

Michigan Educators Declare Independence from State and National Union

Teachers Say Goodbye to \$1000 Dues and Partisan Politics

In a bold move for teacher freedom of association, teachers in Roscommon, Michigan, have voted by a nearly 2-to-1 margin, to decertify from the Michigan local affiliate of the National Education Association (NEA) and the Michigan Education Association (MEA). The newly formed Roscommon Teacher's Association will now bargain independently and negotiate on the local level.

The process, officially called decertification, was “not very difficult,” according to Jim Perialis, a teacher and the interim president of the newly formed Roscommon Teacher's Association. While the decision made waves with union officials, the Roscommon group simply



needed 30 percent of their body to sign off on a request to ask MERC (the Michigan Employment Relations Commission) to call for an election to decertify the local union as the official bargaining agent. Then, if 50 percent (plus one) of the teachers voted to decertify the union, a new “local only” association could be formed to represent the teachers in Roscommon. The election swung heavily in favor of pulling away from the MEA/NEA. Teachers are now free from the partisan politics and excessive dues that were the main points of contention.

In a recent interview, Mr. Perialis indicated that teachers in his district had been disenfranchised with the union for years. He maintained that the union often hiked up dues with little regard for teacher feedback, nearly exceeding \$1000 in 2012. “Teachers were frustrated with the response time of union staff as well as the astronomical level of compensation for union officials.”

F. Vincent Vernuccio, director of labor policy for the Michigan-based Mackinac Center, said the MEA “priced themselves out of the market” in Roscommon. Perialis reiterated this sentiment, saying, “We weren’t getting the bang for the buck.”

Once Roscommon teachers decided that union membership was no longer for them, representatives from the Association of American Educators (AAE) met with district staff to discuss options. Upon the formation of their new local association, teachers were invited to join AAE for nonbargaining support including educator liability insurance and professional development.

Jim Perialis said of the ultimate victory, “I am excited that my colleagues have shown the courage to stand up to MEA/NEA and its bureaucratic machine. We are not anti-union, we are anti-MEA. However, there were many services that were provided by the MEA that we could do ourselves, at half the cost.”

Gary Beckner, executive director of the Association of American Educators, stressed that the development puts the teachers of Roscommon in control of their own paychecks. “Whether teachers are frustrated with rising dues or outdated representation, educators should be aware of their legal options. All teachers deserve the right to select an organization that best aligns with their beliefs and budget.”

This decision is the latest in an **emerging nationwide movement** of teachers seeking a more self-governed approach when it comes to collective bargaining. Teachers in **California, Kansas, and Washington**, among others, have all chosen either self-representation or local organization representation over membership in the state and national unions.

“This is a big success story for the teachers in Roscommon,” said Michael Van Beek, director of education policy for the Mackinac Center. “The dues they pay to be part of a union will be significantly reduced, and they’ll receive better representation. Their money will stay in the district instead of going to Lansing to pay the salaries of MEA officials.”

Van Beek further maintained that the victory in Michigan, over one of the most powerful teachers unions in the country, will be encouraging for others who question what value they get from teachers unions. The Roscommon Teacher’s Association will still maintain a local voice, without the contributions to politics or high union salaries.

Mr. Perialis estimates the new annual dues in Roscommon will be about half of the \$900 a year teachers have been paying to the MEA. In total, the Roscommon Teacher’s Association will be saving \$20,000–\$30,000 yearly. These funds can now be invested in the community or in a legal contingency fund to protect teachers.

“The teachers in Roscommon have been negotiating their own contract for years,” Van Beek added. “This step just cuts out the needless middleman.”

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Teachers Fall Victim to Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying, or the use of the Internet and related technologies to harm other people, has become a very real threat to American students. Unable to simply “unplug” at the end of the day, students from across the country are experiencing relentless and often anonymous teasing and threats via social networking websites and blogs. While coverage has overwhelmingly focused on student victims, teachers are now beginning to feel the adverse effects of cyberbullying. In North Carolina, a law aimed at protecting teachers has sparked conversation about online educator harassment.

