



By Jomayra I. Torres

N.J. Charter Schools Beneficial for Teachers and Students Alike

Public charter schools have been making headlines in New Jersey for years. As policymakers debate equitable funding and the expanding role of charter schools in the state, teachers like me are on the frontlines of this pioneering movement. I believe it's critical that teacher voices be heard when debating the future of charter schools in New Jersey.

I've been a teacher for four years. While I wasn't always sure what type of school I'd end up in, I've spent my career at BelovED Community Charter School, an independent, high-performing public charter school in Jersey City. It is in this innovative environment that I've been able to experience the flexibility and autonomy that I've always envisioned for my career.

Despite serving millions of students and employing thousands of educators across the country, these laboratory-like schools are still misunderstood in many communities. Independent charter schools are unique public schools offered bureaucratic freedom in exchange for real results. Just like traditional public schools, they don't charge tuition, are publicly funded and open to anyone who applies—including students with special needs.

Free from union contracts, my charter school has the freedom to adjust the school day, choose new and exciting curriculum resources, and develop strong models for learning. Teachers like me are treated as equal partners with valuable experience and ideas. Personally, I feel empowered by school leadership to teach in a way that is unique to every student in my classroom.

“In adapting to the system of choice across the country, professional educators are realizing that advances like charter schools are not only meeting the needs of students but also providing professional opportunities to staff.”



As the oldest of eight kids born and raised in Jersey City, I'm the only member of my family who graduated from high school, and college, and now has a career in education. I know from experience that great teachers make the difference for kids.

And I know that teachers across the state understand the transcending power of a high quality education. The vast majority of my colleagues enter the profession with dreams of changing lives and affecting communities. Nowhere is this dream more alive than in public charter schools designed to serve New Jersey's most high-need students.

The truth is educators on the frontlines know that a one-size-fits-all system does little to address the unique needs of all our students. Students learn differently, just as teachers have different teaching styles. In adapting to the system of choice across the country, professional educators are realizing that advances like charter schools are not only meeting the needs of students but also providing professional opportunities to staff. We must see this progression across New Jersey.

While the status quo would have you believe educators are not in favor of choice initiatives like public charter schools, thousands of teachers support this new direction and are working in schools of choice every day.

According to a membership survey by AAE, the largest national non-union educators organization in the nation, teachers everywhere are open to policies that advance choice and innovation. As a member, I couldn't be more proud that my colleagues are embracing the wave of the future of education.

Specifically, an overwhelming 97 percent of AAE members support charter schools as options for both students and teachers alike. Clearly there is an understanding among educators that options for students are beneficial and that educators, in turn, can also reap rewards.

My message to stakeholders in New Jersey and across the nation is simple. Charter schools are nothing to fear. My own son attends my school and is making huge gains. As a public charter school teacher, I'm directly benefitting from choices in education and I'm grateful. I wake up knowing that I am in an environment that challenges me professionally and allows me to work with kids who need me most.

Looking forward, I hope to see policymakers recognize the power of public charter schools in New Jersey by closing the funding gap and creating a comprehensive and fair charter law in our state. Students—and teachers—deserve the opportunity to succeed. ■

Originally published on nj.com.



Jomayra I. Torres is the lead 1st grade teacher at BelovED Community Charter School in Jersey City, New Jersey. An AAE member, she was the recipient of the 2014 Teacher of the Year award from the New Jersey Charter Schools Association.

AAE Member Submission:

5+1 FREE Websites/Apps Every Teacher Should Know About

With the multitude of teacher websites available, it's easy to get overwhelmed trying to find the classroom management tool that will work for you. Here are the recommendations.

Remind remind.com



By signing up for a free account on remind.com, you can communicate with parents via text message without giving out your own phone number. Send reminders about upcoming tests, field trips, or classroom events. Parents can also reply to your messages via text if they join your class.

Classdojo classdojo.com



This is a fantastic classroom management tool that awards students points for good behavior and students lose points for undesirable behavior. Parents can also create an account to monitor how their child is doing. Points can be easily adapted to fit expectations unique to your classroom. Classdojo helps hold students accountable for their behavior and motivates them to do well without using material rewards.



Jill Domina is a 5th grade teacher at Schuyler Elementary School in Nebraska. She's been an AAE member since 2003 and joined after hearing coworker

testimony and researching what AAE stands for.

Scholastic Study Jams



studyjams.scholastic.com

Scholastic offers free educational animated videos about a variety of math and science topics. Mostly geared toward upper elementary, videos include step-by-step instructions for math processes, practice questions, and even sing-along songs.

