

By Gretchen Davies

A Teacher Who Approves of School Choice?

School choice. The term was demonized in my teacher credentialing courses and by my own mother, who had been teaching in public schools since she was 20 years old. Everyone was doing it, so I toed the line as well but only for a short while.

My Ah-Ha Moment

My first teaching assignment was in an inner city elementary school, where 100 percent of the students were in the free and reduced-price lunch program and all but one of my students were English Language Learners. It was a very “at-risk” population I was teaching. The school was under Program Improvement for low test scores, meaning it was under a lot of scrutiny by district officials to raise test scores before the inevitable: bussing children to a different school and an eventual shutdown or takeover of the school by the state.

Feeling the pressure, I dug through my old textbooks and term papers to find the best ways to differentiate and scaffold learning, to make the curriculum and standards accessible to all students, to make educational opportunity available for each student. Fairness above all.

I remember one specific lesson, a language arts lesson during our uninterrupted three-hour daily block of language arts, regarding spelling patterns. I recalled reviewing the lesson the day before and thinking of my students, how disengaging the lesson would be, especially for an at-risk population, so I used my knowledge of pedagogy and decided to implement different learning modalities into my lesson.



The lesson itself dictated I write the words on the board and read them aloud, and then refer to the alphabet chart, sounding out each letter while students sat, stationary, absorbing it all. This lesson aligned with the presumption that my fifth graders could not read or write, and thus must be delivered via this scripted curriculum in my hands.

I looked out into my classroom of thirty-six students, eyes glazed over from boredom and hunger, and altered the lesson right then and there.

I printed out the words and affixed sticky tape to the backs, and distributed them at random to each group. I told the students to read the words together and make sense of them, and then discern if there was any pattern. After a few minutes I asked them to share their findings with the class. Even my most struggling students were engaged in the lesson for once.

Just then, a district official walked in, and by lunchtime, I had a letter in hand stating I was being placed on an improvement plan. Apparently, I didn't know how to teach.

I looked at my classroom of struggling children, the ones statistics say often drop out and continue generational poverty, and my heart ached.

All of my students could read, despite what the district said, and all had a love of learning, even if they didn't show it on a worksheet or in one of their eighteen standardized tests every year. My students were not failing school; school was failing them and I didn't want to be a part of it.

I looked back at my own schooling (public school as well) with fond memories, so opposite of the school I was working in, and thought:

Why can't my students have a better school? Why shouldn't they deserve better? Why must they be forced to attend a school that fails to educate them, just because of the neighborhood where they live? Why should they be denied private school or homeschool due to their poverty status even though both parents were working? Why couldn't I just scoop them all up and put them in my old elementary school, a school that still cared about educating children?

What It's Like Switching Sides

A few years later, I found myself teaching in a charter school, although I was hesitant at first to accept the job because I'd heard only bad things about charter schools from every educator I knew.

It was a small school, less than 100 students, but what it lacked in size it made up in so many other ways. We had a very diverse population, and most students attended the charter because they hadn't succeeded at the public high schools in the area for a plethora of reasons. Our school offered smaller class sizes, a familylike network of support, and less red tape so that we could ditch scripted curriculum and actually teach to the needs of our students.

One student in particular came to us from the largest high school in the area, with abysmal grades and a behavior record to match. She had been enrolled in every state and district program possible, all modifying or supplementing her education in hopes of giving her extra help in school. She floundered in my classroom, often off task, and then, she disappeared.

No one knew what happened until a year later when she appeared in

my classroom again, re-enrolled. A relative had died, and she dropped out of school but wanted to give it one more try.

She met every "at-risk" category, and even told me how schools automatically pigeonholed her into certain programs simply because she was a minority, living in poverty, with low test scores. She felt as if the public school was forcing her to meet lower expectations, to fail.

I told her that would not happen in this school, and that I saw her as a senior, despite her junior status. (She was a year behind and then some.) I told her she would graduate on time, despite what everyone told either of us.

I checked in on her often, helped her study for her exit exam, worked to design instruction that met the standards yet piqued her interest and taught in ways she could best comprehend.