According to a Norton online survey of 2,279 teachers in 24 countries, one in six educators has reported cyberbullying. In some instances, students have attempted to provoke school employees to near breakdown via false claims and threats. Teacher rating websites and personal social networking have created forums for students to voice their opinions about teachers, often with little accountability. With technology moving at a breakneck pace, schools and districts are often unable to keep their disciplinary policies current.

The new North Carolina law stays ahead of the curve, warning kids to watch what they say about school officials on the Internet. As per the law’s language, cyberbullying with the “intent to intimidate or torment a school employee” is now a criminal misdemeanor. Under the law, students could face fines of up to \$1,000, transfer to another school, and jail time if found guilty.

By holding students responsible for their actions online, supporters of the law hope to curb harassment of school employees, including teachers and administrators, on the

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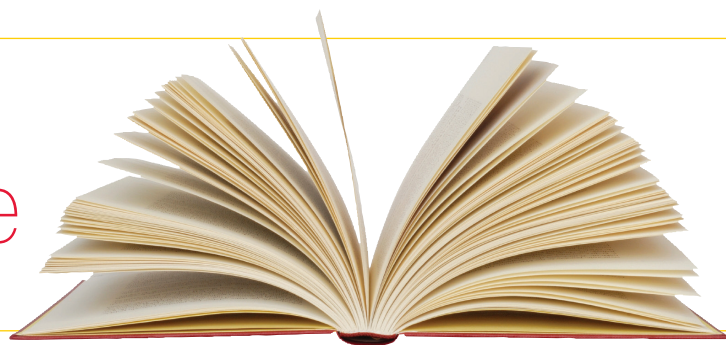


Internet. “We have to pull society back into a realization that what you say and what you do, you are held accountable for them,” said Ms. Judy Kidd, president of the Classroom Teachers Association of North Carolina. “When someone goes over and beyond what is free speech,” said Ms. Kidd, “then you get held accountable.”

Ms. Kidd told reporters that without the law in place, teachers were experiencing several threats. “We had students who were lying about teachers, then they were publishing things that were untrue,” argued Ms. Kidd, a high-school teacher. “There was nothing there to have any recourse, yet the teacher was the one who was suffering.”

While online bullying has become prevalent, critics of the new law warn that the terms “torment” and “intimidate” aren’t clear-cut and could curb free speech rights. The North Carolina American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) suggests legislators define the kind of online conduct that would put “a reasonable person in fear of some kind of bodily injury.” ■

Reading List: Great Reads for the Holiday Break



Trusting Teachers with School Success— What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots by Kim Farris-Berg and Edward Dirkswager with Amy Junge

Our nation's strategy for improving our schools is mostly limited to "getting tough" with teachers. Blaming teachers for poor outcomes, we spend almost all of our energy trying to control teachers' behavior and school operations. But what if all of this is exactly the opposite of what is needed? What if teachers are the answer and not the problem? What if trusting teachers, and not controlling them, is the key to school success?

Examining the experiences of teachers who are already trusted to call the shots, this book answers: What would teachers do if they had the autonomy not just to make

classroom decisions, but to collectively—with their colleagues—make the decisions influencing whole school success? Decisions such as school curriculum, how to allocate the school budget, and whom to hire.

