

Education Matters

November 2011

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation

You Speak Out

**AAE
2011
Member
Survey**



AAE members address the most pressing issues facing the American education system, including school choice, technology, attracting new teachers to the workforce, and collective bargaining.

2011 has been a year of unprecedented education and labor reform nearly nationwide as teachers have questioned and debated policies that affect them in the classroom. While reformers are championing new and innovative ideas, an authentic teacher voice is critical in establishing a system that works for students and teachers alike. AAE fills this need with valuable input from our well-informed and experienced membership base.

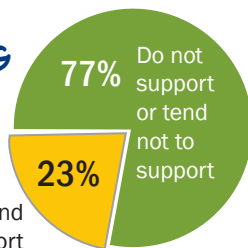
Clearly the education landscape is changing rapidly. This year's membership survey polls our members from coast to coast and paints the picture of a teacher work force overwhelmingly committed to staying in the classroom until retirement (85 percent), using technology in the classroom at least some of the time (92 percent), and who consider themselves well-versed on education policy (79 percent).

Among the topics explored in this membership survey are some of the most pressing issues facing the American education system, including school choice, technology, attracting new teachers to the work force, and collective bargaining. While educators have approached these new ideas with caution, overall, AAE members are supportive of commonsense reform, local control, and new and emerging technologies.

FEDERAL FUNDING

Do you support increased federal funding and regulations in your state?

Support or tend to support



Federal Education Spending and Washington Mandates

With new legislation designed to increase federal spending in education through competitive grants and teacher union bailouts, AAE members stress local control, and are suspect of increased federal assistance with ties to Washington, D.C. and the U.S. Department of Education. Seventy-seven percent of survey respondents do not support increased federal spending on education at the expense of increased regulations in their respective states.

Further, 83 percent of AAE members do not support a national curriculum, and are not interested in their state being subject to the political whims of the federal bureaucracy. Teachers believe states should have the power to design individualized curriculum based on local needs.

School Choice Policies

AAE members support certain laws that advance school choice. Seventy-eight percent of survey respondents agree with a law in Oklahoma that provides a tax credit to individuals and corporations that donate to organizations providing Opportunity Scholarships to students in failing schools.

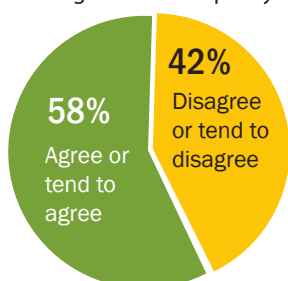
Sixty-one percent of those surveyed agree with an Arizona law providing tax credit scholarships to special education students in traditional public schools, allowing them to attend the public or private school of their choice.

While the union-backed establishment sees school choice as detrimental to the teaching profession, AAE member teachers support varied policies that empower parents to choose the learning environment best suited for their child.

Virtual Education and Technology

As new technologies develop and emerge, school systems across the country are catching onto the possibilities of incorporating online learning and technology into the classroom.

In order to move toward digital learning, certain states are considering replacing textbooks with digital content, including interactive and adaptive multimedia. Do you agree or disagree with this policy?



According to the data, 92 percent of AAE member teachers incorporate technology in their lesson plans at least some of the time.

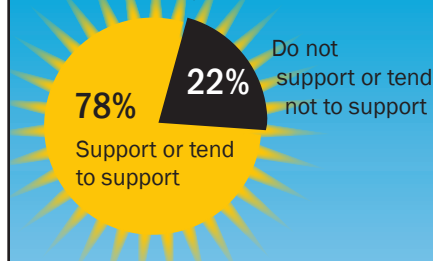
Another 58 percent of survey respondents agree with a policy that would phase out textbooks with digital content, including interactive and adaptive multimedia.