She graduated on time and went on to college. She thanked me personally for believing in her. She said, had she stayed in the neighborhood public school, she'd have dropped out and stayed out for sure. With some school choice allowed in our state, she was able to attend a charter school that allowed her to excel.

The Future I See for Public Education

I do not have anything against public school, although it may seem so. I am against banning school choice.

I came to this realization when looking at my newborn and thinking, do I want for him to attend the local public school? If not, are there other options? With few options at my disposal, I felt

stuck. If I could not afford the only local private school, or did not like their school, I would have to enroll my son in what I considered a failing school, and this felt unjust.

Sadly, I am seen by others in my field as the minority for my support of school choice.

Many teachers feel that school choice is a ploy to destroy public education to prevent those without excess income from getting an education or that it is against the separation of church and state (when speaking of vouchers) or that public school teachers will be left without a job. In districts where school choice is allowed, I have not seen these fears become reality.

I hope there are more teachers who share my opinion but perhaps are just kept quiet for fear of retribution. Unfortunately, I haven't met any, and that is probably because I, too, have kept quiet so that I am not chastised by my mentors and peers. However, I have grown tired of being quiet. I care about and rally for the best educational options for children, which is why I chose to work in education.

As my oldest child approaches kindergarten, I dread the day he has to attend our assigned neighborhood school; it is not a good fit for him. I, the parent, know my son best, and I know that school choice will allow him to attend the school in which he can best learn, grow, and thrive—a school not chosen by an arbitrary boundary map but by the expertise of a stakeholder—in this case myself, his mother.

If we as a nation were to ban school choice, it would be a social injustice.

Students do not deserve to attend a school that—even if it is not “failing” all kids—doesn't work for them. All children deserve a choice to seek the best educational fit for their needs. ■

Originally published on edchoice.com.



Gretchen Davies has worked as an educator for fifteen years, teaching preschool through adult education in the public, private, homeschool, and charter settings. While completing her master's degree in Educational Administration at University of Redlands,

Davies studied the history of American education. She says that very research is what inspired her to become an educational change agent and rally for the best learning options for all children.

By Alana Welch

DeVos Named Secretary of Education

President Elect Donald Trump had a big announcement to deliver about his education agenda in November. Four days after meeting with the President Elect, Betsy DeVos, 58, has been named the intended appointee to serve as the next U.S. Secretary of Education. Who is Betsy DeVos you might ask? A high-profile advocate for school choice, Ms. DeVos is chair of the American Federation for Children, a Washington, D.C.-based organization devoted to expanding school of choice options across the country. She also sits on the board of the Foundation for Excellence in Education.

“Betsy DeVos is a brilliant and passionate education advocate,” Trump said in a statement. “Under her leadership we will reform the US education system and break the bureaucracy that is holding back our children so that we can deliver world-class education and school choice to all families.”



Photo by Keith A. Almli
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

Teacher union officials immediately criticized the pick over her support for school choice and options for students, teachers, and communities. Others were quick to point out her association with organizations that have promoted the Common Core National Standards, an initiative that she's recently promised she's against.

Reform advocates weighed in and praised the DeVos nomination vowing to work with the new administration.

“I cannot think of a more effective and passionate change agent to press for a new education vision, one in which students, rather than adults and bureaucracies, become the priority in our nation's classrooms,” said former presidential hopeful and Florida Governor Jeb Bush.

Here at AAE, we look forward to working with future-Secretary DeVos and the Trump administration on empowering teachers as professionals. We look forward to sharing member opinions with these new leaders in 2017. ■

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Visit aaeteachers.org/blog to stay up to date on the latest news in education.

New Year's Resolutions for Teachers

A resolution can be defined as “a goal directed at a specific area in which there is a perceived deficiency or weakness.” January 1st of each year represents a time that many people create their own resolutions as we roll into the new calendar year. While many resolutions are broken before the end of January, this time of year provides a chance for self-reflection and an opportunity to address glaring issues.

