

EDUCATION MATTERS

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation



12 Important Education Story Lines We'll All Be Reading About in 2018

1. TEACHERS UNIONS BRACE FOR JANUS

The Supreme Court on Feb. 26 will hear *Janus v. AFSCME*, the third case in recent years that asks the justices to consider whether forcing public employees, like teachers, to pay union dues violates their First Amendment rights. Unions say that fees some workers pay (dues minus funds for political activity) prevents “freeriding” employees from benefiting from union-negotiated contracts without paying their fair share and makes it easier for governments to negotiate with one representative of all employees. Those opposed to so-called agency fees say that even standard bargaining issues, such as salary and layoff policy, are inherently political and that forcing employees to support unions is unfair.

A decision will come by late June, and it seems likely the justices will side with those opposed to manda-

tory dues, given that four justices decided that way in the 2016 *Friedrichs* case, and opponents of dues are “cautiously optimistic” about newly added Justice Neil Gorsuch’s stance. The impact on teachers unions—key forces in Democratic politics—could be far-reaching, and some unions are already bracing for a loss in membership and dues. —Carolyn Phenicie

2. REFORMING PUERTO RICO’S SCHOOLS

Although the majority of Puerto Rico’s schools are running after Hurricane Maria devastated the island last fall, work to repair the island’s tattered education system has just begun. In 2018, Puerto Rico Education Secretary Julia Keleher will continue an ambitious campaign to reform schools that have struggled for years.



Even before hurricanes closed all 1,113 schools, Keleher had begun to restructure the island’s singular education department, which she said was strained by bureaucratic inefficiencies. However, the hurricane offered a clean slate reminiscent of education reform efforts in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Although recovery efforts will likely span years, Keleher has focused on dividing the department into seven regions where officials can make decisions locally. Also at the top of the list is a plan to implement project-based learning at schools across the island. —Mark Keierleber

3. AMERICA’S ‘ABSURD’ HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE

In 2018, we’ll no doubt see school districts, states, and perhaps even the U.S. Department of Education tout the latest uptick in high school graduation numbers. Yet we seem to have reached a tipping point when



it comes to such statistics. With a surge of reports of grade inflation and rigged diplomas on the one hand, and an increase in expensive college remediation on the other, skeptics are looking beyond the numbers to ask: What's the real value of a high school diploma?

In December, the Fordham Institute issued a report asking that very question the same day the Education Department released data showing the national high school graduation rate had reached a record high of 84.1 percent in 2016. Fordham called the situation "absurd and untenable," its analysis bookended by two seemingly serendipitous events in the weeks surrounding it: a scandal at a Washington, D.C. high school in which half of its graduates missed three months or more of class, and an investigative report out of Chicago that revealed an alarming difference between the number of students graduating and those passing yearly tests. —**Andrew Brownstein**

4. CONGRESS'S LOOMING HIGHER EDUCATION DEBATE

Two years after crafting the Every Student Succeeds Act—the bipartisan K-12 lovefest law now turned perpetual point of contention—lawmakers are moving to a rewrite of the Higher Education Act. The reauthorization will touch on contentious issues such as student loans and grants, regulations of for-profit colleges, and sexual assault on campus. A GOP-authored bill passed out of the House Education and the Workforce Committee in December and is expected on the House floor in early 2018.

The real action, though, is in the Senate, where bipartisan dealmaker dream team Lamar Alexander and Patty Murray will craft what ends

up being much closer to the final bill. House Republicans, after all, can pass anything without Democrat support, but this bill will require the backing of at least nine Democrats to get through the Senate. Alexander and Republicans will want to roll back federal rules, but Murray has expressed reservations about giving too much latitude to the Trump Education Department, given her displeasure in how it has handled ESSA implementation. —**Carolyn Phenicie**



5. AMERICA'S MOST AMBITIOUS PERSONALIZED LEARNING EXPERIMENT

Rhode Island may be the smallest state, but it has become a national leader for its statewide \$2 million personalized learning initiative. Summer 2018 marks the end of the first year of Rhode Island's Lighthouse Schools, three schools awarded grants in an effort to cultivate best personalized learning practices to share with other schools around the state. Some educators have already started visiting these learning labs to see what practices they can bring to their own classrooms, but a more formal process for reflecting on and sharing their work will be developed this summer.

