

# EDUCATION MATTERS

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation

## AAE Trailblazing A Professional Path: Special 20-Year Anniversary Issue 1994-2014

In 1993, a group of nationally recognized educators came together to form a new kind of teachers' association. They felt the two national teachers unions were leading both teachers and public schools in the wrong direction. AAE's founders believed that America's teachers needed an advocate that would advance them as true professionals.

**T**his group of esteemed educators felt it was time for the teachers in America who took issue with the labor union mentality and partisan political agendas being promoted by the teachers unions

to have their voice heard. This group would become the Association of American Educators (AAE).

AAE was then formally incorporated as a nonprofit professional educators association in 1994. AAE began, and still operates, on the simple vision of offering teachers comparable benefits that unions provide—such as quality liability insurance—but at a fraction of the cost, and without the partisan politics and controversial social agendas. We were, and still are, committed to making sure that AAE is a member-driven organization. If we are going to be a new voice for teachers across America, we must listen to what our members have to say. In that regard, AAE proudly

**“Three of the groups had grown larger than the union’s affiliates in those states, proving that when teachers are given choices, they exercise those choices.”**

advocates for educational reform issues on behalf of our members via member surveys.

In the process of establishing AAE as a premier national educators association, our founders were pleased to learn that independent non-union groups with the same vision as AAE were already in existence in a dozen states. The groups in Texas, Missouri, and Georgia had grown larger than the union's affiliates in those states, proving that when teachers are given choices, they exercise those choices.

Over the years, AAE has worked alongside a number of these state-based groups who also saw the need to build a competing force with the unions at both the state and national levels. And over the past decade, AAE has successfully established chapters in states where no comparable organization existed. Today, these state chapters in Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Washington, Oregon and Idaho are thriving and continue to operate under the leadership of the AAE national staff in California and Washington, D.C.

With members in all fifty states, AAE has experienced remarkable membership growth over the last decade. We believe this dramatic growth is the direct result of our founding principles and our dedication to staying true to the vision of turning teaching into a true profession—a mission that resonates with the new generation of teachers entering the field. We will continue to work tirelessly to make you proud to be a member of the AAE! ■

# Thank You from AAE

Dear AAE members & friends,

Just the fact that you are reading this newsletter says something special about you!

It says you're a true professional—an educator who has the capability of changing the hearts and minds of not only the students you teach, but of your colleagues as well.

It says that you are a leader on the road to real change in the way we do things in our schools and in our classrooms. You are why we started the AAE 20 years ago.

It has been demonstrated over and over that AAE members are among the ranks of the nation's top teacher leaders. They are involved. They are engaged. They are forward-thinking professionals who strive to make a difference both in the lives of their students and their communities.

**And that's why *your* membership with us has helped AAE make a difference over the past 20 years!**

When we led a group of outstanding educators to form AAE twenty years ago, the partisan teachers unions were the only voice for teachers. But over the past fifty years since the advent of monopoly unionism in public education, they've had little interest in listening to what teachers actually had to say. That's why teachers like you have been turning to AAE to speak out about where you really stand...and AAE has been listening.

As the only national professional educator association to form its policies and positions on educational issues based solely on member feedback, we are uniquely positioned to provide state and national stakeholders with what classroom teachers—the best classroom teachers—really think about all the reform initiatives being promoted today.

Now, more than ever before, classroom teachers' voices need to be heard!

**And *no one* is working harder to give them that voice than AAE.**

Right now, we are at a critical crossroad in our nation's education history. As parents and teachers grow increasingly tired of the political games being played in the education reform frenzy, we, all of us, must ensure that commonsense legislation is enacted that truly puts children first.

That is why it is so important for AAE to continue to grow so that our voice, your voice is not drowned out by the voices of those that put their own self-serving interests first.

We want to take this opportunity to thank you for joining with us! We are proud to be associated with professionals like you and look forward to working with you as we strive to make America a better place for teachers to teach and children to learn.

