

EDUCATION MATTERS

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation

VIRTUAL
EDUCATION

SAFETY

CHOICE

COMMON
CORE

Teachers Speak Out: 2014 AAE Membership Survey

Educators Support Commonsense Reform

Education reform has become the number one domestic issue in the United States. While policymakers struggle to find a balance that works for students, teachers are speaking out about the most pressing issues facing America's classrooms. Teachers on the frontlines are uniquely positioned to provide valuable input to stakeholders nationwide. An authentic teacher voice is critical and AAE fills this need with input from our well-informed and experienced membership base.

The education landscape is changing rapidly across the country. This year's membership survey polls our members from all fifty states and paints the picture of a teacher workforce satisfied overall with its careers (82 percent), committed to staying in the classroom until retirement (78 percent), using technology in the classroom at least some of the time (93 percent), and well educated (62 percent hold a master's degree and state certification).

Among the topics explored in this membership survey are some of the most pressing issues facing our education

system, including school choice, technology, school safety, and Common Core State Standards. While educators have approached these new ideas with caution, overall, AAE members are supportive of commonsense reform and incorporating new technologies.

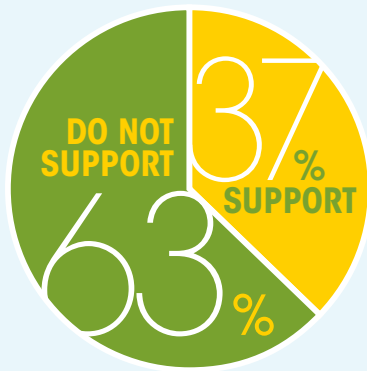
Education Spending and Universal Pre-K

With proposed ballot initiatives designed to increase education spending via tax increases, AAE members stress fiscal responsibility. Sixty-three percent of survey respondents do not support the failed Colorado amendment that would have increased income taxes to raise nearly \$1 billion for public schools. AAE teachers would not support similar amendments in their states if they were tied to across-the-board income tax increases.

However, AAE members are split on the increased push for universal pre-kindergarten led by President Obama. Fifty-two percent of those surveyed support universal Pre-K programs, while 48 percent believe the program benefits are not worth the potential costs.

A defeated amendment in Colorado would have increased income taxes across-the-board to raise nearly \$1 billion for public schools. The new revenue stream would have been aimed at several areas including preschool, full-day kindergarten, additional support for English-language learners, and locally determined innovations such as longer school days and years.

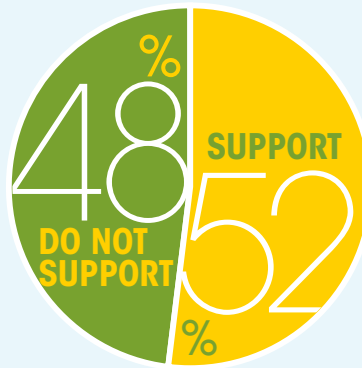
Would you support this amendment or a similar amendment in your state?



Enthusiasm for universal pre-kindergarten education is at an all-time high. Advocates cite studies that have shown significant and long-lasting benefits of early stimulation for young students and that to close the achievement gap, we must start with our youngest children.

Others maintain that these programs would cost billions and that no existing universal pre-kindergarten program has been able to prove that students are more likely to graduate high school, hold a job, or form more stable families.

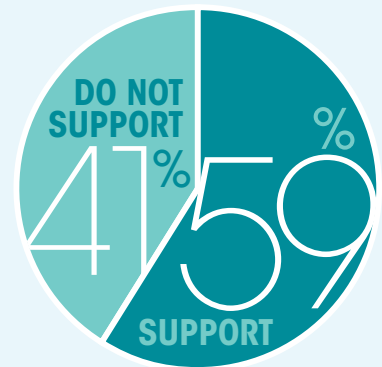
Generally, do you support universal pre-kindergarten education?



A school choice policy in Wisconsin allows parents to use public funding to send their child to a school of their choice. The Wisconsin's Parental Choice Program is open to any income-qualified child who resides outside of Milwaukee Public Schools and Racine Unified School District. (Both districts have similar programs limited to those areas).

Up to 500 students are able to use the program and no more than \$6,442 is allowed to pay for tuition.

Do you support this law?



In Arizona, Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESAs) enable parents of special needs children to leave their assigned public schools, taking with them 90 percent of the state dollars that the schools would have received for their children. That money, deposited into ESAs, can then be used to access a multitude of education options that better meet their children's needs. Funds can be used to pay for private school tuition, online learning, special education services, transportation, and a variety of other education-related expenditures.

Do you agree or disagree with this law?