The state is also working on studies due this summer to measure the efficacy of its personalized learning implementations, as well as to see how mentors can prepare teachers for personalized learning environments. Additionally, Rhode Island has teamed up with districts to collect open educational resources

to be shared across the state in fall 2018. Interest in personalized learning grew significantly in 2017, as large funders such as the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation contributed millions to supporting these programs and the research behind them. In a recent letter, Mark Zuckerberg emphasized the need to focus on technology that can give students the personalization of an individual tutor, equipped with technology that can let students work at their own pace. —**Kate Stringer**

6. NEW ORLEANS'S NEXT CHAPTER

As Louisiana's Recovery School District completes the process of returning New Orleans schools to a locally elected school board in 2018, the nation's most dramatic modern school reform effort will enter a new chapter. Following a decade of radical change and policy innovation, the performance of the city's mostly public charter schools went from the systemwide equivalent of an "F" to a "C." However, ten years after Hurricane Katrina, school performance flattened and then, in 2017, actually dropped.

Has the urgency that propelled the brave experiment waned? Or will the Orleans Parish School Board forge a strategy that will help the schools push past the plateau? It's a story line *The 74* will follow closely in the new year. —**Beth Hawkins**

7. SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS ABOUT NYC'S TURNAROUND PROGRAM

Despite continuing coverage over the past years, a great deal remains unknown about Renewal schools and how the students in them are learning. How is the city's hundreds of millions of dollars actually spent? What does the Renewal program's administrative structure—as large as many districts—

look like: Who makes decisions, what is City Hall's role in the division of labor, why do many principals hate how the schools are managed? Have Community Schools and their wrap-around services for needy students and families helped, hurt, or both? How are they funded? Is Mayor Bill de Blasio's new designation for the twenty-one Renewal schools that are doing better—now called Rise schools—meaningful, rigorous, or arbitrary? How much improvement is reasonable to expect from a long-failing school? What are the success stories?

The early actions and language of de Blasio's next schools' chancellor may tell us a lot about the extent to which the administration will double down on Renewal or take a much lighter hand, although it's not clear what its exit strategy would be. Getting answers to the myriad of questions surrounding Renewal in 2018—as well as understanding what the program means to the ongoing struggle of school turnaround in other places—requires more data and more accounts from those working in the schools and those who recently left them. The goal is to really learn both what makes Renewal tick and how that does or doesn't lead to improvement—and what can.

—David Cantor

8. THE NEW NATIONAL STANDARD FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Supreme Court last year unanimously rejected the idea that schools are complying with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act if students with special education needs receive a “barely more than minimal” educational benefit. “When all is said and done, a student offered an educational program providing ‘merely more than de minimis’ progress from year to year can hardly be said to have been offered an education at all,” Chief Justice John Roberts wrote for the court in *Endrew F. v. Douglas*

County School District. Instead, the justices decided, schools should make sure students' Individualized Education Programs are “reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress in appropriate light of the child's circumstances.” The Education Department released a Q&A document to help districts better meet the new standard.

Funding will also be a key conversation this year, as districts will have to absorb the costs of those new and often costly educational benefits. Congress is supposed to provide 40 percent of special education expenditures but hasn't come close to meeting that; in the current year, it's about 15 percent, according to a policy letter from several education advocacy groups. Bipartisan groups of lawmakers have introduced bills for the past several years to boost the federal share of IDEA funding. They've gone nowhere on Capitol Hill, but new education costs post-Endrew could change the calculus.