As an AAE teacher, you have choices.

We hope you enjoy this special 20-year anniversary edition of *Education Matters* to see how far we've come in just two decades.

Thank you!



Gary Beckner  
Founder & Executive Director



Piete Beckner  
Founder & Director of Membership Services



# AAE Member Hall of Fame

The Association of American Educators would like to recognize the following charter members for choosing AAE as their trusted association for educators for nearly 20 years. Their steadfast commitment to the cause of advancing the teaching profession has helped secure a non-union alternative for millions of their fellow teachers across the nation. Thank you for your years of service in the classroom!

These members will be presented with AAE marble apple awards in the coming weeks. Be sure to check Facebook for photos! 



- |                   |                     |                     |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Wynee Akers       | Katherine Goolsby   | Gary Nunnally       |
| Jeanette Althouse | Maria Guthrie       | Cynthia Oistad      |
| Adele Anderson    | Hugh Gwynn          | Laurel Ortman       |
| Cheryl Andersen   | Daniel Hackbarth    | Jane Otto           |
| Dianne Aveyard    | Richard Hall        | Dollie Penuel       |
| Jeffrey Baer      | Julie Hanshaw       | James Peters        |
| Jorie Baer        | Terry Hiemer        | Susan Pirtle        |
| Wilson Bascom     | Jeanne Hightower    | Joel Puffe          |
| Mary Blanchard    | Lydia Hillerson     | Paul Randall        |
| Christine Blevins | Diane Hoffman       | Shannon Rapp        |
| Kinsey Blomgren   | Janet Howse         | Martha Robbins      |
| Patricia Blount   | Karen Innis         | Kevin Robertson     |
| Marcella Bogan    | David Jones         | Jill Rogers         |
| George Bowler     | Sherry Jones        | Jane Ruud           |
| Darwin Brown      | Michael Keesling    | Cindy Sabot         |
| Lori Burnett      | Cathy Kessler       | Laura Scheele       |
| Patricia Burttram | Carol Klocke        | David Shubert       |
| Janice Cade       | Joyce Kokel         | Brent Shubin        |
| Kathy Cook        | Marilyn Kunkel      | Joseph Smith        |
| Paul Copeland     | Sandra Lebsack      | Barbara Smith-White |
| Regina Copeland   | Howard Lightsey     | Michael Stone       |
| Rita Cox          | Val Jo Lightsey     | Lynn Tabler         |
| Jane Crosby       | Cindy Mash          | Roxann Thompson     |
| Scott Davidson    | Mark Mash           | Loretta Tonak       |
| Charles DeWitt    | Joanne McAuley      | Fred Vanderhoof     |
| Susan Dieckgrafe  | Judith Dawn McCord  | Evan Veldhuizen     |
| Diane Dittrich    | Renee McCreary      | Karen Velguth       |
| Karen Donner      | John McDivitt       | Deborah Virgl       |
| Carol Du Bois     | Christine McDowell  | Donald Walker       |
| Louis Eskuchen    | Jeannie Mears       | Paul Walkowiak      |
| Debbie Fayman     | William Menig       | Richard Waller      |
| Paul Fayman       | Therese Mertz       | Stanley Whipkey     |
| Michael Forte     | Terry Miller        | Del Whitman         |
| Cynthia Gamblin   | Gerelyn Moberg      | Bonnie Wilder       |
| William Gant      | Robyn Moore         | Amy Williams        |
| Becky Garrett     | Nancy Moormeier     | James Yost          |
| Sally Gayner      | Judith Moughler     | Robby Zarkowski     |
| Kathleen Gibson   | Lavonne Niedermeyer | Julie Zitek ■       |

# Take a Walk Down Memory Lane with AAE

== THEN ==

1994



== NOW ==

2014



## 1994

AAE was incorporated as a 501(c)(6) professional trade association.

