

# EDUCATION MATTERS

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By Doug Tuthill

## School Choice Is Good for Teachers, Too

**W**ith her recent passing, Marva Collins is being remembered for her glorious educational crusade to turn around the lives of low-income black children in Chicago. It's also worth remembering how she chose to do this. She cashed in her teacher pension savings in the 1970s to start her own private school. With it, she combined a no-excuses attitude with high standards, strict discipline, and love—and got amazing results with limited resources.

In other words, Collins was empowered by school choice.

Twenty-five years after Milwaukee put private school scholarships on the map, a majority of states now have some form of school choice. Five states either created or expanded education savings accounts, including Florida, which tripled funding for its program; and Nevada, which spawned the nation's most inclusive program, available to more than 90 percent of its students.

These opportunities are created, first and foremost, to give parents the power to choose the educational options that are best for their children. But teachers benefit as well, even if the story lines seldom mention them.

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As choice expands, teachers will see more opportunities to create and/or work in educational models that hew to their vision and values, maximize their expertise, and result in better outcomes for students. Increasingly, they’ll be able to bypass the red tape and micromanagement that plague too many district schools and serve students who are not finding success. In short, they’ll be able to better shape their destinies, and the destinies of their students.

I should know. I’m a lifelong educator who now heads a nonprofit that administers the nation’s largest private school choice program. I have seen firsthand how all forms of school choice can offer teachers more opportunities to innovate.

My home state of Florida is brimming with examples. In June, ABC’s *World News Tonight* put a national spotlight on a particularly inspiring one: the Human Experience School in Orlando, Florida. Doing their best impression of Marva Collins, teachers Danita Jones and Nate Smith started the one-class, one-grade, microschool last fall by pouring in their life savings and getting an assist from tax-credit scholarships. Why the urgency? “If you were standing on the side of the pool and saw someone drowning, would you jump in to save them?” Jones asked ABC. “By lacking access to quality education—you might as well be drowning in a pool.”

Florida teachers now have more power than ever to improve access to quality education by creating, leading, and teaching in their own

schools. And it’s because no state has done more to expand educational choice. Florida is among the top handful of states when it comes to the number of charter schools and charter school students. It is home to the nation’s biggest tax-credit scholarship program and the second largest program of education savings accounts. It has the largest voucher program for students with disabilities and the second largest pre-K voucher program. All told, these programs of school choice serve about a half-million students.

Florida also now has more than 40,000 teachers who do not work for school districts. Nearly 14,000 of them work in charter schools, which surpasses the public school teaching work force in nine other states. At the nonprofit I lead, we routinely hear stories of teachers who migrate from district schools to private schools. They’re choosing these options for the same reason parents are—because they offer a better fit for their individual needs.

The world is full of square pegs. As long as public education remains highly centralized, it’s inevitable that somebody’s vision for what is best will be imposed on somebody who bitterly disagrees, and some students who would benefit from one approach will be jammed into another. Decentralization through expanded choice is the best remedy, and not just for students. Some teachers work well with large bureaucracies; some don’t. Choice gives them the opportunity to find or create schools that play to their strengths and interests.

In a growing number of states, pathways are increasing for teachers to do just that. Those who take them are finding a rich landscape where technology and customization are driving diversity. New programs, such as Course Access, give teachers innovative platforms to think out of the box—and out of the schoolhouse. Meanwhile, tools like education savings accounts, better known as ESAs, give parents direct access to all the educational services their children may need, including teacher-run schools. ESAs can benefit teachers and families the way Uber has helped drivers and passengers—by kicking middlemen to the curb.

As this drive for teacher and parent empowerment accelerates, I have no doubt the opportunities for teacher leadership will grow. Like Marva Collins, some passionate and enterprising educators will always find ways to create their own models. But as more states crack open the doors to educational choice, it’s easy to envision an army of Marva Collins’ charging through. ■

Originally published on [Edweek.org](https://www.edweek.org).



**Doug Tuthill** is a former union president and current president of Step Up for Students, a nonprofit organization that helps administer Florida’s tax-credit scholarship program for low-income students.

