

Education Matters

July/August 2010

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation



DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Responding to each student's
learning needs

By Kevin B. Daniel, Ed.D.

As teachers continue to deal with the unique challenges of today's learners, one of the most promising classroom approaches to meeting the needs of each student continues to be a differentiated instructional (DI) approach.

What is DI?

DI is about responding to each learner's needs, designing lessons with the understanding that students have individual learning styles that motivate them and that students should have ownership over their learning by competing with themselves and against standards rather than competing with other students.

According to DI experts Rick Wormeli and Carol Ann Tomlinson, DI is about doing what is fair for students rather than what is equal, focusing on improvement and growth over time and being a responsive teacher. It's about the same finish line of achievement but the start and journey may vary. Wormeli and Tomlinson also add that DI is about a belief system and mindset of teaching.

What DI isn't

DI is not teaching to the middle and hoping for improved results; it's not about remediation that frequently holds already struggling students at low levels of achievement, and it's not about waiting for students to fail and then thinking about interventions.

Important questions for teachers

Members of a Professional Learning Community understand there are four important questions to ask about learning. These four questions are important for all classroom teachers to reflect on as they review their current classroom practices:

1. What do we want our students to know?
2. How will we know when they know it?
3. How will we respond when students do not know?
4. How will we respond when students already know?

How the aforementioned questions are answered will go a long way toward informing teachers where they are with responding to the needs of all learners. The answers will also show teachers where they are with having a classroom culture of DI.

Critical elements of DI

For DI to be effective at improving student learning, the following five critical elements must be in place:

► **CRITICAL ELEMENT ONE**—Clear identification of the learning goals and targets for students. It starts with Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) and Course Level Expectations (CLEs) but should go beyond to developing essential understandings. Marzano identified the number one school-level factor that has

a strong research correlation to student achievement as having a guaranteed (consistent classroom to classroom) and viable (double within time provided) curriculum.

► **CRITICAL ELEMENT TWO**—To determine where students are in their learning levels (intervention, grade-level, or advanced) and what skills they possess, it is important that teachers have quality pre-assessments. This will take time and preparation; however, remember that pre-assessments do not have to be lengthy but they do have to be effective. During this element it is also important to understand that DI is about more than readiness for learning. It should also be about responding to student interests and understanding how students learn best. Thus, building a learning profile for each student is important. Many tools are easily accessible on the web to accomplish this without a lot of time commitment.

► **CRITICAL ELEMENT THREE**—Once teachers determine the learning levels and skillsets of their students, designing tiered lessons that meet the three aforementioned student learning levels will be needed. Every student has the same learning targets; the pathways of getting to that end are the variables.

► **CRITICAL ELEMENT FOUR**—Teachers must be proficient at using multiple teaching strategies to differentiate instruction consistently well. If the only tools you have in your toolkit are “stand and deliver” and worksheets, DI will be impossible. Marzano’s nine strategies are a great place to start.

► **CRITICAL ELEMENT FIVE**—The foundation of this work includes a teacher having superior classroom management skills coupled with well-defined classroom procedures and routines. DI will not work without this strong foundation of classroom management.

Hitting student achievement zone

One of the most important aspects of DI is hitting students in their respective achievement zone. Students are in the achievement zone in their learning when things are not too easy or too hard but right on target. The following chart describes the zones and characteristics within them:

TOO EASY ☹️	ON TARGET 😊	TOO HARD ☹️
I get it right away	I know some things	I don't know where to start
I already know	I have to think	I can't figure it out
This is a cinch	I have to work	I'm spinning my wheels
I'm coasting	I have to persist	I'm missing key skills
I feel relaxed	I hit some walls	I feel frustrated
I'm bored	I have to re-group	I feel angry

Carol Ann Tomlinson, *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*. 1999 ASCD.

Where do I start the DI journey?

It is important when starting a new initiative to have a destination in mind, knowing the pathway to a great DI classroom is a process that takes time. A great way to do that is through goal setting. I always encourage professionals to establish SMART goals. SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results focused and Time bound. I encourage five goals to be achieved over the course of 12-18 months:

► **GOAL ONE (ONGOING)**

—Read and learn with colleagues in collaborative teams to gain an understanding of the big ideas and philosophy of DI. As finances allow, attend workshops. Group book studies are a great and economical way of learning.