## 1995

The AAE Code of Ethics for Teachers was written and published by AAE's original advisory board of award-winning educators. The AAE Code of Ethics has since been used and cited in academic research and during the establishment of several public charter schools. [aaeteachers.org/codeofethics](http://aaeteachers.org/codeofethics)



AAE hosted its first board meeting in 1994. Front row, left to right: Tracey Bailey, Pann Baltz, Polly Brouard, & Gary Beckner. Back row, left to right: William Kilpatrick, Tom Fleming, Kevin Ryan, & Eric Buehrer.



Former Director of Education Policy Tracey Bailey presents at a USDOE press conference on behalf of teachers.

## 1995

The first issue of *Education Matters* hits the presses. Since its launch, this members-only publication has been a highly sought after resource for educators around the nation who wish to have their work shared with YOU!

## 1996

In its first national media exposure, AAE is introduced as a family-friendly, up-and-coming organization on the "Focus on the Family" talk radio channel.



NWPE Executive Director Cindy Omlin & Gary Beckner testify at a Congressional event sponsored by the Alexis de Tocqueville Institute.



Every year, AAE hosts a State Leaders retreat to help our staff prepare for new challenges. This photo was taken at our Gatlinburg, TN retreat in 2001.

## 1997

AAE exceeds 3,000 members and growing!

## 1999

AAE incorporates its first state chapter, the Kansas Association of American Educators.

## 2001

AAE incorporates its second state chapter, Northwest Professional Educators. NWPE serves the states of Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.



NWPE Executive Director Cindy Omlin celebrates with AAE member Jana Horne on her classroom grant award.



KANAAE Executive Director Garry Sigle joins Governor Sam Brownback for the Equal Access bill signing.

## 2002

AAE testifies before the U.S. Congress during the No Child Left Behind debate to urge the Department of Education to offer more flexibility in the new law.

## 2004

The Arkansas State Teachers Association is incorporated. ASTA is currently AAE's largest state chapter in the nation.

## 2004

AAE opens its advocacy office in Washington, D.C.



AAE opened an office in the Washington D.C. area in 2004. This office handles our communication, outreach, and policy.



The PACE team and two members are excited to fight for the teachers of Colorado. They are pictured at the state Capitol.

## 2006

NEA warns NEA affiliates that AAE "has emerged as the leading anti-NEA organization" and issues a toolkit of anti-AAE propaganda to state affiliates losing members to AAE.

## 2006

AAE incorporates another state-based chapter, the Professional Association of Colorado Educators.

## 2010

AAE helps launch the first ever National School Choice Week and brings an authentic teacher voice to the educational choice movement.



Many of AAE's outstanding members demonstrate strong leadership skills. Carol Scholz, for example, was Idaho Teacher of the Year. Her principal, Jackie Collins (left) is also a member. Carol has since joined the NWPE team as a board member!

## 2011

Supported by testimony of AAE teachers, Wisconsin ends forced unionism. AAE membership increases in the state by 400% and counting.

Ending the practice of forced unionism or mandatory dues gives teachers real choices. For more information, visit [aaeteachers.org/yourrights](http://aaeteachers.org/yourrights).

## 2012

AAE testifies in support of a teacher evaluation overhaul in Utah.

## 2012

[AAECharters.org](http://AAECharters.org) is launched as the go-to resource for the public charter school movement.

## 2012

AAE begins offering memberships to the charter school community through partnerships with charter school associations in California, Colorado, Georgia, Florida, Missouri, and Utah.

## 2013

AAE helps to pass Equal Access legislation in Kansas, giving educators the opportunity to make informed choices about association membership.

## 2013

National Employee Freedom Week is born as AAE leads a coalition of nearly 80 state organizations to shine a spotlight on teacher rights of association. Visit [employeefreedomweek.com](http://employeefreedomweek.com) for more information.