Safeshare.tv safeshare.tv



Ever find the perfect youtube video to enhance your teaching but hate the advertisements that pop up alongside it? Use safeshare to eliminate all of those ads! Just copy and paste a youtube video link on safeshare.tv and then play it without all of the unwanted "extras."



Gonoodle gonoodle.com

Students in grades K-6 will love this website because it gets them up and moving! Need a quick brain break? This site offers a wide variety of them, from stretching with Maximo, doing Zumba, running Olympic track events, singing along to popular Kidbop songs, or just watching a funny video and laughing. Most videos are 2-5 minutes in length. Gonoodle also offers longer brain breaks perfect for indoor recess days!

Kahoot! getkahoot.com



Kahoot is an addicting game your students are sure to love! You can create your own kahoot quizzes for any subject area or find one in the plentiful library and adapt it to your needs. Students compete against each other to choose the correct answer within the time limit. This game is sure to keep your students engaged and provides immediate feedback. Guaranteed to be a hit with your class! ■

Idaho Teacher of the Year Kim Zeydel Speaks Out

No one sets an example for teachers the way AAE member and 2015 Idaho Teacher of the Year Kim Zeydel does. In addition to her latest honor, her educational accolades include numerous district teacher awards as well as receiving the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching in 2009.

Kim focuses not only on helping her students meet their potential, she also works hard to help other educators bring honor and professionalism to teaching at the local, state, and national levels. A teacher since 1985, Kim plays an active role in her school and community by contributing as a student teacher mentor. She also serves as a National Science Foundation panelist for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching and offers professional development for the Idaho Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the Idaho State Department of Education.

Kim epitomizes the AAE mission to elevate the teaching profession. We're proud to feature this exceptional educator and share her personal insights.



NWPE Regional Director Brenda Miller, left, with Kim Zeydel, right.

“Teachers who don’t find the teachers unions a good fit also deserve to have professional protection and support.”

What motivates you as an educator?

I am motivated by hearing my students say, “Now the math makes sense. I wish I had you as a teacher a long time ago.” I’m also motivated when I see students who dropped out of high school come back and graduate. Seeing the looks on their faces when they finally realize they have made it is priceless.

What do you like about teaching in your school?

I work with at-risk students in an alternative high school. Since our students have different needs than the regular high school students, we have some freedom to teach to their needs instead of just completing the curriculum. We can adjust and do what we as a school feel will most benefit our students. We take this responsibility very seriously, and the students and their families are grateful that their education comes first.

What sets your school district apart?

Because my school district is the largest in Idaho, teachers encounter much more bureaucracy. However, the district encourages our teachers to be technology leaders and provides opportunities to collaborate with our colleagues in other districts for professional development. Our district also provides families with many choices as to what type of school they would like their children to attend from foreign language immersion programs, STEM academies, art and music academies, International Baccalaureate programs, dual college and Associate Arts programs for high school students, technology and medical charter schools, and alternative middle and high schools in addition to the traditional public school.

If you have taught in other schools, how is this school different from the others?

I used to teach at a small, rural K-12 school in Idaho. Since we were so small, teachers had professional autonomy to make decisions on curriculum and assessments. Additionally, personal relationships developed between the superintendent, board members, principal, teachers, and the community that are difficult to form in a large district. I miss this community connection in my large district. In addition, all teachers, whether they were members of a union or not, had a strong working relationship with the administration and were able to focus on students and teacher working conditions to enhance student education.

What does it mean to you to be chosen as Idaho’s Teacher of the Year?

This is a great honor that I take very seriously. I am now more focused on state educational issues and am trying to be more involved in the legislative process. We need legislation that helps students and teachers. I also want to encourage a positive focus on what teachers do and to support them as they work to perfect their skills as educators. Blaming teachers for everything that is wrong with education will get us nowhere.

Please describe your primary reasons for joining NWPE-AAE and how membership has personally benefited your career as an educator.

I had wanted to join for about three years since hearing about Northwest Professional Educators (NWPE), Idaho’s AAE state partner, and what the association stands for. But I kept putting it off. The grant/scholarship program finally prompted me to make the commitment to join. I appreciate how NWPE provides support for teachers, especially new teachers.

In your view, what’s the #1 thing prospective members should know about NWPE-AAE?

I like that NWPE-AAE stays out of politics having nothing to do with education and that the dues are very reasonable.