# 5 Resolutions To Modernize Your Teaching

**W**hen it comes to New Year's resolutions, we all hear about the typical weight/health/finance promises we make to ourselves—but why not use this time to make classroom promises instead? We can all use new goals, and our students will benefit from the changes with us. It's a win-win, I'd say! Here are five great ideas to implement in any level of class...

## 1. I will experiment with technology that scares me.

This is your chance to try some new things with your students. “New Tech” doesn't necessarily refer to a completely different piece of technology being used each week, but rather to a commitment to try new ways of using tech in your teaching.

Whether you're using old technology in new ways, or new technology in traditional ways, challenge yourself to do something “scary”—nothing literally terrifying, but rather an app or method of student access to content or digital communities that forces you to learn new things.

Push yourself out of your comfort zone as you continue to modernize and refine your craft for 2016.



## 2. I will consistently try new approaches to learning.

For example, No-Plan Friday.

Don't confuse “no plan” with “no planning”! You still need to plan the objectives of the lesson, but you can leave the activity unplanned. Start the lesson with a discussion about the goals and objectives you want students to be working towards that day. Then, see where the conversation leads you!

Allow students to share their creativity by working on open-ended and mostly unstructured work. This can really help to target different learning types, as each student can choose what works best for them. At the end, each student or group should share their creation with the class. This makes for interesting presentations such as skits, stories, newscast videos, or informational posters. The sky (and student imagination) should be the limit!

## 3. I will teach through moments.

Commit yourself to building stronger relationships with your students. Make a point of speaking with at least one student each day about something completely unrelated to classwork or school activities.

Keep track of who you speak with to make sure that you get around to everyone before starting over again. This resolution can certainly help you to show all your students that they are important and valued members of your classroom community. Don't forget to share some stories about yourself as well!

## 4. I will create a system that honors students.

One idea? An End-of-the-Month Ceremony.

The last school day of each month is a great time to highlight the successes of your class and students. Put aside

time to acknowledge students who have been helping their community.

Highlighting personal successes can go a long way as well! If a student deserves to be thanked for something, do so! Allow students to give thanks to others as well (the impact of “thanks for letting me play with you at recess” shouldn’t be underestimated). Allowing a bit of time to celebrate successes and give special thanks can only add glue to the bonds students forge with you and with each other.

### 5. I will think literacy backwards.

Literacy Monday is one way to try this.

In Literacy Monday, challenge students to read something new each weekend, and take up the challenge yourself! Catch up on new trends in your field by committing to read at least one new article each week. Students can choose to read pieces related to their personal interests. It’s important to let your students choose what they read (even if it means reading walk-through of video games each week), as the goal is to help them recognize the benefits of literacy in their personal lives.

Each Monday, open a discussion where students can share some information about what they read. You can even start things off by sharing what you learned in your article. I found that older students tend to be especially interested in discussing new trends in education. You may just find inspiration for a project that the class can be very excited about completing! ■

Find the full article on [teachthought.com](http://teachthought.com).

By Dennis Pierce

# Flipped Learning Is Changing the Face of Special Ed

At E.L. Haynes High School in Washington, D.C., 44 percent of students are English language learners, have special needs, or both. Yet *all* of the students in this urban charter school’s first graduating class have been accepted into college, said Principal Caroline Hill—and she attributed this success to a personalized, self-paced approach made possible by technology.

E.L. Haynes has a one-to-one laptop program, and students also can bring their own devices to school. Using a flipped learning approach, teachers record their lessons and post them online, so students can watch the content over and over again until they understand—and class time is used to provide more personalized support.

If schools are to meet the learning needs of every student, including those with disabilities, then “we have to think differently about how we provide instruction,” Hill said.

Hill was speaking at a June 17 briefing on Capitol Hill that focused on the intersection of technology and special education. During the event, which was hosted by the National Coalition for Technology in Education and Training, Hill and other educators described how technology is empowering students with disabilities to achieve at high levels.