## 2014

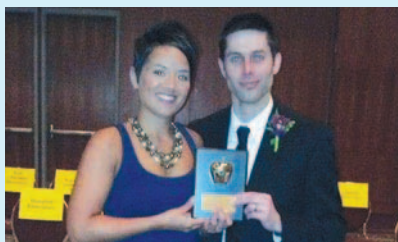
AAE testifies in support of paycheck protection in Pennsylvania.



Our Facebook following continues to grow thanks to members like YOU!



Regional Membership Director Charity Smith celebrates teachers during National School Choice Week, which was first launched in 2010.



Member Cathy Lopez is an English teacher in Milwaukee, WI. She was the WI Teacher of the Year in 2013!

**What Now? A Look at the Future**

What would you like to see change in education policy?  
 What are your suggestions to help AAE effectively address the challenges of future educational leaders?

Email [editor@aaeteachers.org](mailto:editor@aaeteachers.org) with your thoughts.

AAE is constantly looking for ways to grow and improve and to serve our members better.

# In Memoriam:

We remember those who have gone before us.



**Mr. Doug Barnett**  
Celebrated Educator &  
Former KANAEE Executive Director

Doug Barnett was an incredible teacher and leader. He was a revered educator and encouraging coach. Doug taught in the Olathe, Kansas School District for 32 years, coached basketball for more 20 years, and served as president of the Kansas Association of American Educators for 13 years. He impacted thousands of lives in an esteemed career. There are two KANAEE scholarships in his honor for Kansas history teachers.



**Dr. Thomas A. Fleming**  
1992 National Teacher of the Year &  
Founding AAE Board Member

In 1991, Dr. Fleming was named Michigan Teacher of the Year. In 1992 he was awarded the Crystal Apple as National Teacher of the Year by President Bush at the White House. Eastern Michigan University granted him an honorary doctors degree in Education in 1993. He devoted his life to education and was instrumental in guiding AAE in its early years.

## Tell a Friend: AAE is looking for teachers like you!

As the premier professional association for educators, we take teacher advocacy a step further by providing our members with access to a wide array of outstanding benefits such as:

- Top-notch liability insurance & legal services
- Thousands of dollars in scholarships & grants given annually
- Cutting-edge professional development opportunities throughout the year
- Valuable updates that keep you at the forefront of the education debate...& so much MORE!

And all of these quality professional benefits and services are provided at a fraction of the cost of the politically-driven teachers unions!

Tell your colleague to learn more about the great work AAE does for our nation's teacher leaders by visiting us on the web at [aaeteachers.org](http://aaeteachers.org) or by calling our toll-free number at 1.800.704.7799.



# AAE National Membership Survey

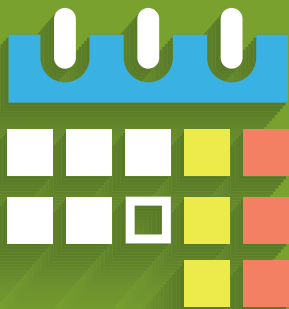
Watch your inbox for the 2015 AAE National Membership Survey! Visit [aaeteachers.org/update](http://aaeteachers.org/update) to ensure your information is current and you are receiving emails.



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## Save the Date:

National School Choice Week:  
January 25–31,  
2015



# AAE's Impact from the Field

Our staff is excited about the wonderful experiences they've had on the ground over the years. As is evident by their experiences, one thing is very clear... the message of AAE and our state chapters is being well received among teachers, and AAE is here to stay.



'Thank you! New teachers need to know about this.' Those were the words said to me by a first-year teacher who had just started his job at a Denver elementary school. He had heard about PACE through another teacher in his school and he wanted to learn more. I met with him during his lunch break and we started by talking about the challenges of teaching, life in Colorado, and football. Eventually our conversation turned to his questions about PACE. He wanted to make sure he would be covered for false accusations if, heaven forbid, such a situation ever arose.