► **GOAL TWO (1-4 MO.)**

—Understand how students learn best by interviews, questionnaires, parent conversations, learning inventories, and learning profile tools.

► **GOAL THREE (4-8 MONTHS)**

—Clearly identify what students are supposed to know and understand by developing essential questions and understandings for students.

► **GOAL FOUR (8-14 MONTHS)**

—Work to develop quality pre-assessments with a team of colleagues and formative assessments to measure student learning so that you know where students are in the learning progression.

► **GOAL FIVE (14-18 MONTHS)**

—Develop multiple tiered lessons that meet the needs of students whether they are at intervention, on grade-level, or advanced levels in their learning.

Final thoughts on DI

One of the most important things teachers can do to impact student learning and create motivated learners is through differentiating instruction. While teachers know this, knowing is not enough. Teachers must consistently do the things required to differentiate instruction as often as is possible to meet the needs of today’s unique learner. ■



Dr. Kevin Daniel is the assistant superintendent for instructional services in the Raymore-Peculiar (Ray-Pec) R-2 in Peculiar, Missouri. Dr. Daniel does a variety of staff development and school improvement workshops with special emphasis on classroom management, reaching students from poverty, creating classrooms with high expectations, and professional learning community-related topics. He can be reached at kdworkshops@comcast.net. Reprinted with permission from author Kevin Daniel and Missouri State Teachers Association and School & Community.

The Edutainer

Connecting the Art and Science of Teaching

“From my years of hosting *Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader?* I have found that learning is most effective when it is fun. Brad Johnson and Tammy McElroy have taken that idea and formatted it in a way to help teachers help students make the most of their valuable classroom time. This can be life-changing for kids.”

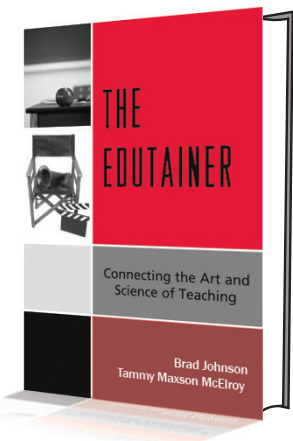
—Jeff Foxworthy, comedian and host of *Are you Smarter than a 5th Grader?*

The Edutainer is a necessary resource for good teachers to survive and thrive, while helping students flourish in the twenty-first century. The classroom teacher is the single most important factor in student success; yet most teachers burn out within five years of teaching.

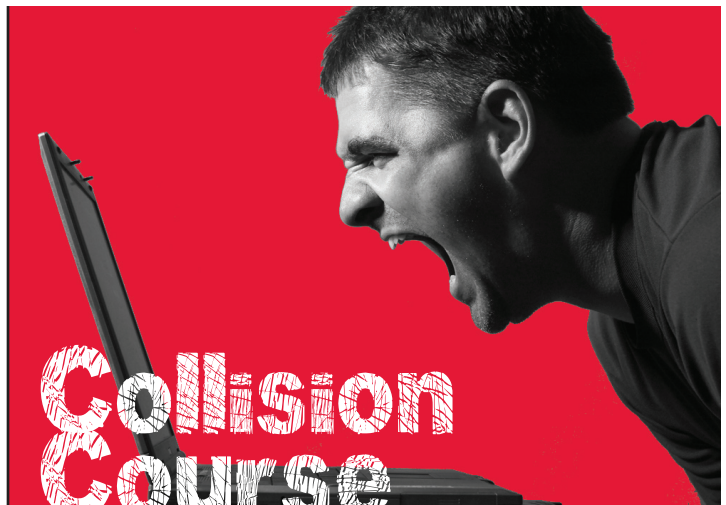
The book describes an educational approach that provides teachers with core operational and interpersonal skills to be an effective educator. These skills include communication, organization, management, planning, and building authentic relationships based upon respect and personal responsibility. It is unique in its perspective that the educator should be fluid and adapting to our current culture, while employing sound academic principles. ■

“Bravo!!! No more teacher burnout here! The book is insightful, practical, and clear, with informative examples, effective strategies, and affirming advice for both the novice and the expert. *The Edutainer* should be at the top of the required reading list for classroom teachers.