As teachers, we should always strive to improve. Self-assessing is a necessary part of being a teacher. Teaching is a broad field; thus many possible resolutions for teachers can drive improvement. Every teacher is unique in that we all have our own individual strengths and weaknesses. A resolution that resonates with one teacher may not necessarily ring true with another.

The following are 23 common New Year's resolutions for teachers. While each of them may not currently resonate with you, I hope they provoke a time of thought and reflection as we move into next year.

Happy New Year!

23. As a teacher, I must improve my turnaround time for grading papers. I will strive to have papers graded and recorded within three days from the time that they are due.

22. As a teacher, I must communicate more with parents. I will strive to make at least five parent contacts each week and ensure that at least two of them are positive in nature.



21. As a teacher, I must spend more time preparing each week. I will arrive at school thirty minutes earlier and stay thirty minutes later each day.

20. As a teacher, I must reorganize my room. I will commit several days to this project, restructuring all furniture, updating bulletin boards, organizing files and papers, etc.

19. As a teacher, I must make a better effort to be a leader. I will find ways to improve my school, and will be a part of the solution rather than the problem.

18. As a teacher, I must build stronger relationships with my fellow teachers. I will spend time each day getting to know them better, asking for advice, and building rapport.

17. As a teacher, I must continuously try to improve. I will commit to creating engaging lessons, attend dynamic professional development opportunities, and study the latest research in education.

16. As a teacher, I must take the time to examine the deeper root of a student issue. I will gather background information on each of my students so that I can identify a solution to help them be better students.

15. As a teacher, I must be a better listener. I will not jump to conclusions. I will listen to my students and their parents before making a decision. I will use their feedback as a guide for change when it is justified.

14. As a teacher, I must become more adept at classroom management. I will handle the majority of issues myself and will refrain

from sending students to the office unless I can document other avenues I have taken, or there is a serious issue such as a fight, drugs, alcohol, etc.

13. As a teacher, I must do a better job at documenting. I will document all parent contacts and situations with students that I deem to be important. This will help protect me and could also help me identify patterns of behavior.

12. As a teacher, I must reach out to the community outside the school. I will invite community members to read to my class, to eat lunch with our class, and will send them periodic updates concerning my classroom.

11. As a teacher, I must recognize the value that all support personnel bring to our school. I will make sure they know that I appreciate them. I will get to know each of them personally. I will tell them thank you as often as I can.

10. As a teacher, I must figure out a way to reach little Johnny. I will think outside the box to motivate him. I will spend one-on-one time with him whenever I have the opportunity. I will help him realize his potential no matter what it takes.

9. As a teacher, I must build a Personal Learning Network. I will use social media outlets such as Twitter to connect with other teachers around the country because I realize that it is a valuable tool for personal growth and development, and can also be a support system.

8. As a teacher, I must build a healthy relationship with my principals. I will seek them out for advice, offer to serve on committees or help them out in any way I can, and most importantly, I will do my job.

7. As a teacher, I must ensure that I give my students the opportunity to be successful in life. I will teach them everything I am required to teach and then some. I will teach them valuable life skills when they are appropriate. I will discuss good decision making and will be a model of moral and ethical living.

6. As a teacher, I must not be afraid to incorporate technology into my lessons. I will implement technology into my lessons daily. I will seek out the latest technology to see if it is applicable to my classroom.

5. As a teacher, I must not be overwhelmed and stressed. I will make time for myself and my family. I will not let my students get to me. I will take control of the situation without being miserable.

4. As a teacher, I must find again my passion for teaching. I will remember that I love the opportunity to mold and shape our young people. I will remember that I love the content I teach. I will remember that I chose to be a teacher because I can make a difference.

3. As a teacher, I must embrace constructive criticism. I will listen to what my principal or my mentor teacher tells me. I will use their advice to make changes. I will not be offended because I realize that they are trying to make me a better teacher.

2. As a teacher, I must demonstrate the ability to handle adversity. I will be sensitive to life-altering events that my students or fellow teachers may be going through. I will go the extra mile to show them that I care. I will remain calm, consistent, and a rock in tough times.

1. As a teacher, I must not get complacent. I will find ways to improve. I will become better each day. I will learn from my mistakes. ■

Originally published on about.com.