It wasn't long into the conversation that this member realized he could rely on PACE to be there to support him—and it became increasingly clear that he was impressed by our willingness to personally invite him into our professional organization. In contrast, this member's building union rep had simply passed by with a form telling him he really needed to join and that she would come by later to pick up his application. There was no concern for his status as a first-year teacher and she made no inquiry about his personal interests. To this member, the choice was clear. He joined PACE on the spot. The personal touch is what a professional association should be about, and I am proud to be a part of PACE."

**Tim Farmer**  
Regional Director PACE



"...I belong to an organization of professionals that will handle issues with respectful, honest manners that allow both sides to retain their dignity."



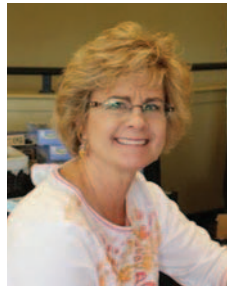


One of things that has kept me going is knowing that, despite having so many challenges, our efforts are making a difference for people who care deeply about doing what is right and good. Teachers join after weighing many factors. For each one, their decision has great personal and professional significance, and often comes after years of struggle.

For example, one member recently shared why she joined NWPE. ‘I was unhappy with our district’s teacher organization and some of the tactics that they used to solve issues. I was looking for another alternative when a fellow teacher told me about NWPE. I love that I belong to an organization of professionals that will handle issues with respectful, honest manners that allow both sides to retain their dignity. I don’t feel pressured into supporting or arguing against any issues that have arisen and I am free to make informed decisions without fear of reprisal. NWPE gives me all the pertinent information and allows me the freedom to think for myself.’

When a teacher chooses NWPE for reasons of conscience, I feel like I am participating in opening up a channel of grace for the member and this wider community. That is a true blessing and privilege.”

**Cindy Omlin**  
Executive Director NWPE



After 15 years in the classroom, I made the very brave and wise decision to work for AAE as the Regional Membership Director in Wisconsin. The educational landscape in Wisconsin has drastically changed over the past two years, and education professionals are excited to learn about the benefits of an AAE membership. After decades of forced unionism, professionals are relieved to know they have a choice when it comes to joining a true professional association like AAE. Traveling this beautiful state and meeting with educators has been a true blessing for me and I absolutely love hearing the positive feedback from our members!”

**Kristi Lacroix**  
Regional Director Wisconsin



As a former educator of 33 years and a member of AAE for over 15 years, I am a firm believer that every educator should have liability insurance beyond what is provided through the school district. KANAAE and the union are both providers of professional educator liability insurance, but KANAAE’s promise to steer clear of partisan politics and controversial agendas puts them in a unique position to serve teachers in a way that the union simply isn’t able to.

Many educators are prevented from hearing about their options beyond the union because current laws keep organizations like AAE from having access to teachers through events like new teacher orientations, district in-services or teacher mailboxes. But every day I find more and more hard-working teachers all across Kansas who are excited about our services, who feel empowered by our message, and who say they’ve finally found a home with KANAAE.”

**Garry Sigle**  
Executive Director KANAAE



I was a member of AAE for 8 years before working full time for AAE as a regional director for the last two years. Understanding how much I help educators each week makes the work well worth it. I get many phone calls each week from teachers and other school employees who call me frustrated or even crying. I am able to help them realize that they have our support and will be protected should any of their fears come true. They get off the phone calmed down and able to focus on their students. It is great knowing that I am helping educators focus on their students and do the right thing without having to fear unexpected lawsuits or frivolous accusations.”

**Ronnie Flowers**  
Regional Director ASTA





# Teacher Testimonials:

Find out what teachers are saying...

AAE and its partner organizations have had a huge impact on the teaching profession and teachers are taking notice. They find value in the services AAE has to offer because they know that AAE cares about teachers. We asked many of you why you joined AAE, and this is what you had to say:

## Laura Sage, UT

I support AAE's mission and respect its tactics. Finally a fair representation for teachers! AAE finds out what we think and then voices our opinion, not their own.