In Utah, a law guaranteeing high school student access to any course via an online da-

SCHOOL CHOICE POLICIES

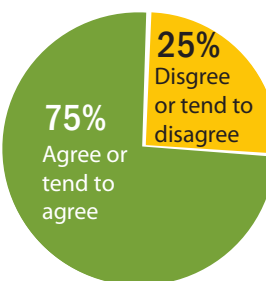
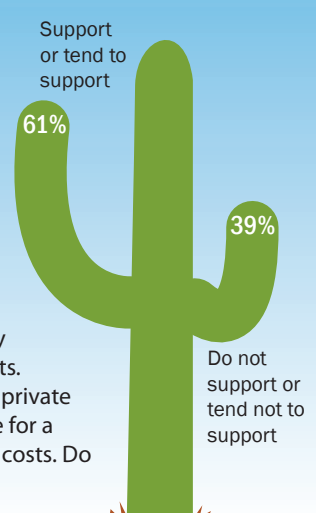
TAX CREDITS FOR OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIPS

A law in Oklahoma provides a tax credit to individuals and corporations that donate to organizations providing "Opportunity Scholarships" to students. Scholarships go toward paying school tuition. Do you support this law?



TAX CREDITS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

A law in Arizona provides tax credit scholarships to special education students in traditional public schools, allowing them to attend the public or private school of their choice. Included in these scholarships are considerations for foster care students, allowing them to attend the private school of their choice so that they may have more continuity in their education environments. After students are admitted to private schools, they apply to the state for a scholarship to help cover their costs. Do you support this law?



A law in Utah guarantees high school students personalized options via online access to any course including any AP, foreign language, or STEM course. Do you agree with this law?

tabase (including any AP, foreign language, or STEM course) sets the bar high for access to online learning. An overwhelming 75 percent of teachers support this law and its efforts to offer students personalized options.

While defenders of the status quo see virtual options as a threat, AAE members embrace new technologies as the wave of the future.

Alternative Certification and Attracting New Teachers to the Profession

In the next ten years, half of our current teacher work force will retire. As we search for ways to attract top college graduates and other seasoned professionals to the classroom, alternative certification programs and reforming teacher preparation have

been catching on as crucial components of creating a work force for the twenty-first century.

AAE teachers overwhelmingly support new policies and programs designed to develop, attract, and sustain effective teachers. Seventy-one percent agree that in order to attract new teachers, and teachers with experience in the STEM subjects, we must explore alternative certifications, allowing degreed professionals an easier path to the classroom.

Seventy-eight percent agree with a Minnesota law that would allow future teachers to be permitted alternative certification through 200 hours of intensive preparation from a nonprofit-, university- or college-based, board-approved teacher preparation program. Teachers then would have to be evaluated by the district or charter school to be recommended for a standard license.

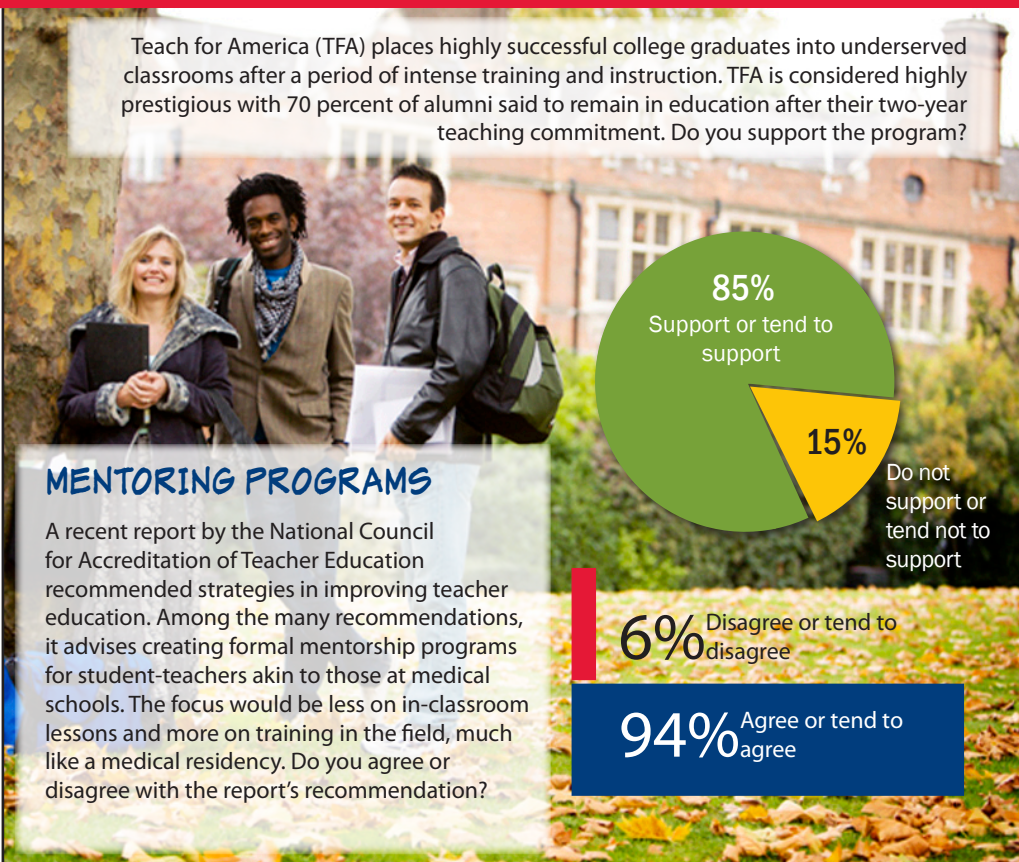
While union officials have publicly denounced programs such as Teach for America (TFA), 85 percent of AAE members support TFA and its mission to place recent top-tier college graduates into high-need classrooms after an intense training regimen.