Derrick Meador is a school administrator who values the importance of the Internet on the teaching profession as the ultimate gateway to improve professionally, as an instructional planning tool, and as a tool to enhance learning in the classroom.

Now's a Great Time to Check Out the PD Calendar!

Did you know that AAE Members can view our professional development calendar online? Don't miss out on the next webinar or upcoming conference! Visit aaeteachers.org/PDcalendar to learn more!

See something missing?

If you think you have an opportunity that belongs on this calendar, email Melissa Pratt at Melissa@aaeteachers.org to ensure your fellow members can participate!



Follow These 7 Tips for an Extra 7 Hours this Week

About five years ago, my son was on the wrestling team at the school where I teach. Practice ran until 6:30 every night. Since we lived a half-hour away, I thought I could get a lot done and catch up on my to-do list while he was at wrestling practice. I was surprised to discover even though I was spending an extra four hours a day working, I still didn't get everything done. It's not about time spent but spending the time you do have wisely, and spending it on the right things!

Here are some tips to help you save seven hours each week.

Limit media time.

Many people spend hours upon hours mindlessly researching things on the web or scrolling through their Facebook feed. I'm not saying eliminate those things, just be more deliberate in how and when you do them. Set a time limit on web research. Have a specific goal in mind. Want to watch TV? DVR the show. You'll save 20 minutes in a one-hour show. Set a certain time to look at Facebook rather than letting the ding of the notification control you.

Touch email messages once.

I once had a coworker who had over 1,200 email messages in her inbox. They were there to remind her of things she needed to get done. Guess what? She never got any of them done and spent much time scrolling through the emails to find the information she needed.

I read an email one time and strive to keep my inbox empty. I have created many folders in my email program. Some examples are Save, Admin, Reservations, Kudos, and Bookings. When I read an email, if it's something I can do or answer quickly, I do it and delete it. If it's some important information I need to keep, I file it in the appropriate folder. If it's meant for someone else (something I have to delegate), I immediately send it to the person who can do it, or I respond that I am not the one who handles that. I also have set times to check email. Many people have notifications turned on and are checking email fifty plus times per day. Some people *need* to be this accessible but most of us just need to check it two to three times a day.

Follow the two-minute rule.

If you can complete a task in two minutes, do it! I can't tell you the number of times I have been in charge of a music event and needed information from other directors. All I need to know is how many students someone is bringing because I am responsible for ordering pizza. No response! It takes three seconds to respond! Do it and get it over with.

Don't even add the item to your to-do list if it takes less than two minutes. At school, the lady in charge of IEPs often needs a feedback form from a student's teacher(s) reporting on how they are doing. When I see the form in my inbox, I fill it out right away and return it.

Control your meetings if possible.

Do you need to disseminate some information at a meeting but are otherwise not involved? Ask to be at the beginning of the meeting so you don't have to wait through it all. I taught at a school where I was responsible for renting the sound system for graduation. I sat through two years of meetings where when it came to be my turn, the headmaster asked, "Do you have the sound system rented and details taken care of?" I quickly learned that was the only reason I was at the meeting. Once I realized that, I began to contact the headmaster a few days before to let him know I had taken care of the details, including the time and expense. I would then ask, "Do you need me to be at the meeting?" He always answered, "No."

Schedule time to get work done.

I found myself being continually interrupted during my planning time by students who needed help or who were just hanging out because they had a free period. I love my students but I have a lot to get done if I want to be an effective teacher. I started being more deliberate about that time. That time is for lesson prep. I now kindly ask the students to leave (even having them around being quiet is a distraction to me, and they often ask just a "quick" question, which gets me off task). I get a lot more done this way.

Consider your mission.

What are your strengths and weaknesses? Focus on your strengths! Know when to say no (I call that my **Know No** rule). If you are a helping person, you naturally want to help everyone, but you shouldn't if something isn't your mission. For me to help the football coach would be a "good" thing, but I would be missing out on the "great."

Look at the big picture.

