Statement of Support

June 18, 2013

The Next Generation Science Standards have met the American Federation of Teachers' criteria for strong academic content standards, which are essential to dramatically improving student achievement and increasing public confidence in our education system. The AFT has been a long-term supporter of rigorous content standards and high expectations for all students, and we believe that teacher voice in both the design and implementation of standards is key to ensuring equal access in all classrooms.

As with our involvement in the development of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Math, the AFT has once again used the voice of our members to help shape the Next Generation Science Standards. These standards, based on the National Research Council's Framework for K-12 Science Education, brings together the latest research in science, technology, engineering and mathematics to create a focused, coherent, rigorous set of expectations for students to better prepare them for college and career, and to make informed science and technical decisions about the world around them.

With the help of 26 K-12 science educators, the AFT provided technical feedback on confidential and public reviews of the standards. Teacher comments during initial reviews included concerns about the amount of material covered in early grades, lack of clarity in how to read the performance expectations and the level of mastery expected at each grade level. With each subsequent review, these concerns were addressed and the AFT is satisfied with the language in the final document.

The Next Generation Science Standards have seamlessly incorporated science and engineering practices, disciplinary core ideas and crosscutting concepts into each performance expectation. Critical thinking and problem-solving are embedded throughout as students use mathematical and computational thinking to construct explanations and design solutions based on understanding of concepts rather than coverage of topics.

The timing of the release of these standards is critical to providing a well-rounded education for all students rather than narrowing the curriculum to just the subjects and content that are tested. The AFT commends the writers of the NGSS for including connections in each discipline to grade-level appropriate Common Core standards for ELA and math. Competency in science promotes literacy and math, and enriches what goes on in the classroom.

The AFT supports the Next Generation Science Standards; however, careful consideration must be given to curriculum development, instructional planning, accessibility of resources, time for unpacking the standards, professional development, and classroom-based assessment of student learning. College and career readiness for America's students is a long-term commitment. Students, teachers and schools are already juggling multiple improvement initiatives, and we still have much to do as a nation to get the Common Core State Standards implemented right. As states begin to consider adoption of the NGSS, timing, support and listening to the voices from our nation's classrooms are critical. The AFT will use our sphere of influence to push for a thoughtful process of implementation in order to make the vision of the Framework for K-12 Science Education a reality in our classrooms. Realizing that vision is years down the road, but with the NGSS, important first steps have been taken.

Sincerely,

Randi Weingarten
President