—Carolyn Phenicie

9. A NEW ERA FOR SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

As the Trump administration puts all Obama-era policies under a microscope for potential revocation, advocates on both sides of the school discipline debate are bracing for big changes in 2018. Already, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has scrapped

similar guidance that had aimed to protect transgender students and survivors of sexual assault. Now, her department is looking at 2014 guidance that had called on schools to rethink punitive school discipline, including suspensions and expulsions, and warned districts that racial disparities in suspensions could violate federal civil rights laws.

While proponents contend the Obama-era guidance protects the civil rights of students who are pushed into the “school-to-prison” pipeline by an overreliance on punitive discipline, critics argue the efforts have prompted chaos in classrooms and actually hurt minority students by disrupting their learning environment. Near the end of 2016, top department officials held meetings with educators and advocates from both sides, although federal officials haven't yet offered public comment on how they plan to proceed.

—Mark Keierleber

10. GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Research shows that social-emotional learning leads to positive outcomes, from grades to graduation rates, which is why education leaders from the classroom to the federal government are trying to make sure that schools are teaching more than academics to their students.

	Percentage Advantage per SEL Student	Monetary Benefit per Student
More/better/higher...		
High school graduation rates	6	\$367,687
College attendance	11	\$637,621
College degree	11	\$1,138,054
Less/fewer/lower...		
High school dropouts	7.5–26	
STD diagnosis	39	\$9,940
Arrests	19	\$175,702
Any clinical mental health disorder	13.5	
Diagnosis of conduct disorder	10	\$3,950,000

Originally from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

In 2018, leaders in social-emotional learning will continue building upon the research supporting the field, especially when it comes to figuring out how to assess how well schools teach skills such as empathy, resilience, kindness, and cooperation. It's an area that's proven challenging, and especially at the federal level, states shied away from linking assessment of SEL to accountability. In the spring, watch for reports from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, which will share findings designed to give schools practical tools for measuring SEL competencies. Making sure SEL programs are culturally appropriate and emphasize equity will also be 2018 focus areas. Additionally, leaders will look for ways to support teachers' social-emotional competencies through professional development and teacher training, an area where SEL has so far come up short in research, policy, and practice. —**Kate Stringer**

11. ESCALATING POLITICS SURROUNDING SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

School segregation and integration will continue to occupy a spot near the top of education reporters' agendas as the 50th anniversary of the landmark Fair Housing Act of 1968—sometimes referred to as the Civil Rights Act of 1968—approaches.

After Nikole Hannah-Jones's marquee reporting for *This American Life* and *The New York Times Magazine*, 2016 and 2017 saw a flurry of coverage—much of it lacking in context. Expect that to change in 2018, as a press corps that now knows more about the topic begins asking more nuanced questions as legislative and legal pushes to desegregate the nation's schools move forward. *The 74* will track the lawsuits, model legislation, and other renewed integration efforts—some of them backed by powerful

groups that oppose school choice—and we'll also be watching to see whether those pushes in fact take aim at schools where black, brown, and Native American students are flourishing. —**Beth Hawkins**

12. ILLINOIS' SPIRALING PENSION CRISIS

Most states have struggled over the past decade to respond to the shock and awe of paying for their workers' pension plans. For the most part, the extent of the problem hasn't taken hold of the public imagination despite innumerable warnings from bankers, financial publications, state politicians, and think tanks, along with a steady heightening of the stakes each year. Given the very large spike in baby boomer retirements expected in coming years, the consequences could be enormous and affect nearly every area of domestic policy.

The issue has gained some traction in a few states' electoral races. In California, which faces nearly half a trillion dollars in unfunded liabilities, pension payments have figured in the gubernatorial campaign. The crisis is clearly being felt in Illinois, where pension payments have risen from 5 percent of the state budget in 2011 to 25 percent this year. Every household in the state owes \$27,000 in pension debt, according to the Illinois Policy Institute, and the state's total \$130 billion pension liability has begun to significantly erode funding for social services and education. The problem is so acute in Chicago that it came near to sparking a strike and forcing schools to close.