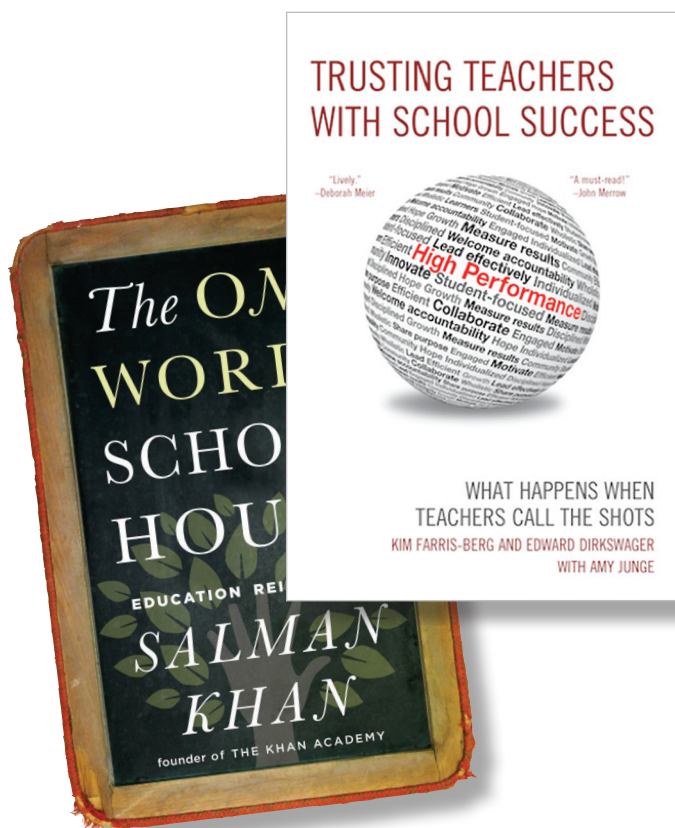
Teachers with decision-making authority create the schools that many of us profess to want. They individualize learning. Their students are active (not passive) learners who gain academic and life skills. The teachers create school cultures that are the same as those in high-performing organizations. They accept accountability and innovate, and make efficient use of resources. These promising results suggest it's time to trust teachers. Visit www.trustingteachers.org for more information.

One World Schoolhouse: Education Reimagined by Salman Khan

A free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere: this is the goal of the Khan Academy, a passion project that grew from an ex-engineer and hedge funder's online tutoring sessions with his niece, who was struggling with algebra, into a worldwide phenomenon. Today millions of students, parents, and teachers use the Khan Academy's free videos and software, which have expanded to encompass nearly every conceivable subject, and Academy techniques are being employed with exciting results in a growing number of classrooms around the globe.

Like many innovators, Khan rethinks existing assumptions and imagines what education could be if freed from them. And his core idea—liberating teachers from lecturing and state-mandated calendars and opening up class time for truly human interaction—has become his life's passion. Schools seek his advice about connecting to students in a digital age, and people of all ages and backgrounds flock to the site to use this fresh approach to learning.

In his new book, Khan presents his radical vision for the future of education, as well as his own remarkable story. Visit <http://is.gd/8oAxhd> for more information. ■



Inspiring Reading Motivation

It's time for teachers across the nation to join a literacy revolution. Many of us have heard the alarming statistics about reading and literacy in America. Among the numbers to worry about are two alarming facts. The first—two-thirds of eighth-grade students do not read on grade level. The second—students with below grade-level reading skills are twice as likely to drop out of school as those who read on or above grade level. Are you convinced yet that we need a literacy revolution? It's time to take action.

The components of this revolution are not in a basal program. The answer is not more book reports, more ditto sheets, and more whole-class novels. The answer lies in the fact that drowning our students in these traditional ways of teaching leaves them severely lacking in motivation.

We must first ask ourselves what will motivate our students to read. According to Krashen, 51 studies prove that students in free-reading programs perform better than or equal to students in any other type of reading program. Not only does research back this claim up, so does evidence-based research conducted by Donalyn Miller, a sixth-grade Texas teacher and author of *The Book Whisperer*. Miller's students are passing the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test with flying colors, and more importantly, they are motivated and inspired to read via this method.

I have to admit, after reading *The Book Whisperer* three years ago, I doubted that free voluntary reading (FVR) could make such an impact. However, I was proven wrong.

After implementing FVR through an 18-book challenge in fifth grade and a 40-book challenge in third grade, I am convinced this is the key to our literacy revolution. Given the freedom to read at their own pace, students jumped at the chance to get started.