—Rosemarie Stallworth-Clark, associate professor emerita of educational psychology, Georgia Southern University



Brad Johnson has fourteen years of educational experience as a teacher, mentor, and administrator. Tammy Maxson McElroy has over twenty years of educational experience at the elementary and middle grade levels.



When Academic Freedom Meets Public Accountability

By Julie Greenberg

Facebook's official statement on privacy is that “you should have control over what you share.” It's also the line of many faculty at Texas public universities, who are going ballistic over a new law requiring them to post online their course syllabi, curriculum vitae, department budgets, and students' end-of-course evaluations of faculty. One biology professor at the University of Texas at Austin said that the legislation would provide “zero public good.”

The legislation may be a bit heavy-handed, but it addresses an issue about which the faculty of many universities appear to have a blind spot: the public support upon which their institution rests compels a greater degree of public transparency.

How does this blind spot connect to teacher quality? The National Council on Teacher Quality has experienced firsthand the cold shoulder from many public universities as we have tried to obtain course syllabi from their education schools, often having to resort to formal “open records” requests. These universities feel that the prerogatives of

their faculty's personal privacy and academic freedom extend to publicly regulated and supported programs producing public school teachers.

Some universities (about 10 percent on average, we find) already post all course syllabi on the web, so the process is hardly antithetical to academic norms. Nonetheless, it is obviously antithetical to some academics' sensibilities. It would be very refreshing to get wind of at least some upstart faculty who argue for setting all public university privacy settings where they should be: as much information as possible available to anyone. As Facebook also counsels, “Your privacy settings should be simple and easy to understand,” and what is simpler and easier to understand than public transparency? ■



Julie Greenberg is Senior Policy Director at the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ). She taught

secondary math for 13 years in Montgomery County (MD) schools before joining NCTQ.



Who is the real **Marc Tucker:** visionary or baloney maker?

Two commentators weigh in on Tucker's ideas that are having a major influence on the standards movement

Tackling a Taboo Topic

By Chester E. Finn, Jr.



How serious are we about preparing everyone for college? This is perhaps the most widely avoided question in American education. It's politically dangerous. Merely asking it seems to raise doubts about our core belief in equal opportunity. And it sounds crabby, cranky, arrogant, and classist.

But think about this. The new "common core" standards that states are being encouraged to embrace are indeed rigorous. By eleventh and twelfth grade, for example, they expect students to do such things as:

- Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text... contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

And that's just part of the tip of the intellectual peaks that our schools, our teachers, and our young people are being asked to scale. (I haven't even mentioned math!)

Yes, it's a very good thing to raise this bar. Yes, it's essential for international competitiveness. Yes, people who have mastered such cognitive skills and knowledge will surely be college ready—and more of those who enroll in college will be prepared to succeed there. Presumably the same will be true of those who embark on (most) careers. The standards are said to be calibrated to college and career readiness.

Marc Tucker's Baloney

By Donna Garner



I cannot sit back and be quiet when "educators" such as Marc Tucker are spreading their "bologna" around this nation. Here is a man who has never taught a day in his life in K-12. He has no education degree, does not know how students learn nor the curriculum they should be taught, and certainly should not be given the authority to

reform the entire American school system.

Mark went to both Brown and Yale on academic scholarships. His bachelor's degree was in philosophy and American literature. He was involved with the drama department at Yale until he dropped out of his graduate program there. His master's from George Washington University was in telecommunications policy.

Tucker worked as a lighting technician at a PBS TV station in Boston and then began to work at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) in Portland, Oregon.

It was from NWREL that some of the worst education fads have either been launched or pushed onto the public schools: outcomes-based education, Certificate of Mastery, culturally based education, the New Jersey Writing Project/whole language instruction (e.g., scoring of student essays without grading for grammar/usage mistakes, invented spelling, chunking, metacognition, the balanced approach).