About 2.5 million children in the U.S. have some kind of learning disability, said Kim Hines, associate director for the National Center for Learning Disabilities. For these children, “technology has been a game changer,” she said, “and for some, it’s been life-changing...We now know what kids are able to do, and not just what they are unable to do.”

## Making learning the constant

At E.L. Haynes, students are able to work at their own pace, Hill said—making learning the constant and time the variable, instead of vice versa. This eliminates the anxiety that students often feel when the teacher moves on to the next topic and they have not learned the previous content.

“For students with disabilities, this anxiety could be the difference between staying engaged in their learning and mastering content,” Hill said, “or disengaging and failing.”

Angela Foreman, a special education teacher at Jamestown Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia, said her school has seen “a huge difference” by putting iPads in the hands of students with disabilities.

Like E.L. Haynes, Jamestown has embraced a flipped approach to instruction. This helps with pre-teaching concepts, Foreman said, such as multiplying large numbers. Kids can watch the videos “as many times as they need” the night before a lesson, and Foreman and her colleagues infuse these videos with humor and catchy songs. Then, when students come to class the next day, the teachers start singing those songs—and “the light bulbs come on” for students, she said, stimulating the connective pathways in their brains.

Technology also helps teachers differentiate their lessons for students with disabilities, Foreman said. For instance, teachers can create customized content for students to download and work on independently.



Kate Nagel, a science teacher who works with high-functioning students on the autism spectrum at The Ivy Mount School in Rockville, Maryland, said her school is using the Science Techbook from Discovery Education. This interactive digital textbook includes features that make the content more accessible for students with disabilities, such as the ability to have the text read aloud to them.

“This gives students a sense of independence and ownership,” she said, because they no longer have to ask for help.

The Techbook content also includes interactive games and video clips explaining key concepts, which students find engaging, Nagel said. When students are interacting with the content in this way, “they really internalize what they’re learning.”

For instance, her students recently played a game in which they had to build cells and keep out invading viruses. “They remembered every single part of the cell,” she said. “That was not going to happen from just looking at diagrams.”

### Relevant for all students

Throughout the briefing, participants noted that these same technologies that are helping students with disabilities to succeed also help other students as well.

By talking about technology and special education, “we’re helping the future of all kids across the country, and not just those with disabilities,” said Alexa Posny, a

consultant and former assistant secretary for the Education Department’s Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services.

Posny moderated a question-and-answer session at the end of the event, in which she asked participants: What will it take for more schools to adopt these types of changes in their instruction?

Nagel said getting teachers to change their approach can be difficult because many teachers already feel overworked and resent having technology “pushed” on them as yet another mandate. She recommended that schools encourage instructional shifts by modeling best practices for their teachers.

“Use it yourself, and invite people into your classroom,” she urged teacher leaders. “Make sure other teachers are seeing that, and also seeing the results—(such as) how students are excited to learn.”

Foreman said school leaders should allow teachers to explore technology use on their own in professional development workshops, letting their creativity emerge instead of telling them what to do.

“Let us see what we can do when we’re given the time and the opportunity to do that,” she recommended. ■



**Dennis Pierce** is the former Editor in Chief of eSchool News. He is now a freelance writer covering education and technology.

# Another AAE Member Caught in the Act Doing Amazing Work in the Classroom: Meet Arthur Brood

**A**AE member Arthur Brood isn't just a supporter of teacher professionalism. He's living it!

A teacher of 25 years, Arthur's interest in teaching began when he was an adolescent working with the children's programs at his church. When he found that he was pretty good at it, he decided to take his interests to the next level by becoming a teacher. It didn't take long for his job to flourish into an abundantly successful career!

See, Arthur teaches 4th grade in Saulte Ste. Marie, Michigan, and recently he found himself presented with the 2015 Jim and Annette McConnell History Educator Award through the Michigan Council of History Education as well as the 2015 Michigan Council for the Social Studies Elementary Teacher of the Year Award.

These accolades are a direct result of his contributions in teaching Michigan's automotive history. Arthur's primary project in this field is a presentation and unit of study that entails going back in time and role playing Henry Ford using a half-scale Model T (former Shriner car). Through this Arthur is able to share the economic, geographic, and historical contributions of the assembly line, along with how this industry changed the face of America. It was because of this presentation that Arthur found and developed



a plethora of activities that foster student excitement for learning.