My classroom was transformed from a mundane skills-only instruction to an environment where students took part in daily conversations about higher level questions about their reading, were excited about what they were going to read next, and had a sense of pride simply from the sheer amount and depth of their reading. And yes, that was without any extrinsic incentives! The reward was the reading itself. (Yes, kids do read without extrinsic rewards.)

There was definitely an adjustment period, for the students, parents and for me as we underwent this new approach. Questions from the students included *You mean I have to do 18 book reports?!* No, was the answer to that; they didn't do book reports. One does not need a book report to know whether students are comprehending text or even to know whether they can summarize. Suggestions from parents included making the kids take an Accelerated Reader test.

Again, one doesn't need a test to know whether a child comprehends or has actually read the book. The point of free voluntary reading is to get students excited about reading, to make them lifelong readers, and to facilitate intrinsic motivation to read. I used my classroom lessons and assessments to gauge their ability to comprehend text. Free voluntary

reading is about creating the love of books, which is far more likely to encourage someone to keep reading the rest of his life more than a book report, an Accelerated Reader test or any classroom lesson. Assessments, lessons, and comprehension checks need to be a part of a communication arts classroom, but without free voluntary reading, a classroom teacher is only helping students pass their class, not helping them be a lifelong reader and thinker.

The first year I took this approach was the first year I started receiving notes from parents, saying "Thank you, my child now loves to read." One of the most impactful responses I received from a parent and her child was as follows:

"My son and I were discussing his day at school and if he had homework this evening. He mentioned that he needed to read, which led me to tell him that I have noticed an increased interest in him wanting to read. His response was enlightening! He said, 'Oh yes, mom, Mrs. Palmer has changed my life.' It was a very sincere statement and just wasn't quite what I was expecting in reply. He continued to say that he likes to read and when he gets a good book, he just can't put it down. Jake has always read books because he needed to and because we've encouraged him to; however, he has never enjoyed reading or picked up books on the spur of the moment until this year. Thank you!"

Don't be afraid to try this method in your classroom. It's working for my students and it's a huge part of the literary revolution we are looking for. ■



Mrs. Annie Palmer is an AAE member leader, third-grade teacher, and instructional leader in Missouri's Kearney School District.



It's All Greek to Me

You are used to hearing your students throw out phrases that you've never heard, but when your peers and colleagues do it, there is an element of embarrassment that prevents you from asking, *What does that actually mean?* Well, now is your chance to finally learn, with these twenty commonly used foreign words and phrases. It doesn't matter whether you teach science or English, even the best teachers need a refresher course.

1. **Ad hominem (Latin)** – appealing to prejudices and emotions rather than reason; attacking an opponent's character rather than her arguments.
Example: The teacher tried to stop the argument, but the teenage girl responded with an *ad hominem* attack: "You can't be on the decorating committee; you wore stripes and plaid together on Monday."
2. **Ad infinitum (Latin)** – to infinity
Example: The grading still was not over by midnight, and I feared it would go on *ad infinitum*.
3. **Après (French)** – after
Example: She loved the *après* work coffee and muffin.
4. **Bête noire (French)** – a dreaded or detested person or thing
Example: To many students, the principal is a *bête noire*, waiting to catch them texting.
5. **e.g. – exempli gratia (Latin)** – for example
Example: The child has several learning disabilities; e.g. attention deficit disorder.

6. **i.e. – abbreviation for id est (Latin)** – in other words

Example: The student suffers from ADD, *i.e.* attention deficit disorder.

7. **Enfant terrible (French)** – a difficult child; an unconventional or outspoken person whose behavior dismays or embarrasses others

Example: The seventh grade bully is the classroom *enfant terrible*, with his intimidation and derisive comments.

8. **Quid pro quo (Latin)** – an equal exchange

Example: Students, do well on your quizzes and you won't have homework on this section.

9. **Sturm und drang (German)** – turmoil, upheaval

Example: The enforcement of dress codes caused a *sturm und drang* among the middle school girls.

10. **Ad nauseam (Latin)** – to a sickening degree

Example: The parent complained about the child's low grades *ad nauseam*.