From NWREL, Tucker went to the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C. Even though he has no degree in education, he later became a "professor of education" at the University of Rochester (1988-90) where he taught college students for two years. So, as far as I can determine, that is Tucker's only real teaching experience.

In 1988, Tucker became the president of the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE) where he joined up with Hillary Clinton, Mario Cuomo, and Ira Magaziner to get states to move away from local control of their schools and migrate to national standards.

But do we seriously mean that everybody should be expected to learn what's in them? Even with today's mostly-modest K-12 academic standards; with relatively low "cut scores" on high-school graduation tests (generally set around eighth grade competence); with slews of "credit recovery" and "dropout recovery" programs; with hundreds of "open admission" colleges; and with generous provision for on-campus remediation (and employer-delivered training)—even with all of that, barely 70 percent of our young people graduate from high school. Although most of them subsequently enroll in some sort of postsecondary institution, fewer than half will complete college, a grim reality than hasn't changed in four decades.

COLLEGE FOR EVERYONE?

Nobody doubts that we will do better with college completion if those who emerge from high school possess the sort of intellectual mastery built into the "Common Core." And that would be a swell thing for America as well as for millions of individuals who now fall by the wayside. It's definitely worth recalibrating our K-12 system so that many more young people are prepared to succeed on that path.

Having said that, do we really expect everybody to follow that path? Picture, say, 100 random Americans and ask yourself how many of them are likely to have the aptitude, desire, and perseverance to become adept at these sorts of things. Betcha you don't say 100 percent.

I'm by no means the only person with doubts about the wisdom and economic utility of making college universal. My immediate concern, however, is that even as raising the K-12 academic bar does great good for a great many people, it will also discourage others. Faithfully "enforced," it could worsen the dropout rate even as it better prepares those who complete high school to succeed in college and the more challenging occupations.

How about those who want to be plumbers, nurses' aides, soldiers, landscapers, or chefs? Does anyone actually not expect many to respond, "This stuff really doesn't interest me and isn't related to what I want to do in life"?

Will we continue to avert our eyes from this problem because we're afraid of the backlash that will surely follow when someone says "We don't really expect everybody to meet our uniform academic standards and we're prepared to watch some young people fall by the wayside"?

Nobody is prepared to face the consequences, such as angry political factions or ethnic/racial rabble-rousers rising up and saying "It's our kids that they're prepared to throw over the side."

ANOTHER PATH

That's not the only way to view this problem, or the only outcome to anticipate. Recognize, though, that to find an acceptable alternative, one must accept the fact that a high-standards academic diploma at the end of twelfth grade isn't the only imaginable credential that might be worth earning, or the only imaginable timetable, or the only imaginable way to organize our school system.

In 1991, Marc Tucker and Lauren Resnick created New Standards that push standards-based reform. In 1998, he and Judy Coddling created America's Choice that made sure the national standards were further implemented into the schools; and in 2005, Tucker created the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce.

QUIT FOCUSING ON ACADEMIC CONTENT

Tucker's whole plan has been to require public school teachers to quit focusing on knowledge-based academic content that emphasizes mostly objective testing with right or wrong answers. This kind of thinking has been given a new level of credibility under President Obama and Secretary Arne Duncan who have added federal "teeth" by creating Common Core Standards and the millions of federal dollars available through Race to the Top funding. States are lining up at the trough without seriously considering the long-term consequences: national standards=national curriculum=national assessments=a national database. Teachers will be forced to teach daily whatever is on the national assessments in order to keep their jobs.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

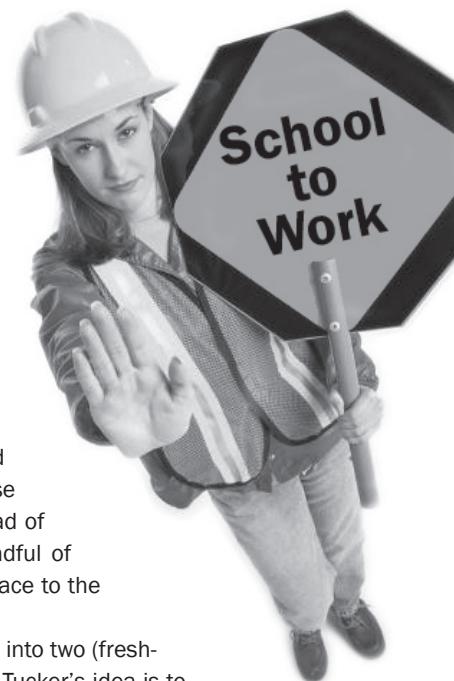
As you read through Marc Tucker's "plan," please realize that this is nothing new. Tucker called it "School to Work" in the 1980s. The idea is to educate a small percentage of the population and then make "worker bees" out of the rest of the masses.

