**Teachers don’t oppose reforms. But these federal ideas just won’t work.**

By Marty Hittelman

What makes for successful education reform? From the teacher’s perspective, **it must be rooted in classroom practice and supported by research that demonstrates success in improving student learning.**

U.S. Secretary of Education **Arne Duncan** is proposing to award $4.35 billion to states on a competitive grant basis for what he considers “educational innovation.” California’s share — if it qualifies — might be around $500 million for its 6 million students. To put the federal funding in perspective, **education budget cuts in California over the last couple of years come to $13 billion.** The millions would be helpful, but not enough to make up the difference. We would also like to see them directed more productively.

To qualify for the competition, states must enact federally mandated “reforms.” One would force states to adopt teacher performance evaluation procedures that rely on **individual students’ standardized test scores.** Another would base teacher compensation on those scores. **Research has found both ideas to be ineffective.** Still another requirement would force states to lift caps on the number of charter schools, although recent studies have shown that **only 17% of charters perform better than traditional schools and 37% actually do worse.**

**Public education faces complex problems and won’t be fixed by simplistic solutions.** Standardized testing can be a useful tool among others to assess student learning. But it is too narrow a measure on which to base a student’s grade, let alone gauge a teacher’s or school’s performance. This classroom perspective is backed up by research.

Some will try to paint our opposition to “Race to the Top” mandates as “the unions are opposed to school reform.” That’s untrue. **We are for research-validated changes that work,** such as standards-based and common curricula that have multiple source assessments. **We oppose reforms based on fads and opportunistic politics.** We can do better than the currently conceived “Race to the Top” federal mandates. We hope President Obama will live up to his pledge of education reform “**with teachers, not to them**.”

Marty Hittelman is president of the California Federation of Teachers.