School Choice Policies

AAE members support certain laws that advance school choice for students and are increasingly recognizing the benefits and flexibility that choice offers the profession. Over 82 percent of our members support public school open enrollment. Furthermore, 59 percent of survey respondents agree with Wisconsin's Parental Choice Program, allowing low-income students public funds to attend a school of their choice.

Seventy-two 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, an increase of 11 percent since last year.

While the union-backed establishment sees school choice as detrimental due to the rapid growth of non unionized public charter schools, 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, districts across the country are incorporating online learning and technology into the classroom. Ninety-three percent of AAE member teachers incorporate technology into their lesson plans at least some of the time. According to the data, the figure has increased by 25 percent since 2011 as educators increasingly embrace technology.

Another 65 percent of survey respondents would support a blended learning environment where students spend part of their day with a teacher and part of their day working with a computer if it meant more planning time and higher quality instruction.

In many states, a law requiring students to take at least one virtual course to graduate with a high school diploma is gaining steam. Fifty-six percent of teachers support this law and its efforts to increase college and career readiness.

While defenders of the status quo see virtual options as a threat, AAE members embrace new technologies to prepare students for the twenty-first century. Furthermore, educators recognize the flexibility and opportunity associated with advances in career options.

Safety in Schools

In the wake of several high-profile school shootings, lawmakers, school administrators, teachers, and parents continue to work on improving school safety. Many of the proposed policies are considered controversial, and teachers have strong opinions about what will keep schools safe.

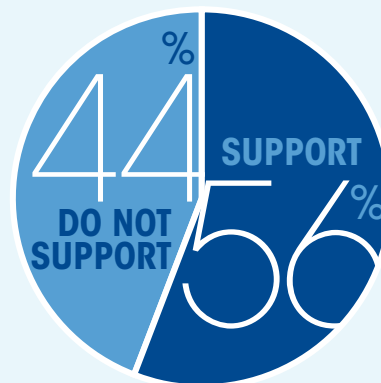
While 75 percent of survey respondents feel safe or very safe in their respective school, many teachers report increased safety measures in their building, including locking doors, additional drills, and an increased police presence. Ninety-one percent of

teachers report that an armed guard would at least somewhat improve school safety.

With regard to guns in schools, 61 percent of educators support a proposed policy in Arkansas that would make it legal for educators to have access to a locked concealed firearm after a training course and certification class if they choose. Despite this majority, just 26 percent of surveyed teachers would consider bringing a firearm to school if they were permitted to do so.

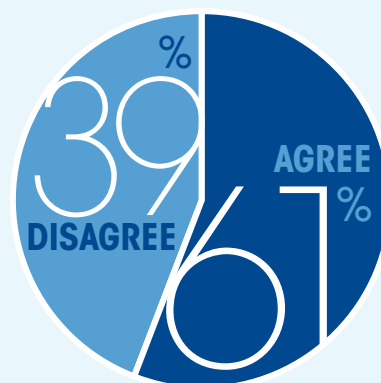
Many states have enacted laws that require students to take at least one virtual course to graduate with a standard or advanced diploma.

Do you agree with this policy?



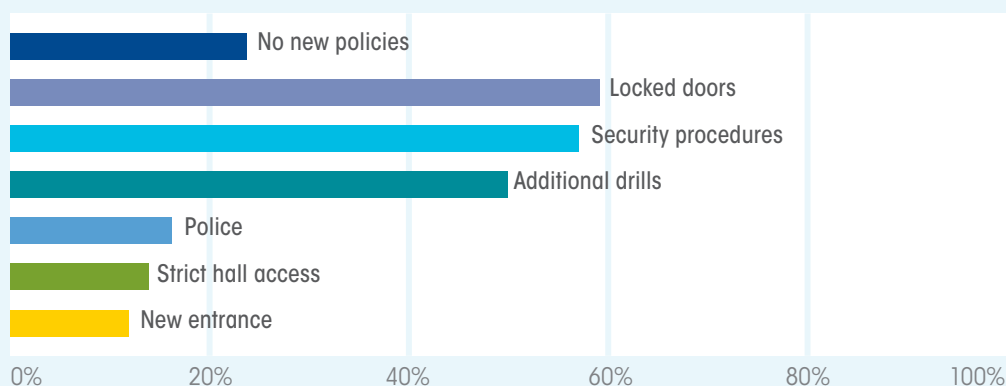
A proposed policy in Arkansas would make it legal for educators to have access to a locked concealed firearm after a training course and certification, if they choose.

Do you support this policy?



In the wake of Sandy Hook and other school tragedies, many schools have implemented new safety procedures.

Has your state/district/school implemented any new safety initiatives?



Common Core State Standards

One of the most controversial topics in education is the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative. While some have argued that CCSS will advance a nationalized education agenda from the Department of Education, others have maintained that a set of optional rigorous standards will be instrumental in promoting results for students. AAE once again polled teachers on the value of the Common Core with mixed results.