Tucker's School-to-Work plan has simply morphed into what he is now calling "early college entrance." He is luring parents to buy into this idea by dressing it up in sweet-sounding words such as "college-level work," "admission to selective colleges," and "instructional programs that are among the best in the world."

The reality is that if the standards are measurable, knowledge-based, academic, rigorous and doable, almost all students need to take four years of high school to master them. It is completely nonsensical to think that there would be many high school students who could complete four years in two. This would not happen if the high school courses are content-rich and rigorous.

As an example, take a look at the Texas standards in the four core subjects. You will see that only an absolute genius could possibly master all of these elements in two years instead of four. (Texas is one of a handful of states not applying for the Race to the Top funding.)

By compressing four years into two (freshman and sophomore years), Tucker's idea is to



Which means, simply stated, that one must be open to multiple options for kids and schools and—hold on tight—for some modern version of what used to be known as “tracking.” No, not the old-fashioned four-track high school where some kids earned “academic” or “honors” diplomas while others received “vocational” certificates or that abomination known as the “general” diploma.

Instead, picture something like Marc Tucker’s bold plan for paths to diverge after tenth grade. Each path leads to a worthwhile place—but not all of them to college.

This concept is set forth in *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, the 2006 report of a blue-ribbon commission on “the new skills of the American workforce.”

Tucker & Co. envision serious academic standards for all and big changes in how schools are organized and instruction delivered.

Tucker and company have been assiduously working these past four years to identify states willing to experiment with this radical alternative to our traditional structures for K-12 education, and at this writing they’ve signed up six of them: Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Utah, Delaware, Arizona, and New Mexico. This has been happening quietly, as the spotlight has beamed onto the Common Core state standards initiative, and I’ve no idea how far actual implementation may have gone in any of those six jurisdictions.

Mind you, there’s much more to this plan than simple tracking. Tucker & Co. envision serious academic standards for all and big changes in how schools are organized and instruction delivered. They don’t intend to let anybody off the hook. But they’ve got serious plans—and career opportunities—for those not headed to academic colleges. They expect the dropout rate to be far lower than today’s. And they might just be right.

You should read their report yourself. You might think up a better plan. The point is simply that we ought not, as a country, stumble into the challenges of the Common Core standards initiative without asking ourselves how far along that intellectual continuum we seriously expect everyone to move—and what’s in store for those who may not want or need or be able to move as far as others.

If we don’t force ourselves to think creatively about this—and deal with the politics of thinking about it—we’re bound either to dumb-down the Common Core standards or risk an even higher dropout rate and more alienated young people than we have today. ■

Chester E. Finn, Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in Washington, D.C., and a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education.