11. **Chez nous (French)** – at the home of; at or by; often used with French word nous, meaning we

Example: I invited students to a holiday party *chez nous*.

12. **Faux pas (French)** – a social blunder

Example: Entering the classroom with toilet paper on my foot was just my *faux pas* of the day.

13. **Mensch (Yiddish)** – a person of honor and integrity; a decent, upright person

Example: The new principal was a well-respected and loved veteran teacher, a true *mensch*.

14. **Slemiel (Yiddish)** – a fool

Example: The mischievous third grader proved he was truly a *slemiel* when he copied the homework in front of the teacher.



PIECE DE RESISTANCE



???



STURM UND DRANG



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15. **Schmooze (Yiddish)** – to talk casually, chat or network

Example: *Schmoozing* the parents is always an activity at the PTA meetings.

16. **Vis-à-vis (French)** – face-to-face with, compared with; in regard to

Example: My thoughts *vis-à-vis* common core standards are mixed.

17. **Je ne sais pas (French)** – I don't know

Example: When students ask me when their homework will be returned, I simply reply "*Je ne sais pas*."

18. **Joie de vivre (French)** – a hearty enjoyment of life

Example: The student had a real *joie de vivre*, never complaining about homework, always talking to new students, and always leading new games on the playground.

19. **Persona non grata (Latin)** – unacceptable or unwelcome

Example: Ever since he let a spider loose in the classroom, the insect exhibitor has been a *persona non grata* in our school.

20. **Piece de resistance (French)** – the prized item in a collection

Example: The art student's intricate oil painting was the teacher's *piece de resistance*. ■



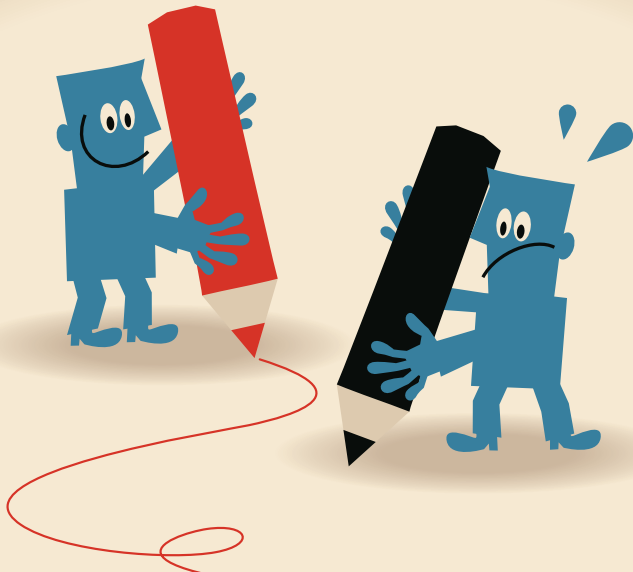
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Merry Christmas and
 Happy Holidays
 from the staff of
 the Association
 of American
 Educators!

Mail Bag: What Matters to You

“Since joining AAE, one of my favorite perks of being a member is the monthly *Education Matters* articles. I always find something I can use in a meeting or conversation with my coworkers. I appreciate the relevant and timely information this professional publication provides and look forward to each issue!”

– Sydney Young, Early Light Academy, Utah

Do you have strong opinions about an education policy issue? Would you like to respond to an article you’ve read in *Education Matters*? Email AAE today at Editor@aaeteachers.org.

Save the Date

National School Choice Week:
 January 27 – February 2, 2013

National School Choice Week provides an unprecedented opportunity, every January, to shine a spotlight on the need for an effective education for all students.

Planned by a diverse and nonpartisan coalition of individuals and organizations, National School Choice Week features special events and activities that highlight support for school choice programs and proposals. The effort is a collaboration of more than 200 partner organizations, including AAE, who are interested in shining a spotlight on options for all education stakeholders.

AAE will be planning events across the country, both in person and online, for National School Choice Week 2013. Visit the AAE website for timely updates and to RSVP for events! ■