These issues will play out against the context of a bitter governor's race, as well as the shifting relationship between Chicago and the state capital, Springfield, and between factions within the capital. Added to the mix: ruinous school funding

shortfalls, a new Chicago superintendent, the uncompromising Chicago Teachers Union, and the final year of Gov. Rahm Emanuel's term. —**David Cantor**

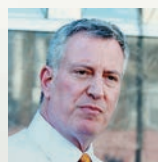
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This post was originally published at The 74Million on January 2, 2018, and features the opinions of their writers and staff.



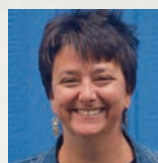
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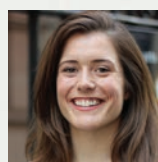
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Three Ways Charters Reform and Improve Our Schools

City Academy High School in St. Paul, Minnesota, will celebrate a milestone in September: twenty-five years as the nation's first charter school. During that quarter century, charter school growth has been remarkable. Today, forty-four states and Washington, D.C. contain some seven thousand of these independently operated public schools, serving nearly 3 million students. Remarkably, charters account for the entire growth in U.S. K-12 public school enrollments since 2006.

Confusion abounds among educators and the broader public about the purpose of charter schools and how these independent public schools relate to school district improvement efforts. A mainline view sees them “as the research and development arm” of K-12 public education, crediting Albert Shanker, former leader of the American Federation of Teachers, with most fully envisioning this perspective. Yes, Shanker endorsed this approach, but that hardly exhausts what he—and others—thought about chartering more than twenty-five years ago when chartering was hatched.

Our analysis argues there are three ways chartering is, in the 1996 words of Ted Kolderie, perhaps its foremost theorist, “about system reform...a way for the state to cause the district system to improve.” In short, charters are research and development laboratories for districts; competitors to districts; and replacements for districts.

Charters as research and development labs.

Chartering can advance district improvement efforts through R&D; i.e., be a laboratory for testing different approaches and ideas that are replicated in district schools. This could involve approaches to assessment and curriculum or organizational innovations such as giving more site-based freedom over budgets and personnel to other district schools, based on successful charter experiments. Shanker described this idea in a 1988 address to the National Press Club, followed by a *New York Times* column entitled “A Charter for Change.”

A prime example of a district employing chartering as R&D is Denver Public Schools, shaping its system into a “portfolio district.” It preserves the elected school board but outsources some school operations, including fifty-four largely independent charters and thirty-six less autonomous “innovation schools.”

The seven-member board can hire and fire the superintendent—but also authorizes charters. Denver is a story of innovative superintendents and boards incorporating charters into a comprehensive system, learning from them, and giving families more quality choices.

Yet Denver has only just begun. Ninety-five schools still operate in the traditional way, and some charters barely participate in the “portfolio.” We are reminded that chartering, undertaken by a tradi-

tional district, must still navigate the clash between ingrained district culture and the dynamics associated with innovation.

It's not yet clear how those two approaches to public education are fully reconciled. However, Denver's journey has shown real if modest results. Over the past decade, students scoring at the proficient level or better rose 15 percent, with achievement slightly superior in the city's charter schools.

Charters as competition.

A less collegial approach has charters competing with the traditional system, drawing students and funding from district schools to charters. The assumption is that districts will respond positively by improving their offerings and enhancing school quality.

However, a negative response is also possible. States and districts find ways to limit competition. For example, a charter law may restrict the number of students who attend charters or the number of new schools allowed or require a state to reimburse districts for the money it loses when a student leaves the district.

Reform-via-competition has origins on the political right and left. This approach in modern times is linked with conservative economist Milton Friedman. In 1962 (years before the first charter law), he described how competitive market forces would strengthen educational quality, efficiency, and productivity.

Ironically, on the left, Shanker's 1998 *New York Times* piece describes a quasi-marketplace where, "Parents could choose which charter school to send their children to, thus fostering competition." So while we should accept Shanker's thoughts on charters as R&D, we cannot ignore his thoughts on how chartering is also about choice and competition.