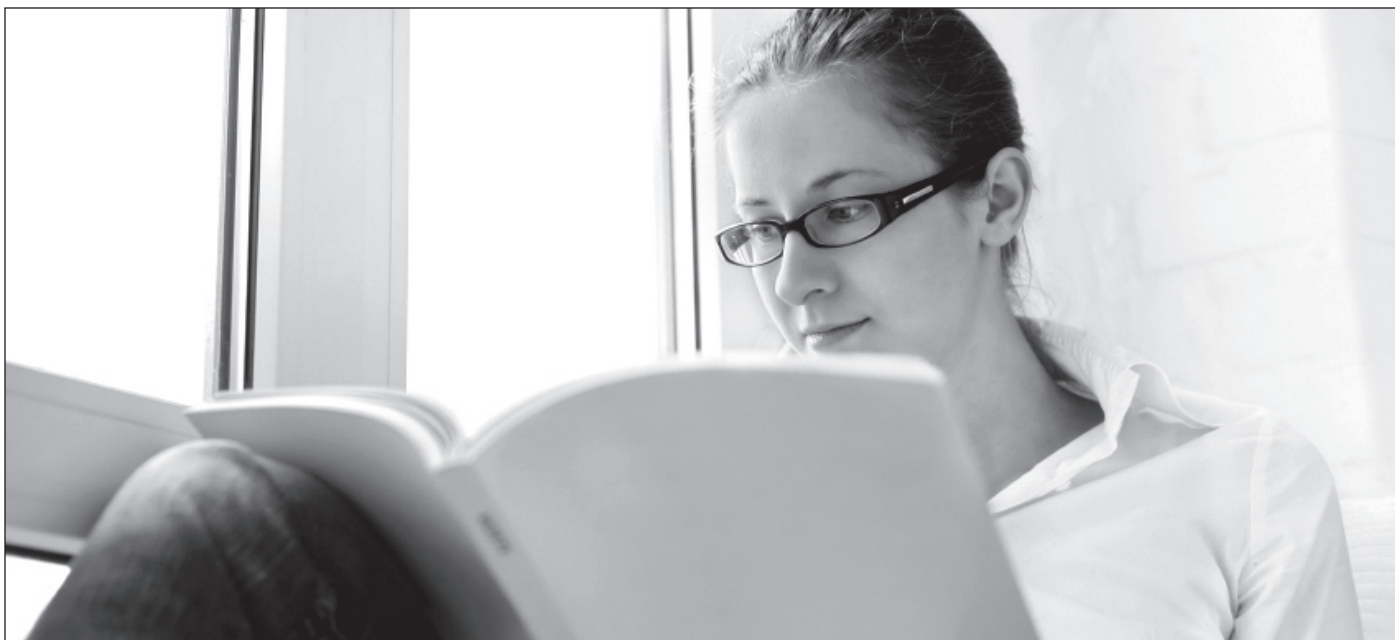
fast-track and minimize the high school curriculum so that students do not receive in-depth instruction in world history, U.S. history, economics, government, higher math, the great classics of the world, and advanced science. Such two-year high school students would be bereft of the knowledge base needed to cope with the adult problems of the world, and certainly would not make well-informed voters or citizens.

These students also would not have the flexibility and the knowledge base to change vocations readily or to get into college and be successful students. Students (encouraged by their naïve parents) who unknowingly succumb to Tucker’s plan would end up having a very shallow educational background and would be doomed to the career pathway they chose when young and immature.

STUDENTS CAN REACH ACADEMIC GOALS

For all thirty-three years of my teaching career and until the present moment, I have fought for rigorous, explicit, doable goals for students to reach at each grade level. I believe in the maxim that says, “How do you eat a huge pizza? One piece at a time.” If a teacher has clear-cut goals that are reasonable and can bring his students along steadily and consistently from Day One of the school year, I believe most students can reach those goals through hard work and personal responsibility. If students reach their goals at each grade level, they will be equipped to pursue college at the end of their four years in high school. If they want to go directly into the workforce—that is fine. However, if they want to choose college, they will also be equipped to become successful college students and to graduate, thus opening many doors of opportunity for them in life. They will also have the equipping skills to be good citizens who can make wise choices regarding social, economic, and political issues. ■

Donna Garner taught high school for over twenty-six years, and was appointed by Presidents Reagan and Bush to the National Commission on Migrant Education. She was also appointed to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) writing team for English/Language Arts/Reading.



Returning to School

Are You Ready?

By Sharon L. Nelson
Director of Legal Services

Are you ready for the new school year? Sure, you probably have some supplies, have finished your summer break training, have vague ideas at least of how you want to present your curriculum, but are you really ready? Have you even thought about you?

Let's face it—teachers are not trained to focus on themselves. No other profession gives to others so freely and means so much to the future of our country. The profession demands selfless service, and teachers across America comply. For that we thank you. However, in the midst of giving, have you taken a moment to spend on you? Here are some tips to help make your school year start smoothly.