AAE members also recognize the need for better preparing new teachers for classroom challenges. Ninety-four percent agree with a report by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education that recommends improving teacher education via mentorships programs akin to those at medical schools. Survey respondents overwhelmingly agree with focusing less on in-classroom lessons and more on training in the field, much like a medical residency.

Collective Bargaining and Labor Policy

In the wake of forty-eight states considering labor reform legislation in 2011, the value and cost of the collective bargaining and one-size-fits-all system have been heavily debated. Seventy-eight percent of survey respondents assert that collective bargaining has little to no effect on their ability to teach effectively, and just 28 percent of teachers believe collective bargaining equates to a better compensated work force.

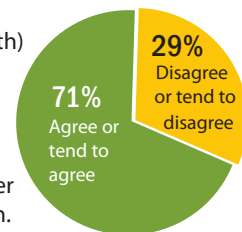
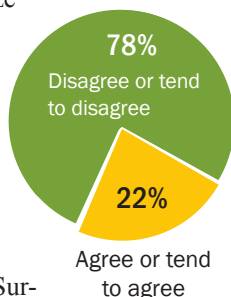
Teach for America (TFA) places highly successful college graduates into underserved classrooms after a period of intense training and instruction. TFA is considered highly prestigious with 70 percent of alumni said to remain in education after their two-year teaching commitment. Do you support the program?



ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION

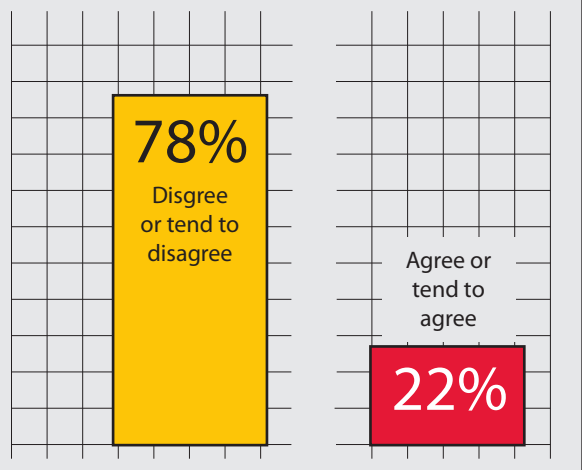
Under a Minnesota law, teachers, in combination with a nonprofit-, university- or college-based board-approved teacher preparation program would be permitted alternative certification through 200 hours of intensive preparation before entering the classroom. Teachers then have to be evaluated by the district or charter school to be recommended for a standard license.