According to survey results, over 90 percent of those surveyed are already involved with incorporating the Common Core standards into their states or schools. Fifty-one percent have an unfavorable view of CCSS, with 49 percent having a favorable view of the standards.

When asked whether the Common Core State Standards will make the U.S. more competitive on a global scale, just 30 percent of respondents believe they would have this effect. Forty-seven percent of member teachers believe they would have no effect, and 22 percent assert that CCSS will have an adverse effect on global competitiveness.

Furthermore, 56 percent of survey respondents believe that Common Core State Standards would provide more consistency in the quality of education between school districts and between states, a decrease since 2013.

Just 34 percent of teachers believe CCSS implementation is running smoothly, while 49 percent of teachers are neutral, and 17 percent believe implementation in their state is going poorly. Additionally, a mere 26 percent of survey respondents believe the standards are higher than prior state standards.

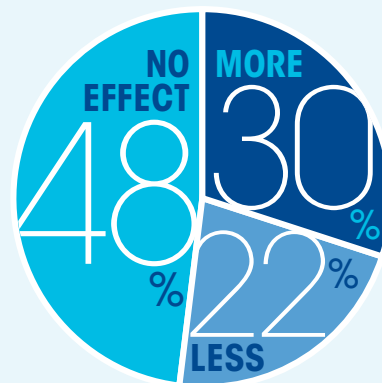
While AAE members are still split on the merits of the Common Core, support for the standards has decreased overall since 2013.

Collective Bargaining and Labor Policy

In the wake of all fifty states considering labor reform legislation since 2011, the value and cost of the collective bargaining and one-size-fits-all system have been heavily debated.

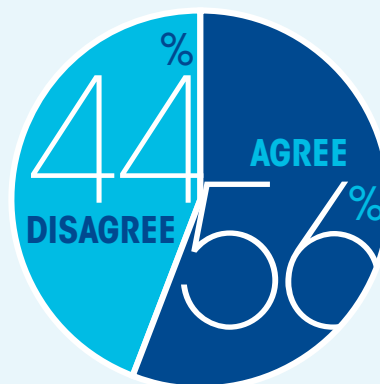
A majority of member teachers would prefer to negotiate their own contracts to account for their unique circumstances. Sixty-four percent agree with the statement, “I would prefer to negotiate my own contract so that I can negotiate a salary and benefits package that best suits my lifestyle. For example, as I am unmarried, I would prefer to have a higher salary than have X amount of sick-days.” Additionally, 80 percent of teachers would prefer an “a la carte” benefits program

Do you believe Common Core State Standards will help make education in the United States more competitive globally, less competitive globally, or have no effect?



Some educators believe that Common Core State Standards would provide more consistency in the quality of education between school districts and between states.

Do you agree with this stance?



instead of negotiated one-size-fits-all package.

With regard to another outdated policy, 78 percent of AAE members disagree with “LIFO” or “last in, first out,” jumping another four points from last year’s survey.

AAE’s Policy Goals

Ninety-five percent of surveyed members support AAE’s general policy agenda based on years of teacher feedback. As a member-driven organization, AAE supports policies that promote teachers freedom of choice and empower educators to freely select the organization that best meets their needs. AAE also supports public charter schools, virtual education, and the promotion of new and innovative school settings for students and teachers. Generally, AAE supports policies that reward and promote teachers based on performance and type of service rather than years in the system. ■

As the profession changes systematically and the rallying cry for reform reaches a fever pitch in 2014, teachers are embracing commonsense solutions that put students first. AAE is listening and we look forward to sharing your thoughts with policymakers and stakeholders at the national, state, and local levels.

Scholarships and Grants

The AAE Foundation Fall scholarship and grant winners are putting their awards to good use!

The next deadline for the Association of American Educators Foundation Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant program is right around the corner! Apply today at: aaeteachers.org ■



Indiana Career Academy Charter School Takes Innovative Approach to Education

Doug Bernhard was so frustrated at the lack of basic skills and work ethic in the employees at his previous employer of thirty-six years that he decided to do something about it.

He went straight to the source and became a welding instructor at a new public charter school—the South Bend Career Academy (SBCA)—on the northwest edge of South Bend, Indiana.

There he teaches welding (gas, arc, TIG, and wire) to students in grades seven through twelve. The goal is to have them certified in welding by the time they graduate so they are ready to go straight into the workforce (if that’s the career path they choose).

“All the years that I was in manufacturing (structural steel and fabricating company), with my job, I ran the place for thirty-four of the years, I couldn’t find kids or young people coming out of college or high school that had any work ethics, could read a tape measure, simple things,” Bernhard recalls. “They didn’t want to show up to work on time. I want to teach kids how to be workers, come on time, do what you get paid to do. I want the people that hire our kids to say, ‘Well, I want more from that place because they are sending out kids who know how to work and want to work.’”