1 Put on your flexibility shoes. We all know the start of the new school year can mean chaos—students changing classrooms, teachers getting new assignments upon arrival at school, and more. Despite the chaos, you will be required to adapt and to be flexible, as most contracts allow your administration to assign you different duties. During this economic

crisis, now more than ever teachers are being asked to take on different tasks. While change can be disconcerting, it can also help you be a better educator. A teacher who embraces new assignments with zeal can only pass that level of fervor onto students.

2 Know your rights. While change can be good and often inevitable, not all change is handed to you with the intent of broadening your horizons. Sometimes it is illegally punitive, and knowing your rights can help you tell the difference. While your contract likely allows your administration to assign you different tasks, federal and most state laws prohibit retaliation. If you find yourself handed a new assignment, take a moment to think about why you have been selected for this change. During the last school year, were you vocal about any legal violations? Federal law in particular protects you from retaliation if you have recently complained about any form of discrimination or harassment, a failure to provide proper lunch or rest periods, or if you have blown the whistle on something your school did you believed was illegal. You should never be punished for those things, and if you are, you should not hesitate to consult with legal counsel.

3 Review your files. You have the right to see your personnel files and should regularly review them to ensure nothing derogatory is being placed in your file without your knowledge. Some adminis-

trators also maintain a school file separate and apart from your personnel file. Ask to review both. While some teachers are fortunate enough to work an entire career without any disciplinary issues, most do not for various reasons. Your personnel file and its contents can impact your ability to move to a different district or move up in your profession. You should know the contents of that file.

4 Dues/Fees. Finally, we all know teachers now work in a more litigious society. Sadly educators find themselves in a position where support from AAE and/or state associations is necessary. While the reasons for needing such support can be disheartening, thankfully these support mechanisms exist and provide peace of mind. Make sure you have put your support group in place, your dues and fees are paid, and you can focus on what is important—the profession you've chosen and the education of our future leaders.

Thank you for all that you do and we wish you all the best for this upcoming year! ■



*Sharon L. Nelson is
AAE Director of Legal
Services.*



Education Matters is a publication of
the Association of American Educators
Foundation (AAEF)
27405 Puerta Real, Suite 230
Mission Viejo, CA 92691-6388

Presorted Standard
US Postage Paid
#400
Laguna Niguel, CA

www.aeteachers.org; (800) 704-7799
E-mail: info@aeteachers.org
Gary Beckner, Managing Editor
Kelley Prause, Associate Editor & Researcher
Diane Meyer, Editorial Assistant
Bobette Craycraft, Editorial Assistant

ASSURANCE INSURANCE



In addition to \$2,000,000 of liability protection, professional members of the Association of American Educators get access to optional insurance policies at a discount, including:

✓ **ID Theft Assist Protection**

AAE has arranged to provide ID theft assist through a partnership between a leading credit bureau and a respected 24/7 crisis response team providing a comprehensive identity recovery system.

✓ **Term life**

You can request up to \$750,000 of outstanding coverage at special rates for Association members.

✓ **\$1 and \$3 Million Private Practice Professional Liability**

This plan is designed to meet the needs of private practice educators who are not directly employed by a school district.

✓ **Disability Income Protection**

If you can't work due to a covered disability, you can receive up to two-thirds of your salary to age 65.

✓ **Personal Auto**

Mention your association and you may receive an additional 8 percent discount from Geico (in most states) on your auto insurance.

✓ **Free Long-term Care Insurance Evaluation Service**

You and your loved ones can receive a personalized, no-obligation benefit and price comparison of plans from several top-rated insurance companies (for members, parents, and grandparents).

✓ **Accidental Death or Dismemberment**

Pays up to \$300,000 for death from any covered accident.

✓ **Life after 50**

A guaranteed issue, modified whole life plan for members and spouses.

✓ **\$500,000 New Cancer Plan**

This plan pays you cash benefits in addition to any other insurance you may have. Your entire family can be covered with individual lifetime benefits of up to \$500,000.

✓ **Comprehensive Health Insurance**

You may save hundreds or even thousands of dollars with several major medical options available to you today.

For more information, visit
www.aeteachers.org/optional.shtml