Often our schedule revolves around, "Well, I don't have anything else going on, so sure I'll do such and such." This attitude is not deliberate enough. What if we take a look at our calendar for a year and "fill in" things that are important to us before other things crowd the important things out? For example, I've already filled in my anniversary weekend, so if someone calls me with a speaking or performing opportunity, I will answer that I already have something scheduled.

I do have some flexibility. If the person calling me were to offer a great honorarium, I would present the opportunity to my wife and say, "How about if I take this and

we celebrate the following weekend, but instead of a weekend in Denver, we get to take a cruise?"

Plan each week, month, and year of your life so trivial things don't fill your schedule. Make sure to include off time too. If you are teaching a two-week class, block off four days or even a week afterwards so you can relax, hike, visit the grandkids, whatever you like to do.

If each of these tips saved you one hour a week, you would have seven extra hours a week to exercise, cook, hike, read, practice, sew, take karate, or whatever you like to do, maybe even sleep! ■

Originally published on jamesdivine.net.



An AAE member in Colorado, **James Divine** is a music educator, musician, speaker, and podcaster. He enjoys hiking, biking, and spending time with his family.



Member Spotlight: Understanding the Realities of the Student Experience



Varsity sports have always been a fantastic place for high school athletes to put their talents on display. Drama clubs work year-round, allowing students to show off their acting talents to the public several times per year. Organizations like the Student Council and National Honor Society enable those with leadership skills to practice and organize events on campus. My school even has a literary annual for students who excel at creative writing.

But what about the great thinkers? You know, the kids who are always able to take class discussion to another level and see the major ideas behind a piece of literature or a current event? What extra outlet do they have?

Two years ago, I was inspired by a certain English 10 class, the type of group teachers get lucky with maybe once every five or six years. Just about every day we had a fantastic, in-depth class dialogue about something, and probably because it was my last class of the day, I usually went home on a high about what was going on in my classroom.

Many of these kids, though, did not excel in the other areas that offer public performances. They weren't athletes, and they weren't actors.

I desperately wanted to share my experiences in the same way that a coach feels when leading his or her team onto the field. These thoughts, combined with my ever-growing frustration about the common perception of the state of education

today, made me wonder: How could I get people to know that within these walls are some extremely concerned, passionate, insightful students?

I thought about a book.

So, in spring 2015, I recruited some of these deep-thinking students to work with me on a project that would span the 2015-16 school year. Each month, they would compose 300-500 words on something going on in their lives that would be reflective of the high school experience. Sometimes, these essays would be about specific school happenings, sometimes not.

Every student I talked to about the project said yes. My aim was to create as diverse a group as possible, considering race, gender, age, interests, and social status.

Initially, the group was twenty kids; I started with a big number anticipating that not everyone would flourish, and fourteen made it to the finish line. Some started the project but struggled to find their voice, while others never even got to the first sentence.

Our group met after school around the 25th of each month to bounce ideas off each other. My aim was to get the kids to write their essays at the end of each month, but sometimes they just put a string of ideas together and polished it off later.

During the school year, I never edited the content; instead, I would review each entry as it came in, only offering my thoughts, suggestions for improvement, and

places that needed more details or examples. Since each student worked on his or her own Google Doc file, I allowed them to revisit, revise, and edit throughout the year.

Sometimes, two or more kids wrote about the same topic, but that was OK. Each student brought a different perspective and unique angle when discussing topics such as friendships, teachers, pressure, college, and more.

Obviously, it wasn't easy. Even though none of these students are slackers, keeping their motivation up the entire year was difficult. They all had busy lives and discovered that writing a book contained no instant gratification. Some days, the finish line was far, far away.

However, by mid-July, we had made it. I met individually with each student during the summer to review their file. In some cases, we deleted entire months that weren't good enough, but each student ended up with seven or eight essays that worked.

The feedback has been tremendous, and the students are mighty proud of their work, titled *High School Life*. They are authors. At the very least, they have quite a keepsake of their high school years. ■



AAE Member **Rob Guyette** is an English teacher in Wisconsin. His 162-page book contains essays from 14 students, half boys and half girls. Contact Rob at rguyette@depere.k12.wi.us

for more information on his book project.