Washington, D.C. is a prime example of a charter sector large enough to compete with the traditional district, enrolling nearly 47 percent of public school pupils, creating a mixed market of charter and district choices for families. Mayor Muriel Bowser presides over this dual system, where the traditional D.C. public schools are run by a chancellor and the parallel sector of independently operated charter schools is answerable to D.C.'s public charter school board.

By 2015 to 2016, enrollment in D.C.'s public schools rose to 87,443, with 112 charters and 111 district schools. Test results have improved in both sectors, with charter gains surpassing those of district schools.

David Osborne, senior fellow at the Progressive Policy Institute, completed an analysis of D.C.'s two sectors, documenting how competition led the district sector to emulate charters in many ways, including more diverse curriculum offerings; new choices of different school models; and reconstituting schools to operate with building level autonomy, especially giving principals freedom to hire all or mostly new staff. This competition "pushed both to improve [leading to] a surprising amount of collaboration between the two sectors." A highlight of this cooperation is My School DC, a program making it easier for district and charter parents to choose from the many D.C.



school options available through a common lottery application system.

Charters as replacements.

The replacement approach makes charters the primary vehicle for delivering public education in a community. In 1990, one year before Minnesota passed the nation's first charter law, Ted Kolderie dubbed this approach "divestiture." It envisions a school improvement strategy overseen by a new state-created governance structure. It not so much improves the district as replaces it, making the procedure more akin to a heart transplant rather than a repair of part of the heart.

In short, where districts aren't able to reboot their schools, the district is stripped of its exclusive authority to create and operate schools, and is replaced with a governance scheme based on chartering. There is an overseers board setting policy; defining results expected from schools; contracting with organizations to run schools; and monitoring performance, closing and opening schools as necessary. New Orleans is the most evolved example of this approach.

Even before Hurricane Katrina,

Louisiana lawmakers created a Recovery School District to revive the state's worst schools, mostly in New Orleans. By August 2005, the school district converted five failing schools into charters. Then came the hurricane, after which lawmakers widened the district's responsibilities, making it the instrument for overhauling public education in New Orleans.

By 2014, the Recovery School District in New Orleans was entirely charter, overseeing 57 campuses with more than 29,000 pupils, some 92 percent of the city's public school population. The other 8 percent attend schools run by a vestige of the Orleans Parish School Board.

Originally devised to serve youngsters stuck in weak schools, the Recovery School District became the city's main provider of public education, with charters as its delivery vehicle. Recent legislation returns charters to the Orleans Parish School Board, with charters keeping their operating autonomy and the remaining traditional schools converting to charters.

Impressive student results have emerged. Students scoring at or above grade level on state tests doubled from 31 percent in 2004 to 62 percent in 2014. Pupils

attending schools in the bottom tenth percentile statewide shrank dramatically from 60 to 13 percent. The on-time four-year graduation rate rose from 54 percent to 73 percent.

In none of these cities is every school a source of quality learning. However, in all three, chartering magnified the capacity of a challenged district delivery system to do things better, while furthering structural innovation within public education.

Today, more schools in each city are doing right by their students so that many kids are better served by today's restructured system than when there was no alternative to the traditional arrangement.

One major lesson can be drawn from this discussion: No matter how hard some search for a single "founding myth" for charter schooling, there was never a unique story line. Chartering has not been a single experiment or the product of a single vision, theory, or doctrine. ■

This article was published by the Fordham Institute on edexcellence.net on May 27, 2017.



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What Teachers Say About School Choice

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I teach at a charter school because I know how much the students in the district I teach in need a structured and nourishing environment that my school provides. It lights up my world when I see that I can be the reason students from low-income families love reading and learning. My administration is extremely supportive and my colleagues are always open to help each other.

I wouldn't have it any other way!

—Ms. Bayram, NJ

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School choice means having the freedom to make decisions that will help pave the way for a successful career and future. I believe there is nothing more sacred than knowing that you have received a positive education that promoted your well-being for future success.