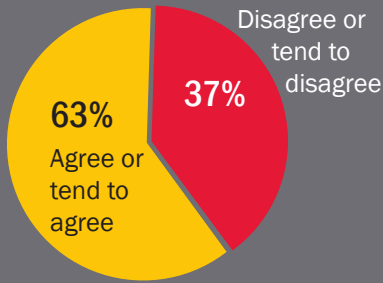
In order to attract new teachers, and teachers with experience in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) subjects, we need to explore alternative certifications, allowing degreed professionals an easier path to the classroom.



NECESSITY OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Do you think collective bargaining is necessary to perform your job effectively?





CONTRACT NEGOTIATION

"I would prefer to negotiate my own contract so that I can negotiate a salary and benefits package that best suits my lifestyle. For example, as I am unmarried, I would prefer to have a higher salary than have X amount of sick-days."

A majority of member teachers would prefer to negotiate their own contract to account for their unique circumstances. Sixty-three percent agree with the statement "I would prefer to negotiate my own contract so that I can negotiate a salary and benefits package that best suits my lifestyle. For example, as I am unmarried, I would prefer to have a higher salary than have X amount of sick-days."

A nearly unanimous 98 percent of teachers believe that teachers should have a choice in union membership, further advancing AAE's position that no educator should be required to pay union dues as a condition of employment. Moreover, 84 percent of those surveyed believe that teacher unions are hurting the teaching profession.

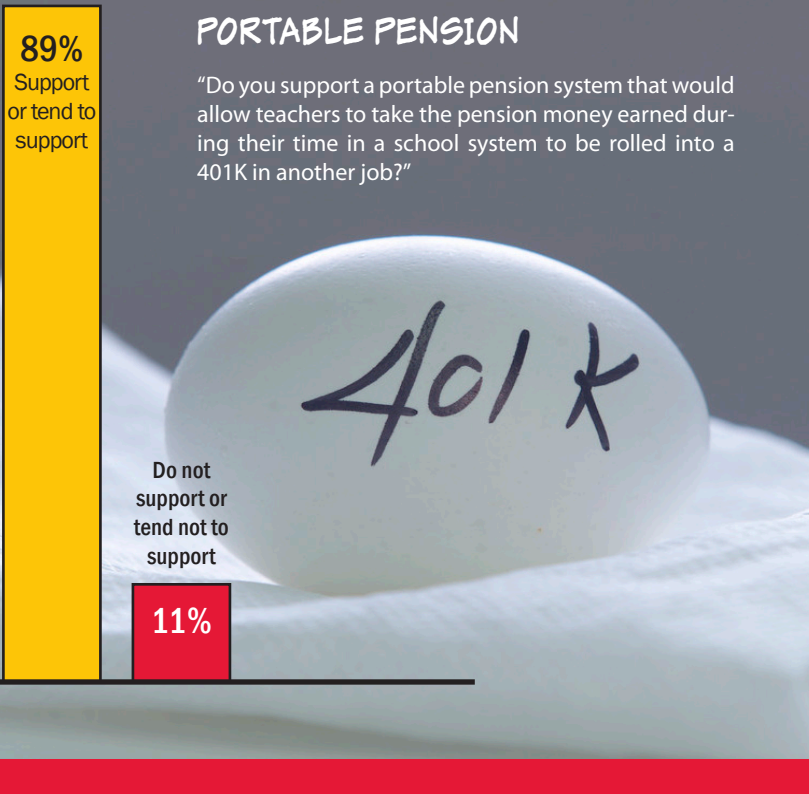
With regard to another union-backed policy, 74 percent of AAE members disagree with LIFO or "last in, first out," jumping nearly four points from last year's survey.

School Budgets and Pensions

Transparency and pension sustainability have been hot topics as states and local districts feel the effects of the recession on education budgets. Ninety-seven percent of teachers believe that school budgets should be shared with the public as a means to ensure state/federal monies are being allocated effectively.

Further, 89 percent of those surveyed would support a portable pension system that would allow teachers to take the pension money earned during their time in a school system to be rolled into a 401K in another job.