What is your favorite NWPE-AAE benefit?

It’s nice to know that I can easily access confidential legal assistance if issues of concern arise in my workplace. I appreciate that there are no potential conflicts of interest with NWPE’s legal counsel.

How do you feel about NWPE being excluded from district benefit fairs and other school communication forums?

Districts should not limit what information and benefits their teachers can access. Freedom of choice should come first. I have taught in Idaho for 16 years and did not join IEA due to its affiliation with NEA and its politics. Teachers who don’t find the teachers unions a good fit also deserve to have professional protection and support. NWPE-AAE provides that. If IEA were such a great organization, it should be able to sign up members without pressuring districts to prevent other organizations from contacting their teachers. ■

AAE Members are Better Teachers

Send teachers who are interested in learning more about AAE membership to aaeteachers.org/membership.

Teacher Survey of the Month

Do you feel that teachers unions do a good job of representing the interests of teachers like you?

Take the survey at tinyurl.com/July15Survey today and be entered to win an AAE Prize Pack just for participating in this one-question survey!

Scan the QR code to take this survey on your phone.

Check Out This Amazing School: Milwaukee Collegiate Academy

Friday mornings at MCA are vibrant and lively. Staff gathers at morning circle for announcements, celebrations, and to prepare to welcome the 250 students that attend each day. After the staff huddle breaks with a motivational cheer, teachers head off to their assigned areas to give shout-outs to individual students for various accomplishments. One teacher collects student cell phones while others make sure students are dressed in accordance with the school uniform policy.

MCA shares the sincere belief that every scholar who joins the MCA team and family can and will go through college. This core belief is the heart of everything it does. Its team is comprised of highly skilled educators who are committed to that mission and understand the hard work that must be done to accomplish it. They exhibit this commitment each and every day through instructional practice and relationship building with their scholars and families.



Photo via Milwaukee Collegiate Academy's website

MCA uses a blended-learning approach to instruction that combines the power of face-to-face instruction with the innovations and academic benefits of learning online. This allows it to personalize instruction for every student. MCA's mission of "to and through college" remains the same no matter where their students are on the academic spectrum when they come to MCA.

MCA takes and creates every opportunity it can for their students to grow and develop the character strengths needed to persist through college. Its learning environment is both structured and caring. They create high

expectations for all of their scholars and hold them accountable for meeting them. And along with high expectations, MCA provides amazing support. Each teacher has office hours after school to ensure students receive additional instructional support they need or to simply study in a quiet place.

Simply put, they transform lives.

MILWAUKEE COLLEGIATE ACADEMY

Milwaukee Collegiate Academy (MCA) is an inner city, independent public charter school in Wisconsin. Formerly known as CEO Leadership Academy, MCA opened in 2003 as a private school. It became a public charter school in 2011.

Student Demographics:

- 99% African American
- 96% are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch

Mission & Vision: MCA's mission is to nurture scholars capable of transforming their world, by sending them to and through college.

Its vision is to produce responsible leaders through academic mastery, community-focused education, and the fostering of lifelong learning in any environment.

Awards: 2015 Milwaukee Charter School of the Year

School Website

milwaukeecollegiateacademy.org



“Our core value is that all students are capable of academic achievement and educational success past the secondary level regardless of their race or socioeconomic level! They know that when they work together, they are able to help capable, low-income students become college-bound scholars.”

— **Rashida Evans, Current Principal**

“I graduated from MCA knowing that I have the ability and essential skills I need to be the successful African-American leader that I want to be. I could not have done it without them.”

— **Amanda Paige, MCA Class of 2014;
Howard University**



What makes MCA great?

100%

graduation rate for the past 3 consecutive years

90%

of MCA families indicate satisfaction with MCA

65%

of MCA graduating scholars have enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college or university since 2012

25%

improvement rate on ACT tests over the past 5 years

4x

National average of college persistence and graduation for low-income, black students since 2007

MCA College Acceptance Rate

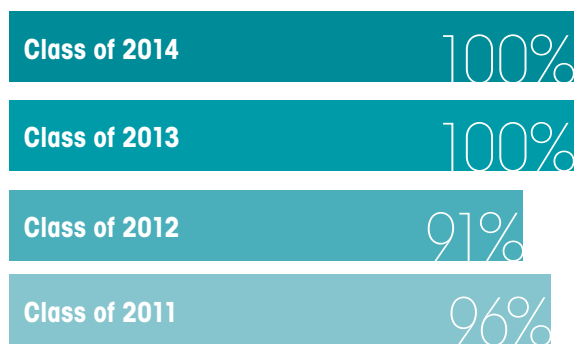


Photo via Milwaukee Collegiate Academy's website

Tips on how your school can mimic these results...