—Ms. Bordley, D.C.

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I'm at an approved 766 school which means we work with school districts to determine if any of their students would benefit more by attending our school where we individualize every student's education.

—Ms. Miceli, MA

“

What school choice means to me is students being able to go to a school that fits their needs and what they want to do for schooling. It means having students in high school going to schools that specialize in programs that help them get jobs in the future.

—Ms. Block, GA

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Although I support the idea of public schools, I would not be where I am today and would not have had the success I have had if it weren't for the parochial school education that my parents paid for, which taught me the value of hard work, discipline, moral values, and respect, things that are lacking so much in the public school system today.

—Mr. Ludwikowski, MD

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The Six Habits of Highly Grateful People

How You Can Tell if Someone is Grateful



I'm terrible at gratitude. How bad am I? I'm so bad at gratitude that most days I don't notice the sunlight on the leaves of the Berkeley oaks as I ride my bike down the street. I forget to be thankful for the guy who handbrews that delicious cup of coffee I drink midway through every weekday morning. I don't even know the dude's name!

I usually take for granted that I have legs to walk on, eyes to see with, arms I can use to hug my son. I forget my son! Well, I don't actually forget about him, at least as a physical presence; I generally remember to pick him up from school and feed him dinner. However, as I face the quotidian slings and arrows of parenthood, I forget all the time how much he's changed my life for the better.

Gratitude (and its sibling, appreciation) is the mental tool we use to remind ourselves of the good stuff. It's a lens that helps us to see the things that don't make it onto our lists of problems to be solved. It's a spotlight that we shine on the people who give us the good things in life. It's a bright red paintbrush we apply to otherwise invisible blessings, such as clean streets or health or enough food to eat.

Gratitude doesn't make problems and threats disappear. We can lose jobs, we can be attacked on the street, we can get sick. I've experienced all of those things. I remember those harrowing times at unexpected moments: my heart beats faster, my throat constricts. My body wants to hit something or run away, one or

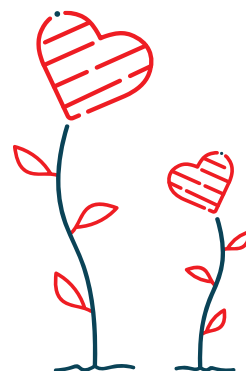
the other. But there's nothing to hit, nowhere to run. The threats are indeed real, but at that moment, they exist only in memory or imagination. I am the threat; it is me who is wearing myself out with worry.

That's when I need to turn on the gratitude. If I do that enough, suggests the psychological research, gratitude might just become a habit. What will that mean for me? It means, according to the research, that I increase my chances of psychologically surviving hard times, that I stand a chance to be happier in the good times. I'm not ignoring the threats; I'm appreciating the resources and people that might help me face those threats.

If you're already one of those highly grateful people, stop reading this article—you don't need it. Instead, you should read Amie Gordon's "Five Ways Giving Thanks Can Backfire." However, if you're more like me, then here are some tips for how you and I can become one of those fantastically grateful people.

1. Once in a while, they think about death and loss

Didn't see that one coming, did you? I'm not just being perverse—contemplating endings really does make you more grateful for the life you currently have, according to several studies.



For example, when Araceli Friasa and colleagues asked people to visualize their own deaths, their gratitude measurably increased. Similarly, when Minkyung Koo and colleagues asked people to envision the sudden disappearance of their romantic partners from their lives, they became more grateful to their partners. The same goes for imagining that some positive event, like a job promotion, never happened.

This isn't just theoretical: When you find yourself taking a good thing for granted, try giving it up for a little while. Researchers Jordi Quoidbach and Elizabeth Dunn had fifty-five people eat a piece of chocolate—and then the researchers told some of those people to resist chocolate for a week and others to binge on chocolate if they wanted. They left a third group to their own devices.

Guess who ended up happiest, according to self-reports? The people who abstained from chocolate. And who were the least happy? The people who binged. That's the power of gratitude!