Bernhard’s story resonates with Bruce Daeger, human resources manager at automotive supplier Federal-Mogul.

“The No. 1 reason why employees lose jobs in America

is absenteeism. The exciting thing about this school is that is a core value; you must be here,” Daeger exclaims. “Also, what I recognize is that in a traditional school, they’re training you to go to college. And here, they’re being trained to go to life.”

Students attend from 8 am to 5 pm and for 190 school days (ten longer than traditional public schools). No ‘D’ grades are given—students are expected to have at least a ‘C’-level mastery of a subject before moving on. There are no class bells; the responsibility is placed on students to get themselves to class on time.

The school was founded by two local businessmen, Larry Garatoni and Steve Hartz. Garatoni says he and his wife were looking for a way to give back to the community. Hartz, who runs a local manufacturing company, was struggling to find a suitable workforce, Garatoni says. The two merged their mutual interests and submitted a charter application to Ball State University.

The school opened in a renovated building in an industrial park in fall 2011 with about 120 students in grades seven through nine. Each year, additional grades have been added; there is now a small group of seniors at the school. The current enrollment is around 300 students.

“Education is a very complex business,” notes Garatoni, also the school board president. “Obviously you’re getting kids who have been somewhere else, and through the kids or the parents there’s a motivation to come to the school—either a dissatisfaction or they weren’t doing well where they were.”

There were some behavioral issues at first, he admits. However building a culture of personal responsibility has gone a long way in curbing those problems.

“The culture we’ve tried to establish here, the kids are responsible for a lot of their learning. We’re here to guide them, but we want to have a very adult-to-adult relationship. Our goal is to help these kids become adults,” Garatoni contends. “One of the precepts of the school is



everyone treats everyone else with respect.”

Sarah Fine, education manager of transition, explains that the SBCA is different from traditional career schools because the academic and career sides are under one umbrella.

“You’ll see a lot of career centers where kids come to the building for a half day; our kids are here all day. We are intentional about helping kids to start thinking about their futures starting in seventh grade,” she discloses. “They are kind of at the helm of what their future might unfold to be.”

Students can graduate with up to a year and a half of college credits; are exposed to career opportunities in a variety of fields; shown the possibilities that exist in the military, Peace Corps, and AmeriCorps; and are required to contribute a set number of hours of community service each year.

The students come from throughout the region and a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. There is about a 20 percent special needs population. AAE member and Lead administrator Chad Addie (other schools would refer to his role as principal) says the staff doesn’t buy into the concept of “at-risk” students.

“SBCA uses hands-on project-based learning and Project Lead the Way (PLTW) curriculum, which focuses on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).”

“We look at kids as ‘at-promise.’” It’s a very different approach. We’re not looking at kids’ weaknesses and deficits and where they fail; we’re looking for where are their gifts, strengths, and what are their abilities and what can we build on together to do something special. There’s no question in my mind that they’re going to continue to unfold and amaze us,” he states.

Hands-on experience

Shelbi Holt’s anxiety disorder and medical issues were exacerbated by her traditional public school education. It got to the point that she stopped going and was homeschooled.

Today, the 16-year-old is flourishing at SBCA. She’s contemplating a degree in the medical field. “I’m not sure what; I just want to help people,” she offers.



“I started (at SBCA) this year, and my anxiety disorder has decreased and I’ve been off my medication for a while and it’s so much better here. My scores and everything have gone up,” Holt adds.

Similar stories can be found throughout the school. Sophomore Tamara Harris was bullied at her last school and has found a welcoming environment at SBCA. Chris Swartz, sophomore, explains that SBCA staff and students are very protective of one another.

“We’re all pretty much one gigantic family,” he says. “Everyone is here for one another, without a doubt.”

Stefan Lula wasn’t doing well at his last school either. (Three of his siblings also attend the SBCA).

“I came here, and there was a completely different experience,” he shares. “Teachers aren’t barking at you to do things; they’re inviting you to do things. They’re inviting you to learn. I got the chance to take some really cool classes here that I wouldn’t have taken anywhere else.”

SBCA uses hands-on project-based learning and Project Lead the Way (PLTW) curriculum, which focuses on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

Sophomore Tamara Harris demonstrates that students can learn about various careers, including veterinary medicine.

Students at the free public charter school get to experience hands-on learning in technology, engineering, medical sciences, business administration, and more.

AAE is proud to support many of the hard-working administrators and teachers at SBCA. The school’s personalized and holistic approach to education makes it a true twenty-first century school. ■

This article was originally printed in the Jan/Feb edition of *Biz Voice Magazine*. School choice means opportunity for students and teachers. SBCA is an example of a school meeting needs for all stakeholders.



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