Success in the Classroom



Cheers to all my fellow colleagues who are giving their very best each and every day! Our students deserve the quality instruction our districts provide, and although it seems education is always under the microscope for improvement, I know way more teachers in these United States who are incredible in how they educate than not. I have picked up these tested and true methods along my educational journey that work in most any classroom.

1. Make a connection with each and every student.

They all matter. They all have a story. They all will listen and learn together if you care about them and show them to care about themselves and one another.

2. Let the students drive the classroom.

Try not to call it YOUR classroom; it should be theirs—or at least OURS. You should feel lucky to be a part of their journey. Let your students set the rules, steer the curriculum within the standards, create the laboratories/activities/

assignments, and create, or be an integral part of, the assessments.

3. Be their educational guide.

Try not to be an answer book; let them create the learning opportunities or concepts—even if it's completely off-target. If mistakes are made, just be there to guide them away from misconceptions and toward hitting the standards. Usually those mistakes are what we call “learning.” The answer is never as important as the journey!

4. Have fun!

When I was finishing pre-teaching many years ago, almost every veteran teacher or professor told me not to be friends with my students and that it was not my job to make class fun for the students. **THEY WERE ALL WRONG!** Have as much fun as you can every day! If the bell rings and the students want to stay and continue learning, I kind of think you are doing it right!

5. Be THE professional in your field of study.

Sure you have hundreds of clock hours in educational credits, but do you have accomplishments in your particular field? Be the next guest presenter in their classroom! English teachers: write novels and get published! Music teachers: write music and get in the recording studio! History teachers: research in the field across the planet and document your findings along the way! Physical education teachers: try out for local/minor league/professional sporting groups! Art teachers: create your own art shows! Science teachers: conduct your own research and get published!

Share your professionalism with your students so they see you as a writer, musician, athlete, historian, or scientist. Better yet, do all these things **WITH** your students and be professionals together! Once your students are active in their classroom, they stop calling it a classroom as it becomes a makerspace where they work on publishing their next short stories, their next musical scores, their next historical research documents, or their next scientific or engineering research projects.

If you would like to know more about transforming your classroom into a thriving student-driven, research-based laboratory, contact Jeff via email anytime at [WehrdScience@yahoo.com!](mailto:WehrdScience@yahoo.com) ■



An AAE-NWPE member, **Jeffrey Wehr** has been a scientist and educator for nineteen years. He has spent the last twelve years at Odessa High School, where he currently teaches

Honors Integrated Science, Honors Biology, Honors Chemistry, Honors Physics, Computer Programming, and Honors Advanced STEM Research Laboratory. (PAEMST 2016)

How These Five Schools Sustain Innovation Through Technology

What technology initiatives are other schools and districts proud of? Schools and districts are launching new technology initiatives and programs designed to improve teaching and learning.

Educators love to share their successes, learn from the success of other schools and districts, and they also love to share lessons they learned along their journey.

eSchool Media and Xirrus have teamed up on the Innovate to Educate Awards to give a national platform for educators to share what they're most proud of in their schools or districts. Here are the successes of five awards program applicants.

1 West Iredell Middle School Rachel Oakley-Gregg, MathCast


Mathcast is an innovative initiative that I have been working on for a couple of years. The concept is that students work collaboratively to digitally record their understanding of mathematical concepts via voice-recording, on-screen writing, video recording. Mathcast has allowed my students to show me digitally their understanding of concepts. They are able to share their methods for understanding with other students to help

them better understand and grasp concepts. Since the projects are digital, the students are easily able to access them to review concepts as they move to future classes and need a quick review.

2 Mountain Heights Academy Sarah Weston, Director of Technology and OER

ONLINE DIGITAL OPEN COURSEWARE—Mountain Heights Academy is an online, public charter school in Utah. Mountain Heights is the first secondary school to develop its own online curriculum as open source content and share it with the world. Mountain Heights remains one of the most innovative and cutting-edge digital academies today, providing equal access to high-quality digital resources all over Utah and beyond. We have released these digital resources under a Creative Commons Attribution licence. This means that any teacher or student can reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute the materials. This gives teachers the freedom to do what teachers do best—tinker, adjust, and adapt their teaching materials to meet the needs of their students. Course development began in 2009 with nine courses being produced. Since then, an additional seventy-three courses have been created and publicly released, bringing the total to eighty-two.