2. They take the time to smell the roses

And they also smell the coffee, the bread baking in the oven, the aroma of a new car—whatever gives them pleasure.

Loyola University psychologist Fred Bryant finds that savoring positive experiences makes them stickier in your brain, and increases their benefits to your psyche—and the key, he argues, is expressing gratitude for the experience. That's one of the ways appreciation and gratitude go hand in hand.

You might also consider adding some little ritual to how you experience the pleasures of the body: A study published this year in *Psychological Science* finds that rituals like prayer or even just shaking a sugar packet “make people pay more attention to food, and paying attention makes food taste better,” as Emily Nauman reports in her *Greater Good* article about the research.

This brand of mindfulness makes intuitive sense—but how does it work with the first habit above?

Well, we humans are astoundingly adaptive creatures, and we will adapt even to the good things. When we do, their subjective value starts to drop; we start to take them for granted. That's the point at which we might give them up for a while—be it chocolate, sex, or even something like sunlight—and then take the time to really savor them when we allow them back into our lives.

That goes for people, too, and that goes back to the first habit: If you're taking someone for granted, take a step back—and imagine your life without them. Then try savoring their presence, just like you would a rose. Or a new car. Whatever! The point is, absence may just make the heart grow grateful.

3. They take the good things as gifts, not birthrights

What's the opposite of gratitude? Entitlement—the attitude that people owe you something just because you're so very special.

“In all its manifestations, a preoccupation with the self can cause us to forget our benefits and our benefactors or to feel that we are owed things from others and therefore have no reason to feel thankful,” writes Robert Emmons, co-director of the GGSC's Gratitude project. “Counting blessings will be ineffective because grievances will always outnumber gifts.”

The antidote to entitlement, argues Emmons, is to see that we did not create ourselves—we were created, if not by evolution, then by God; or if not by God, then by our parents. Likewise, we are never truly self-sufficient. Humans need other people to grow our food and heal our injuries; we need love, and for that, we need family, partners, friends, and pets.

“Seeing with grateful eyes requires that we see the web of interconnection in which we alternate between being givers and receivers,” writes Emmons. “The humble person says that life is a gift to be grateful for, not a right to be claimed.”

4. They're grateful to people, not just things

At the start of this piece, I mentioned gratitude for sunlight and trees. That's great for me—and it may have good effects, like leading me to think about my impact on the environment—but the trees just don't care. Likewise, the sun doesn't know I exist; that big ball of flaming gas isn't even aware of its own existence, as far as we know. My gratitude doesn't make it burn any brighter.

That's not true of people—people will glow in gratitude. Saying thanks to my son might make him happier and it can strengthen our emotional bond. Thanking the guy who makes my coffee can strengthen social bonds—in part by deepening our understanding of how we're interconnected with other people.

My colleague Emiliana Simon-Thomas, the GGSC's science director and another co-director of our Expanding Gratitude project, puts it this way:

"Experiences that heighten meaningful connections with others—like noticing how another person has helped you, acknowledging the effort it took, and savoring how you benefitted from it—engage biological systems for trust and affection, alongside circuits for pleasure and reward. This provides a synergistic and enduring boost to the positive experience. By saying 'thank you' to a person, your brain registers that something good has happened and that you are more richly enmeshed in a meaningful social community."

5. They mention the pancakes

Grateful people are habitually specific. They don't say, "I love you because you're just so wonderfully wonderful, you!" Instead, the really skilled grateful person will say: "I love you for the pancakes you make when you see I'm hungry and the way you massage my feet after work even when you're really tired and how you give me hugs when I'm sad so that I'll feel better!"

The reason for this is pretty simple: It makes the expression of gratitude feel more authentic, for it reveals that the thanker was genuinely paying attention and isn't just going through the motions. The richest thank yous will acknowledge intentions ("the pancakes you make when you see I'm hungry") and costs ("you massage my feet after work even when you're really tired"), and they'll describe the value of benefits received ("you give me hugs when I'm sad so that I'll feel better").

