shaping the profession of teaching, teachers like Maddie Fennell, who led the Commission for 12 months to bring to this union ideas about strengthening our profession.

We are ending the era of teachers taking a back seat in policymaking, whether in schools or in administrative or elected offices. Today, we begin the work to have more teachers shaping education policy than politicians or pundits or CEOs or anyone else currently attempting to do so.

NEA will deploy its own national network to train teaching professionals for leadership in our profession, in order to transform public schools and help students succeed.

NEA has always advocated for policies that strengthen public education and help students. We were an early and strong advocate for universal education, expanded access to higher education, and

equality in our nation's schools. We expanded collective bargaining and fought for dignity for teachers and support professionals.

Today, across the country, there is a new wave of change. Many local NEA affiliates are helping teachers and schools improve their performance – and raise student achievement – because teachers are taking responsibility and leadership roles. When great teachers become great leaders, students reap the benefits.

NEA has a national apparatus to mobilize for this action. Just as NEA trained and supported our local affiliates in the fight for collective bargaining during the 1960s and '70s, so we will now support them in efforts to transform our profession.

Action

- **NEA will use its national training networks to deliver leadership skills to teachers recognized for their effectiveness. NEA will work with affiliates to train 1,000 accomplished teachers to be voices for their profession, both as instructional leaders and at all levels of policymaking. NEA will make extra efforts to ensure that younger teachers join their experienced colleagues to collaborate and bring fresh perspectives into professional decision-making. Throughout this effort, NEA will urge these talented teachers to be strongly involved at every level of their union.**

- **Additionally, NEA will train educators from all 50 states in educational leadership based on the innovative curriculum being developed by the NEA Foundation's Institute on Innovation in Teaching and Learning.**

An Open Door

Just as teachers can no longer work behind closed doors, our Association can no longer be isolated from promising new approaches.

While staying true to our founding values, we must remain open to ideas, especially those that are driven by evidence. And we are especially focusing on ideas that will help our lowest achieving students stay in school, be inspired, learn, achieve, and graduate to become productive members in our democratic society.

While we believe the best ideas for transforming education will come from teachers, we will continually study the research, successful practice, and new systems that produce results for students. And we are eager to exchange viewpoints—including vigorous debate—and work with anyone who shares a commitment to public education and our nation's students.

At the end of the day, this is the work our members want of NEA, their union: to stand strong for what is best for their students and for what teachers and education support professionals need to do their jobs. NEA will remain true to the voices of our members, acting on their vision, and learning from

them, with profound respect and pride in the passion they bring every day to the success of each and every student they teach.

Dennis Van Roekel,

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NEA POLICY STATEMENT ON TEACHER EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

As Adopted by the July 2011 NEA Representative Assembly

Consistent with the National Education Association's belief that the "teaching profession is a cornerstone of society," "composed of individuals who meet the highest standards" of "evaluation" and "accountability," (NEA Resolution D-1), and recognizing that evaluation and accountability systems too often leave teachers without the feedback or support needed to enhance practice and advance student learning, NEA sets forth below the criteria for the types of teacher evaluation and accountability systems necessary to ensure a high quality public education for every student.

I. High Quality Teacher Evaluation Systems

NEA believes that our students and teachers deserve high quality evaluation systems that provide the tools teachers need to continuously tailor instruction, enhance practice and advance student learning. Such systems must provide both ongoing, non-evaluative, formative feedback and regular, comprehensive, meaningful and fair evaluations. Such systems must be developed and implemented with teachers and their representatives, either through collective bargaining where available, or in partnership with the affiliate representing teachers at the state and local level.

a. All teachers should be regularly evaluated by highly trained evaluators on the basis of clear standards as to what teachers should know and be able to do. Such standards should be high and rigorous and define the rich knowledge, skills, dispositions and responsibilities of teachers. Such standards may be based on national models such as the NEA Principles of Professional Practice, the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Model Core Teaching Standards, the Standards developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, or statewide standards for the teaching profession.

b. Evaluations must be comprehensive – based on multiple indicators to provide teachers with clear and actionable feedback to enhance their practice—and must include all three of the following components:

   i. ***Indicators of Teacher Practice*** demonstrating a teacher's subject matter knowledge, skill in planning and delivering instruction that engages students, ability to address issues of equity and diversity, and ability to monitor and assess student learning and adjust instruction accordingly. Such indicators may include the following indicators or others chosen by a local or state affiliate: classroom observations, proof of practice (e.g., lesson plans, curriculum plans, student assessments, minutes from team planning meetings, curriculum maps, and teacher instructional notes), teacher interviews and self-assessments.

   ii. ***Indicators of Teacher Contribution and Growth*** demonstrating a teacher's professional growth and contribution to a school's and/or district's success. Such indicators may include the following indicators or others chosen by a local or state affiliate: completion of meaningful professional development that is applied to

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II. High Quality Teacher Accountability Systems

NEA believes that teachers are accountable for high quality instruction that advances student learning. High quality teacher accountability systems, developed and implemented with teachers and their representatives either through collective bargaining where available, or in partnership with the affiliate representing teachers at the state and local level, should be based on the following principles.

a. All teachers are responsible for providing a high quality education to students and supporting the efforts of colleagues and their school as a whole to do the same. To fulfill that responsibility, teachers have the right to a safe and supportive working environment including ongoing non-evaluative feedback on their practice that supports teachers' efforts to innovate and the right to regular, confidential evaluations.

b. All teachers have the responsibility to continually enhance their practice and to stay current in subject matter and pedagogical approaches by reflecting and acting on feedback received, accessing professional development opportunities provided and collaborating with colleagues to enhance instruction. To fulfill that responsibility, teachers have the right to increased autonomy over instructional practices, time during the school day for collaboration with colleagues, a decisionmaking role in professional development, and the right to have such development tailored to enhancing skills identified as needing improvement in both non-evaluative feedback and in evaluations, as well as the ability to pursue advanced coursework and degrees as part of professional development.

c. If, through a high quality evaluation system, a teacher's practice fails to meet performance standards, a teacher should be provided with clear notice of the deficiencies and an improvement plan should be developed by the teacher, local association and employer. The improvement plan should provide the teacher with a reasonable opportunity—including time, high quality professional development and support—to meet expectations. In addition, the teacher should receive regular and frequent feedback from the district and the local association regarding his or her progress during the support program period. What constitutes a reasonable opportunity will depend on the nature of the deficiencies identified, but in no event should an improvement plan exceed one school year. During the period in which a teacher is implementing an improvement plan, the district shall provide a support program mutually agreed upon by the district and the local association, which shall include the assignment of an accomplished teacher to assist the teacher not meeting performance standards in improving his or her practice and to ensure a quality education for that teacher's students.

d. If a teacher fails to improve despite being given a reasonable opportunity to do so, or otherwise fails to meet expectations, the teacher may be counseled to leave the profession or be subject to fair, transparent and efficient dismissal process that provides due process. Such a process should include: notice to a teacher of the basis for the dismissal; early disclosure of all evidence on which the dismissal is based; an early mandatory meeting between the teacher, employer and the teacher's representative to discuss possible resolution; and, failing such resolution, a prompt hearing before an impartial decisionmaker on the charges.

e. NEA believes that it is appropriate and fitting for accountability systems to continue to differentiate between the rights and responsibilities of probationary teachers, meaning those teachers in their initial years of employment who may be nonrenewed upon notice at the end of a school year, and career teachers, meaning those teachers who have successfully served through the probationary period and may be dismissed only for cause as defined by state law or local agreement or policy.

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