“They are able to share their methods for understanding with other students to help them better understand and grasp concepts.”

 **Our Lady of Perpetual Help School**
Carl Jankowski, Principal

As part of our Middle School Integrated Language Arts program, ‘Genius Hour’ was a project-based learning activity that engaged students to research topics or concepts about which they were passionate. Students presented their Genius Hour projects to their peers proving that true understanding of a concept stems from the students, ability to teach that concept. Chromebooks were used in the research and development of the Genius Hour projects.

 **The Richland School of Academic Arts**
Dan Jones, Teacher

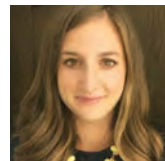
I have created a distance learning program at my school that now stretches around the globe. I began this program because I knew that my students were not able to travel to many of the locations that we studied in social studies, so I wanted to bring those locations to them. As we studied the Declaration of Independence, I contacted the National Archives in Washington, D.C. to see if they would be able to talk about the Declaration of Independence with my students. They were thrilled to have been asked, and we were the first school that they had ever Skyped with. The Skype session was AMAZING, and my students asked when we could do another Skype session. I began to think about people to contact for the other content that I knew we would be covering. My eighth graders would become the first class in the United States to Skype with The U.S. Capitol, The White House Historical Association, Mount Vernon, The Benjamin Franklin House (in London, England), Clemson University (Research Institute for the recovery and restoration of The Hunley), as well as Teresa Kemp, an expert on slave code quilts, who has been recognized by the White House for her efforts. My seventh graders have had the opportunity to Skype with The National Science and Technology Museum for Leonardo da Vinci in Italy.

 **Odyssey Day School**
Stephanie A. Wilkins,
Head Elementary Teacher

We held our first ever STEAM Night in January 2016. It was a labor of love that involved administrators, teachers, students, families, and community volunteers. The evening involved a variety of activities/presentations that represented each of the areas of STEAM. The event brought our school community an increased awareness of and appreciation for integrated learning across the curriculum. It also highlighted the technology that is taught in the classrooms. From squishy circuits and conductive playdough to brainteaser math problems, and engineering challenges, the participants and their families collaborated, and created together! This will continue as an annual event and brought student interest to our school from the local community.

Want to apply for the awards? You can do that at eschoolnews.com/innovate-to-educate/ ■

Read the full article on eschoolnews.com.



Laura Devaney is Director of News for eSchool Media. Mom of two, runner, popcorn lover, Boxer owner, and home improvement enthusiast.



Are you or someone you know interested in joining the AAE family? Visit aaeteachers.org/membership to find out why more and more educators are making the nonunion choice with AAE membership.



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M. Alana Welch, Coordinating Editor



Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! We hope you had a relaxing holiday season. Here at AAE, we are honored to serve thousands of educators with valuable benefits and services at a reasonable price. This New Year, we've decided to augment the size and schedule of our flagship publication, *Education Matters*, to account for busy lifestyles, changing technologies, and the increasing cost of postage. We're happy to announce that the Association of American Educators Board of Directors has decided to release six, content-rich, twelve-page issues of *Education Matters* in 2017.

We are confident you will agree that this practical change in our newsletter will allow members extra time to peruse a new depth of interesting articles throughout the year. We have big plans to include new profiles of our members in action, reports on the latest policies and issues affecting the profession as well as all of the thoughtful commentary, research, and AAE news you've come to expect from *Education Matters*. This shift will allow us to dive deeper with each passing issue while simultaneously including submissions from our talented member teachers.

If you have any questions, submissions, or suggestions, please contact us at editor@aaeteachers.org. We look forward to your feedback and we thank you for choosing AAE!

We wish you the best in 2017!

Warm regards,

Gary Beckner
Founder, Chairman, & President