When Amie Gordon and colleagues studied gratitude in couples, they found that spouses signal grateful feelings through more caring and attentive behavior. They ask clarifying questions; they respond to trouble with hugs and to good news with smiles. "These gestures," Gordon writes, "can have profound effects: Participants who were better listeners during those conversations in the lab had partners who reported feeling more appreciated by them."

Remember: Gratitude thrives on specificity!

6. They thank outside the box

But let's get real: Pancakes, massages, hugs? Boring! Most of my examples so far are easy and clichéd. But

here's who the really tough-minded grateful person thanks: the boyfriend who dumped her, the homeless person who asked for change, the boss who laid him off.

We're graduating from Basic to Advanced Gratitude, so pay attention. And since I myself am still working on Basic, I'll turn once again to Dr. Emmons for guidance: "It's easy to feel grateful for the good things. No one 'feels' grateful that he or she has lost a job or a home or good health or has taken a devastating hit on his or her retirement portfolio."

In such moments, he says, gratitude becomes a critical cognitive process—a way of thinking about the world that can help us turn disaster into a stepping stone. If we're willing and able to look, he argues, we can find a reason to feel grateful even to people who have harmed us. We can thank that boyfriend for being brave enough to end a relationship that wasn't working; the homeless person for reminding us of our advantages and vulnerability; the boss, for forcing us to face new challenges.

"Life is suffering. No amount of positive thinking exercises will change this truth," writes Emmons in his *Greater Good* article "How Gratitude Can Help You Through Hard Times." He continues:

"So telling people simply to buck up, count their blessings, and remember how much they still have to be grateful for can certainly do much harm. Processing a life experience through a grateful lens does not mean denying negativity. It is not a form of superficial happiology. Instead, it means realizing the power you have to transform an obstacle into an opportunity. It means reframing a loss into a potential gain, recasting negativity into positive channels for gratitude."

That's what truly fantastically grateful people do. Can you? ■

This story was published by uplift-connect.com on September 28, 2016.



Jeremy Adam Smith edits the online magazine *Greater Good* and is author of *The Daddy Shift*. He has won numerous awards for his coverage of racial and economic segregation in San Francisco schools.



Congratulations AAE Scholarship & Grant Winners

We are pleased to announce AAE's National Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant award winners for fall 2017. 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 WINNERS FOR AAE'S NATIONAL COMPETITION

Karen Cuen

Oak Ridge Elementary, CA

Susan Yuknalis

Central Jersey College Prep Charter School, NJ

Ashley Peterson

Lincoln Public Schools, NE

Joan Simon

Prescott High School, WI

Meaghan Marshall

Green Fields School, AZ

Dayna Derichs

Wheeler Elementary School, NE

Jill Woodsmall

Washington Township Elementary School, IN

Siobhan O'Hara

East High School, AK

LaTavya Foster

William B Travis Middle School, TX

Rebecca Thomas

YES Prep Northside, TX

Bonnie Taylor

Victor School, MT

Cyndi Hsiao

Quail Summit Elementary School, CA

Nia Gipson

Saint Joseph Prep, MA

Rebecca Thornton

Pink Hill Elementary School, NC

Jana Steiner

Bellevue East High School, NE

Laurie Jensen

Lena Public School, WI

Suzanne Banas

South Miami Middle Community School, FL

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. ■



SCHOLARSHIP & GRANT APPLICATIONS DUE MARCH 1!

The AAE Foundation's National Teacher Scholarships and Classroom Grants competition is held twice a year in the fall and spring. Its purpose is to help teachers just like these. The deadlines are March 1 and October 1 of every year. For more information, visit aaeteachers.org/awards.



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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



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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. We're excited about the changes to come in the new year as we continue to grow to serve our members.

Each new year holds so many opportunities and has so much potential. We hope that you find this time of year as exciting as we do.

We wish you the best in 2018! May the new year hold joy, peace, and blessings for you.

Warm regards,

Gary Beckner
Founder, Chairman, & President