As the profession evolves, and the cry for reform grows louder, teachers are embracing commonsense solutions that put students first. AAE is listening, and we look forward to sharing your thoughts with policymakers and stakeholders on all levels. ■



LABOR POLICIES

74%
Do not support or tend to not support

Do you support the policy that retains or RIFs/pink slips teachers solely based on seniority? (Also known as "last in, first out" or LIFO)

26%
Support or tend to support

84%
Hurting

Do you believe teacher unions are helping or hurting the teaching profession?

16%
Helping

98%
Agree or tend to agree

Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Teachers should have a choice in union membership. Membership in any education association should be entirely voluntary and no union fees should be paid as a condition of employment in any school.

2%
Disagree or tend to disagree

Best Practices Weekly

Teacher Professional Development for the Twenty-first Century

By Elliot Haspel

During my time as an educator in Teach For America, I was frustrated watching the stack of professional magazines grow dusty on the corner of my desk. As much as I wanted to read about cutting-edge research in literacy, math, and child psychology, I simply lacked the time. Between lesson planning, creating materials, contacting parents, and various administrative tasks, I was lucky to have time to read a book before bed, much less *The Reading Teacher*. It was this disconnect with the traditional professional literature that led me to create *Best Practices Weekly* (BPW).

Best Practices Weekly (www.bestpracticesweekly.com) is a free service for teachers produced by my nonprofit, the Education Success Network. We summarize one article of research about instruction per week in written, video, and audio formats, along with a planning guide for easy implementation. The hope is that by doing this, we provide teachers with bite-sized actionable professional development, consumable in 10 minutes or so.

We choose the articles with an eye towards applicability. I comb through roughly a dozen different journals and magazines and pick out articles that have concrete strategies teachers could easily turn around and use in their classrooms. Then, I send my list to a pair of veteran volunteer teachers, who give me feedback on which are going to be the most powerful and which are likely to be least impactful.

I truly believe that the vast majority of teachers want to be the best they can be, but the unforgiving workload and oversaturated directory of research articles make it nearly impossible to stay on the ball.

Best Practices Weekly is a move to make professional development align with the needs and realities of contemporary teachers.

There exists nearly unlimited potential

for carving out a new style of twenty-first century professional development. Imagine teachers who regularly access relevant research through summarization services like *Best Practices Weekly* and then enter into professional communities online where they discuss how they adapted the ideas for their particular students or how they tested the ideas through impromptu action research. Educators often lament the need for advancing their profession so that teachers can be respected on par with

“The vast majority of teachers want to be the best they can be, but the unforgiving workload and oversaturated directory of research articles make it nearly impossible to stay on the ball.”

doctors and lawyers. Just as doctors hone their skills and expertise by keeping up with medical journals, which they can afford to do thanks to their generally high institutional support, teachers need a way to become fluent in the current research without having to shoulder the time and burden of subscribing to lengthy and expensive education journals and magazines.

In the next twelve months, we hope to significantly expand *Best Practices Weekly* in both the diversity of editions and opportu-

nities for teachers to engage around the research. We want to be able to hone in, adding subject-specific editions for middle and high school, splitting elementary into K-2 and 3-5, and adding editions for other areas of need such as special education, early childhood education, and the science of learning. On the side of engagement, we hope to revamp the website to include a discussion board and explore the possibility of hosting webinars with article authors or other such extensions.

Check out *Best Practices Weekly* and sign up for free at www.bestpracticesweekly.com. You can also catch a monthly round-up of BPW on the AAE blog on the first Wednesday of every month.

We'd love to hear your thoughts, so please to contact me at ehaspel@ed-success.org. Together, we can rethink and improve teacher professional development, and in doing so, better help the students we serve. ■



Elliot Haspel, M.Ed., is the Editor-in-Chief of Best Practices Weekly and the President of Education Success Network. He is former 4th grade teacher in Phoenix, Arizona through the Teach For America program.

After his time in the classroom, Elliot attended Harvard's Graduate School of Education.



Intellectual Takeout 'Serves up' Policy Issues for Busy Teachers

Are you searching for a resource to break down complex policy issues into easily digestible tidbits to read online and on-the-go? Intellectual Takeout (ITO) might be just what you are looking for.