## Elizabeth Retana, IN

I joined AAE because AAE is a *professional* association of educators, offers professional development, and networking opportunities.

## Lana Sigle, KS

AAE not only provides liability insurance but it also provides scholarships, legal services, and caring support.

## Joanne Murphy, WI

I think that the field of education is in a transitional period right now and my individual opinions are not being heard—but I think AAE can change that. I look forward to a new professional association that will truly focus on the children we educate.

## Dallas Nickell, TX

I want to share and gain further ideas, learning goals, strategies, and stories with other educators around the world.

## Mallorie Flanigan, OK

I joined to have a voice in Congress.

## Patricia Schonviesner, ID

I joined AAE to work with other like-minded educators.

## Jennifer Telligman, IN

Because it believes education is best served from the local and state levels and does not advocate for non-educational issues.

## Elizabeth Stone, FL

I wanted to be involved in an organization that cared about teachers without telling me how to vote and otherwise run my life.

## Tracy Fuquay, IN

I feel the coverage is just as good as my local teacher association and you speak out just as strongly for MUCH less.





AAE provides a safe haven for teachers who aren't interested in funding partisan campaigns and causes. In fact, many of our members are coming to AAE because they feel that their current association isn't serving them. This is what teachers are saying about why they are 'making the switch'...

**Brandon Benson, TX**

I would like additional legal protection above my district's coverage, but I am also morally opposed to many of the actions of teacher unions.

**Brian Peterman, NE**

I needed an alternative organization that isn't involved in a political agenda that destroys teacher and local empowerment.

**Rick Hudson, WI**

AAE was more economically and ideologically in alignment with who I am as a professional when compared to my former union.

**Kathleen Taplin, IA**

I do not support the beliefs of NEA. I am a conservative and do not want my money supporting causes I do not believe in.

**Cynthia Lathrop, PA**

Because I was not happy with the NEA. I do not agree with all of their policies and I feel they spend too much money on politics. I also thought the fees they charge are exorbitant and the percentage that goes to our local affiliate is too low in comparison to what we pay overall.

**Kimberli Lyons, OR**

I never thought I would "opt out" of our local union! I am very relieved AAE is available to represent teachers and important educational interests. My local union has lost touch and isn't hearing my concerns.

**Ali Weimer, West Memphis, AR**  
**2013 Arkansas Teacher of the Year**



The main reason I joined AAE/ASTA was for the support that they give teachers in a variety of ways through grants, teacher scholarships, through professional liability insurance, and things of that nature. The value of others joining AAE/ASTA is to be connected with other educators who are experiencing the same types of things, who have the same type of values, who want to learn and network with each other. I would also say to be connected to bigger issues of what is going on in the world outside of your classroom and how you can be a part of that. AAE/ASTA gives you a great voice and a great network to do those types of things.

**Tamara Brown, CA**

I did not agree with the direction NEA/CTA is headed politically.

**Thea Goding, KY**

I disagree with a lot of union issues. I am a teacher because I care about kids and what is best for THEM, not myself.

**Elaine Lautenschlager, MI**

I do not like my money paying for the campaigns of political candidates whom I don't necessarily support, but I still wanted to have some protection for my job. Now that Michigan is a Right-to-Work state, I am able to sever ties with the union.

**Kristi Creamer, OH**

I went into education to teach, not to send my hard earned money to a Washington bureaucrat.

**Anzan Alaimo, WI**

Because union membership is no longer a requirement in Wisconsin, I was interested in alternative programs for insurance, etc.

**Deborah Carr, ME**

I needed affordable liability coverage and when I looked into joining the school district's union, I would have to pay almost \$900 in yearly dues to get less coverage than AAE offers.

**Steve Millam, AZ**

I refuse to give money to or support the NEA or any union that supports causes that I don't agree with. I have been teaching without liability insurance for years—a big risk in today's litigious culture. ■



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Merry Christmas and  
Happy Holidays from all of us at  
the Association of American  
Educators