A second component for these awards came as a result of Arthur's two juvenile historical fiction books, *The Mud Hole* and *The Snow Car*—publications that share information on the early automobile industry in a whimsical story told through the lens of two young boys. He also participates in the Author, Specialist, Knowledge (ASK) program, an interactive question and answer session with students twice yearly. These two programs have allowed him to

enrich the lives of thousands of students over the last ten years.

Arthur has advice for his fellow teachers and discusses the importance of AAE membership...

*Be passionate about teaching. Your students will see your excitement and will get motivated about what you teach. Take a unit of study the extra mile and make it engaging for the students by creating something they will remember for the rest of their life. I became an AAE member when Michigan passed legislation allowing teachers to opt out of the "closed shop" required union membership. I chose AAE because I saw a focus on the real issues in education as it relates to equipping and supporting teachers to teach students. AAE provides an alternative to the big teacher unions that allows teachers to focus on their students and teaching. ■*



Are you doing amazing things in your classroom? Email [editor@aaeteachers.org](mailto:editor@aaeteachers.org) using the subject line "Feature My Teacher" to tell us about it!

# Congratulations AAE Scholarship & Grant Winners!

We are pleased to announce AAE's National Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant award winners for fall 2015. These teachers embody our core values with their dedication to the field and innovative initiatives. As always, we had so many excellent applications and we wish we could award them all!

The Association of American Educators Foundation is committed to offering individual educators various avenues for improving their effectiveness and student outcomes. The teacher scholarships provide teachers with funding to pursue additional teacher trainings, attend workshops,

or specialized conferences. The classroom grants are offered to educators to supplement the costs of student-focused projects or activities. Both awards are available to all educators, regardless of location, school, or membership status.

Congratulations, teachers! Thanks to all who applied but were not selected to receive a scholarship or grant in this fall competition. ■



The AAE Foundation National Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant Program is held twice a year in the fall and spring. The deadline for the spring competition is March 1, 2016!

Visit [aaeteachers.org/awards](http://aaeteachers.org/awards) to learn more!





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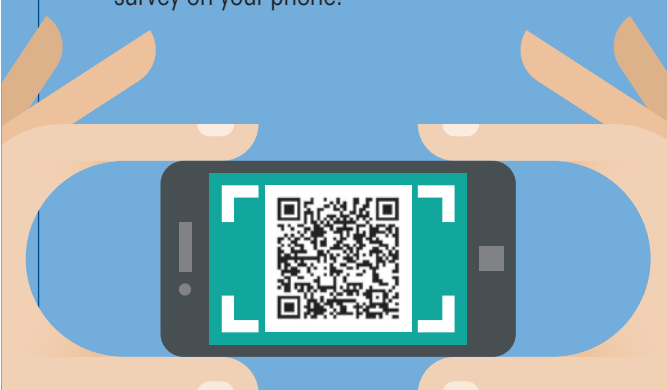
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# AAE Teacher Survey of the Month

**? What are your professional goals for 2016?**

▶ Take the survey at [tinyurl.com/aaeJan16Survey](http://tinyurl.com/aaeJan16Survey) today and be entered to win an AAE Prize Pack just for letting us know!

You can also scan the QR code to take this survey on your phone!




## Stay Tuned

*Friedrichs vs. CTA* is set to begin oral arguments at the Supreme Court on January 11th. Visit [aaeteachers.org/blog](http://aaeteachers.org/blog) for the latest updates!



## Celebrating #NSCW2016? We Got You Covered...

AAE is celebrating National School Choice Week 2016 by giving away gift boxes filled with apparel and other goodies and supplies to any teacher who is interested in bringing awareness to the school choice movement. Claim your gift box today by visiting [schoolchoiceweek.com/mymeeting-aae](http://schoolchoiceweek.com/mymeeting-aae) today!




2016  
 Happy New Year  
 from all of us at the Association of American Educators



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