At Intellectual Takeout, scholars research complex ideas and policy issues and make them easy to read. By slicing and dicing academic, think tank, government, and historical research into quotes, charts and graphs, commentary, studies, videos, podcasts, primary documents, and books, ITO brings the conversation to busy professionals. They even “serve” it all up topic by topic in what they call topic overviews. All of the researched material is linked and sourced so you can feel secure sharing it with friends, family, associates, and others. ITO even has a hearty education section for teachers interested in learning more.

Intellectual Takeout is a non-political, educational 501(c)(3) institution based in Minnesota, with research and marketing staff and volunteers located around the country and even internationally.

Check them out today at www.intellecualtakeout.org.



Choosing the **Right** Door to Education Reform

By Michael J. Petrilli

If you step back from day-to-day vitriol that characterizes the current education policy debate, and glimpse the larger picture, two worldviews on education reform emerge. One, articulated by the likes of Linda Darling-Hammond, Marc Tucker, David Cohen, and others, obsesses about curricular coherence, and the lack thereof in our nation's schools. The other, envisioned by Rick Hess, Tom Vander Ark, Paul Hill, and many more, seeks to unleash America's trademark dynamism inside our K-12 education system. Although these ideas appear to pull in opposite directions, they might best work in concert.

Coherence Camp

Let's start with the Coherence Camp. Its argument, most recently made in David Cohen's book *Teaching and Its Predicaments*, is that America's teachers are being set up to fail by a system that is fragmented, divided, and confused about its mission. Teachers are given little clear guidance about what's expected of them. Even when goals are clear, these teachers lack the tools to succeed: pre-service training is completely disconnected from classroom expectations, and never ending reform pulls up the roots of promising efforts before they are given time to flower.

The Coherence Camp looks longingly at Europe and Asia, where many national systems offer teachers the opportunity to work as professionals in environments of trust, clarity, and common purpose. (Japan envy yesterday, Finland envy today?) The members of this camp praise national standards, a national (or at least statewide) curriculum that gathers the best thinking about how to reach these standards and shares this thinking with the teaching corps, authentic assessments that provide diagnostic information, and professional development (pre-service and in-

service) that is seamlessly woven into all of the rest.

These countries can (and do) pour over their latest PISA results, identify areas for improvement, and get their educators to row in unison toward stronger performance. And their scores go up and up and up.

As bright as that vision may be, however, it carries with it many dark clouds. First is the temptation to lead by decree, in

With taxpayers footing the bill, don't they have a right to ask kids to learn certain essential somethings?

a very top-down, highly bureaucratized manner that squelches the initiative of frontline educators. The best systems in the world, according to McKinsey, find a way

to combine common standards with lots of local autonomy, but striking that balance is no easy feat.

A more fundamental concern is that it assumes getting all of a nation's teachers—and parents—to buy into one notion of what it means to be well-educated. Asking people with diverse views to coalesce around one educational model is a little bit like asking all citizens to choose a single religion. One's views on schools are closely related to larger values—what it means to live the good life, the degree to which children should be raised to pursue their own individual aspirations versus contribute to a larger community, whether learning right from wrong takes precedence over learning to value diversity, and on and on.

To restate the cliché, “one size fits all” is a recipe for frustration, if not social and political warfare, at least in a heterogeneous country like ours.

Dynamism Devotees

Dynamism Devotees, on the other hand, look at America’s private sector (and especially Silicon Valley) with envy. They envision an education marketplace full of can-do problem-solvers, myriad options for parents, and lots of customization for

kids. They don’t even want a system, per se, but a raucous sector that welcomes new entrepreneurs and washes away legacy operators if they don’t keep up with the times. To them, the American higher education

Asking people with diverse views to coalesce around one educational model is a little bit like asking all citizens to choose a single religion.

sector looks like a much stronger alternative to our K-12 system, with its rise of new competitors (many of them online), flexible, student-centered funding, and responsiveness to consumer demand.

So you hear Dynamism Devotees chanting the “every school a charter school” mantra and preaching the exciting potential of customized digital learning, the rise of upstart providers of teacher training, and the imperative of backpack funding for schools.

