

SHARE MY LESSON SOARS IN POPULARITY

In less than two years, more than 500,000 teachers, parents, and others have used Share My Lesson, the free online resource created by the AFT and TES Connect, making it one of the most sought-out collections of lesson plans and resources. Winner of the Software & Information Industry Association's 2014 CODiE Award for Best Crowd Sourced Solution, Share My Lesson now offers more than 300,000 free lesson plans—including more than 31,000 materials aligned to the Common Core State Standards—along with videos, handouts, and teaching and parenting tips. More than 5.5 million resources have been downloaded from Share My Lesson, with a recent average of 10,000 downloads daily. Find out more at <http://go.aft.org/AE214news4>.



TOO SMALL TO FAIL IN TULSA

In March, community leaders in Tulsa, Oklahoma, joined with Too Small to Fail, a joint initiative of Next Generation and the Bill, Hillary & Chelsea Clinton Foundation, to launch a campaign that will help parents and caregivers of children ages 5 and under prepare their children for success in school and life. Called “Talking Is Teaching,” the campaign will emphasize how simple actions like describing objects seen during a walk or bus ride, singing songs, or telling short stories a few times a day can significantly improve a baby’s ability to learn new words and concepts. Tulsa has emerged as a national leader in early childhood education, and the campaign is being developed in partnership with local organizations. Read more at www.bit.ly/1gMc40G.

GROWING CONCERNS OVER COMMON CORE IMPLEMENTATION

The Learning First Alliance (LFA), which includes the AFT among its members, is calling on policymakers to allow more time for implementing the Common Core State Standards, particularly the high-stakes consequences tied to Common Core testing, to ensure the required instructional alignment and supports are provided. “Rushing to make high-stakes decisions such as student advancement or graduation, teacher evaluation, school performance designation or state funding awards based on assessments of the standards before they have been fully and properly implemented is unwise,” the LFA statement says. More information is available at <http://go.aft.org/AE214news2>.

In spring 2013, the AFT called for a moratorium on assessment-driven sanctions tied to the Common Core standards until solid implementation plans are embedded in schools and after a year or more of field testing. Read the press release at <http://go.aft.org/AE214news3>.

WANTED: TESTING TRANSPARENCY

AFT President Randi Weingarten pressed the corporate testing giant Pearson to remove “gag orders” preventing educators from expressing concerns about company-developed tests. “Principals and teachers in New York who recently administered the Pearson-developed Common Core tests have said they are barred from speaking about the test content and its effects on students,” reported Weingarten. She said the forced silence comes from contracts tied to the tests that are executed by Pearson, the largest testing company in the world. In a letter hand-delivered to Pearson executives in London during the company’s annual shareholder meeting, the AFT demanded that the company “immediately remove these prohibitions (referred to as ‘gag orders’ in the press) from existing and future contracts.” The letter is available at <http://go.aft.org/AE214news1>.

INSIDE THE “BLACK BOX”

Good teachers are receiving poor evaluations because of a grossly flawed value-added algorithm that should be changed, seven Houston teachers and the Houston Federation of Teachers said May 1 in an unprecedented lawsuit filed in a federal district court. The lawsuit details numerous problems with the Houston Independent School District’s Education Value-Added Assessment System. Its statistical formula uses a student’s performance on prior standardized tests to predict current-year academic growth and to measure the effect, or added value, each teacher has on a student’s academic growth over the school year. What is considered a sufficient level of student growth is not defined, however, and the school district uses this deeply flawed methodology for decisions about teacher evaluation, bonuses, and termination in a “black box” system in which the calculation is considered proprietary and confidential. The legal brief can be found at <http://go.aft.org/AE214news5>.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

The AFT has joined a broad coalition of education groups to release a blueprint for better-coordinated support systems for all children in public schools. “Partnerships, Not Pushouts—A Guide for School Board Members: Community Partnerships for Student Success” lays the groundwork for policy recommendations, including the use of community school resource coordinators to develop “Personal Opportunity Plans” for each student. Members of the coalition include the Alliance for Excellent Education; the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL); the Coalition for Community Schools; the National Education Association; the National School Boards Association; Opportunity Action; the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign; and the Rural School and Community Trust. More information is available at www.bit.ly/QvzZRL.