1. Remember to make everything a community effort.
2. Keep it positive. Positive reinforcement is key!
3. Create a required intervention program for struggling students.
4. Treat each student as an individual.
5. Invest in talented teachers and use their unique talents. ■

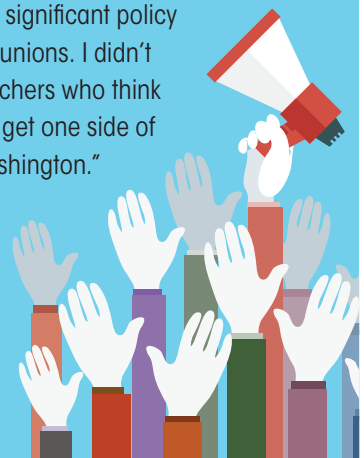
Did You Know?

67%

of this year's AAE membership survey respondents said that they agree with a new Colorado law requiring school boards to let the public observe collective bargaining negotiations.

Each year AAE members are invited to participate in a National Membership Survey so that their ideas, priorities, and perspectives can be heard. We supply their responses to the national media, educational policymakers, and the U.S. Congress. U.S. Senator Charles Grassley from Iowa told us, "I was pleased to review your membership survey, which demonstrates significant policy differences with the unions. I didn't know there were teachers who think like you do. We only get one side of the story here in Washington."

Read more about our member survey at aaeteachers.org/natsurvey.





The Association of American Educators Foundation
27405 Puerta Real, Suite 230
Mission Viejo, CA 92691-6388

Presorted Standard
US Postage Paid
#400
Laguna Niguel, CA

Education Matters is an exclusive publication for members of AAE and its state chapters. This publication is brought to you by the Association of American Educators Foundation (AAEF).



aaeteachers.org • editor@aaeteachers.org • 800.704.7799

Gary Beckner, *Executive Editor*
Alexandra Freeze, *Managing Editor*
M. Alana Welch, *Coordinating Editor*
Debbie Brown, *Editorial Assistant*
Diane Meyer, *Editorial Assistant*

Union Attacks School Board Member for Sharing AAE

By Conner Dunleavy

The Collier County Education Association in Florida has threatened legal action against school board member Kelly Lichter in an attempt to silence her efforts to make local educators aware of their professional options for association membership.

According to reports, the local teachers union discovered that Ms. Lichter sought to share information about AAE to district employees. Distressed with the union's commitment to blocking reform, Lichter maintains that sharing AAE would give educators critically needed information. "I think our teachers deserve to have choices," Lichter told reporters.

The union fired back, attacking Lichter and conjuring up accusations of unfair labor practices. They claim that their status as the teachers' exclusive bargaining agent makes sharing information about AAE a violation of labor law.

This typical union strong-arm tactic is one that occurs time and time again as

AAE membership continues to make great gains. AAE isn't a union but a professional association that doesn't engage in collective bargaining or partisan politics. Therefore, the claim that informing teachers of AAE constitutes a breach of the union's status as the exclusive bargaining agent simply falls on its face.

The union uses scare tactics like these against teachers and allies to block dissenting voices and to keep their members in the dark about union alternatives and where they can acquire better benefits—at a fraction of the cost.

Ms. Lichter says she knows teachers who are immensely frustrated with the bullying tactics of their local union leaders.

While we both wish to reach teachers, AAE and its state chapters are a fundamentally different type of organization with a unique mission and vision for educators. Teachers have a right to make an informed decision. We're not trying to sign up

every teacher; we're trying to meet the needs of educators whose professional interests and goals would be well served by our association. Our organization is open to both non-union and union educators alike!

Barring AAE from events and teacher communication channels mars the free marketplace of ideas and violates teachers' rights under Florida's Right-to-Work statute which clearly prohibits coercion in the exercise of a teacher's right to join or *refrain from joining* a union.

AAE is proud to provide high-quality, low-cost benefits to educators across the United States—and will continue to do so—while always giving educators the option to join or leave AAE—hassle free—at any time.

Read the original article at aaeteachers.org/blog. ■

Conner is supporting the communications and marketing team in the DC AAE office this summer. From the class of 2017, he intends to graduate from the University at Albany with a Bachelor's Degree in European History and a minor in Education.