But for all of the excitement, this vision has major holes, too. For one, with our system already fragmented into 14,000 districts, won’t the “every school a charter school” idea just lead to even less coordination and fewer benefits of scale? Yes, charter networks might rise up to connect schools with one another and provide essential services, but will they spread to every nook and cranny of our country? If NCLB’s free tutoring initiative was any lesson, we can expect the vast majority of communities to remain unserved. Would we get a dynamic marketplace in the exurbs, small towns, and rural locales, or even less support for those schools than they get now?

Furthermore, why should we have any confidence that the result of all of this creative destruction will be a citizenry with essential democratic skills, knowledge, and habits? The marketplace model in higher education has, along with its benefits, also led lots of people to get narrow, skill-focused degrees rather than seek a broad liberal education. Can we afford a K-12 system that does the same? With taxpayers footing the bill, don’t they have a right to ask kids to learn certain essential somethings?

Can’t We All Just Get Along?

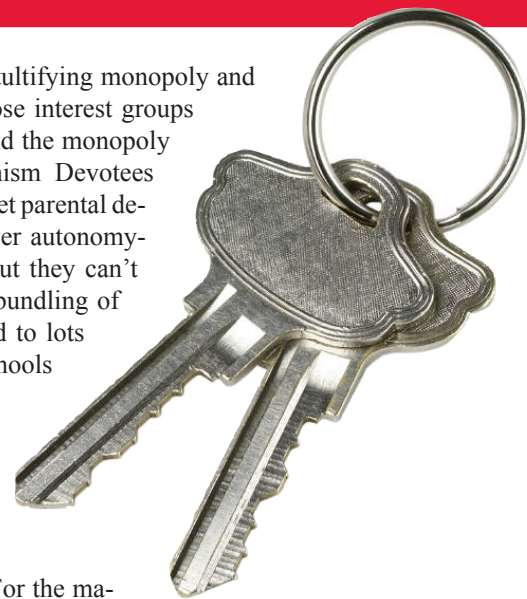
So what to do? The Coherence Camp can plausibly argue that its path is the surer route to higher student achievement and more consistent classroom practice—but it risks alienating thousands of teachers who feel hamstrung by a curriculum they don’t like and millions of parents who want something different for their

kids. It also feeds a stultifying monopoly and tends to empower those interest groups that know how to bend the monopoly to their will. Dynamism Devotees are better suited to meet parental demands and to empower autonomy-seeking educators—but they can’t promise that their unbundling of the system won’t lead to lots of poorly served schools (and kids).

Thankfully, the two visions can be combined; the resulting approach might be labeled One Size Fits Most. For the majority of American schools, we follow the Coherence Camp’s cues. We build national standards (à la Common Core), we develop a handful of national curricula, we connect pre-service and in-service training to the standards, and we tie accountability for schools, teachers, and students to them, too. We continue to minimize the role of the 14,000 school boards (if not eliminate them outright) by empowering states to take an ever-larger role in all aspects of educational improvement. And through these mechanisms, we make the default option in American public education—the typical public school—much better than it is today.

At the same time, we make it easy for educators and parents to opt out of this One Best System. We grow the charter and digital sectors aggressively and remove the barriers that are keeping them from achieving their full, dynamic potential. And we even consider going back to the original charter concept—allowing schools to negotiate their own unique performance expectations with their authorizers, rather than being held accountable to the One Best System’s standards. More specifically, we allow charters and digital providers (or at least some subset) to opt out of the Common Core framework entirely, and to proffer their own evidence of educational achievement.

This is a classic call for “both and” rather than “either or.” Done right, it could accelerate the benefits of both the Coherence and Dynamism approaches—while mitigating their weaknesses. And it could allow an escape valve for some of the overheated debates in which we’re stuck. Don’t like the Common Core? Opt out. Don’t think our schools should be driven by market forces? Opt in. How about we give this option a try? ■



Mike Petrilli is one of the nation’s foremost education experts. As Vice President for National Programs and Policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, he oversees the Institute’s research projects and publications and contributes to the Flypaper blog.



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