

By Matthew Johnson

The Advantages of Being a New Teacher

If you look at books for new teachers, a trend emerges: dozens of them, including four of the five best sellers on Amazon at the moment, include some form of the word *survive* in the title or subtitle. Outside of books for doomsday preppers or outdoorsmen, no other genre uses *survive* so liberally.

This constant focus on surviving says something important about the lens through which the education community views new teachers. In the end, what generally defines them is not their skills and contributions but the things they must survive: the struggles, long days, and missteps.



Anyone who has been a new teacher knows that significant struggles, embarrassing missteps, and brutally long days are a big part of the first few years. A recent *Atlantic* article called “The First Year of Teaching Can Feel Like a Fraternity Hazing” talks about how new teachers often skip meals and whittle down their personal lives to nearly nothing in an effort to stay above water, and yet many still struggle with effectiveness.

While that is part of the story, it shouldn't be the whole thing. Every year new teachers do a lot more than stay in their classrooms too late and struggle to control classrooms. They also create and innovate, connect with and inspire students, and breathe new life into old curriculum—but these accomplishments hardly ever get a headline.

The one-sided new-teacher narrative is a serious problem because constantly being stigmatized for their deficiencies can take a toll on new teachers and the job they do. There's a strong and unsurprising correlation between low teacher morale and low student performance. Further, the feelings of incompetence that often go along with first-year struggles can seriously impact new teachers' personal lives and likely play a significant role in why up to 50 percent of new teachers leave the profession in the first five years of their career.

One of the biggest things mentors of new teachers can do to help their mentees is to show them that they are more than their struggles. We need to make sure they see their current contributions and demonstrate how to better leverage their strengths and advantages.

In *Embarrassment: And the Emotional Underlife of Learning*, Thomas Newkirk discusses how having even one known strength can infuse us with the confidence to get through life's toughest lessons, and it turns out that new teachers regularly do bring certain strengths and have some advantages over more veteran teachers that help them to navigate the tumultuous seas of those first years.

Common New Teacher Strengths

New teachers have new ideas: Last week a colleague confided to me that he wished he had more new teachers in his department because his group regularly struggles to innovate—much more so than other departments, in his understanding.

This is a point I've heard before, and it indicates a core strength for many new teachers: they bring fresh ideas. For example, a new English teacher at my school saw



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that the new SAT required kids to have a deeper understanding of rhetoric and persuasion than previous versions. To improve student understanding of these topics, he created a festival—based on the hilarious BAHFest—where students had to argue absurd hypotheses using rhetorical and persuasive techniques. This idea was an immediate sensation and got students using techniques like pathos, juxtaposition, and parallel structure at a depth I had never witnessed before.

New teachers have new perspectives: Alongside new ideas, new teachers can use their fresh perspective to identify gaps that those within a school can't see. During my first year of teaching, I worked at a small school that had a number of sports teams but no track team. Track played a massive role in my development, and the fact that the school didn't have a team horrified me, so I decided to start one.

Within two years, the team was the largest in the school, with over a quarter of the student body running, jumping, and throwing for us, and when I left, nearly everyone mentioned the creation of the team—which to me was the most obvious idea possible—as my defining accomplishment.

New teachers often are experts in areas that veteran teachers might not be: Teaching takes up a lot of one's bandwidth, so even the most committed veterans may struggle to keep up with innovations and research. This

means that while veterans have a knowledge advantage over new teachers in many areas, new teachers often have a significantly better understanding of the most current research, best practices, and pedagogical or technological advances. This expertise, if tactfully and thoughtfully shared, can add a lot to a department, school, or even district.

New teachers have a unique energy reserve:

Someone who has been in a relationship for ten weeks is probably going to have a different type of energy than someone who has spent the last decade in even the strongest relationship. The same principle holds true for new teachers, who, because their journey is so fresh, often have a unique type of energy. This exuberance can help them to connect with and inspire students who are often drawn to their energy and excitement in ways that even the iciest veterans can't. ■

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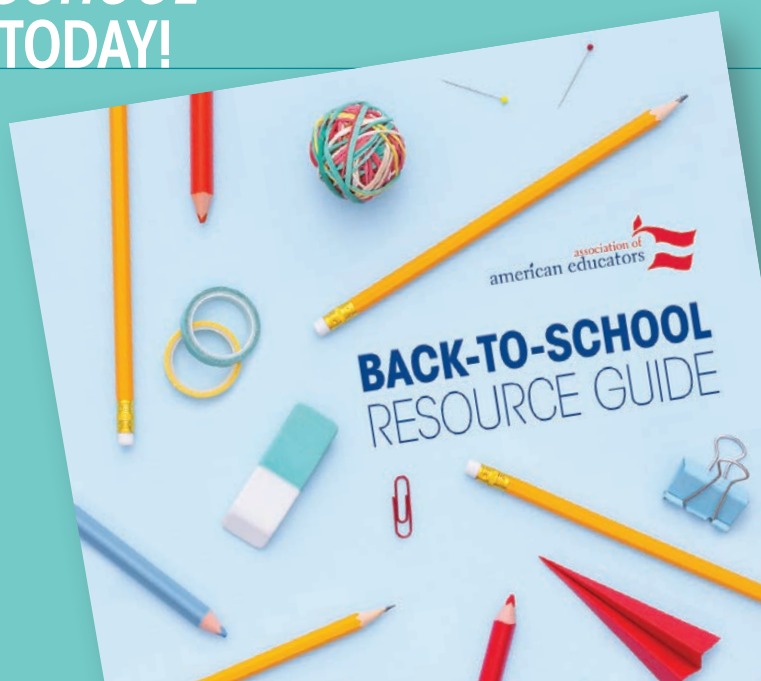
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Sketching a Win-Win Solution on Teacher Pay

Amidst the wave of teacher strikes that have unfolded this spring, the broad outlines of a sensible deal seem pretty clear. Several big, interrelated issues are on the table:

1. Teachers are not well paid and, in many states, teachers are paid quite poorly.
2. Terrific teachers are criminally underpaid, and they enjoy few opportunities for professional growth and substantial compensation unless they leave the classroom.
3. Taxpayers already pay for expensive employee benefits that don't do a lot to attract or reward many of today's educators.
4. Underfunded pensions are soaking up a large (and growing) share of school spending, making it harder to pay teachers well or fund schools responsibly.

In short, we need to improve teacher pay, rethink the profession in a way that values terrific educators, and modernize outmoded, unsustainable retirement systems.

Addressing this tangle of issues requires a grand bargain—as piecemeal efforts have a history of infuriating either educators or taxpayers. Reforms without commensurate dollars can smack of a “war on teachers” while spending without reform sows the seeds of taxpayer rebellion. And for those who look at pro-teacher public sentiment and see little cause to worry about backlash, the annual *2017 Education Next* survey is instructive. The pollsters did indeed find that 61 percent of respondents supported raises for teachers—but they also found that support plunged when respondents were told how much teachers actually make (as it turned out they thought teachers earn less than they actually do). Fortunately, there are sensible, win-win ways to tackle this problem.

First, additional taxpayer support is needed in many states. For instance, in one-third of the states, the average teacher earns less than \$50,000 a year. Terrific teachers are woefully underpaid and, certainly in those states, average pay should be higher. The argument that teachers in such states deserve a major pay increase—something like 15 to 20 percent over the next few



years—has gained currency even with taxpayers and Republican legislators who might normally be skeptical. In a state like Oklahoma or Arizona, that kind of increase requires something like an additional \$350 to \$400 million per year—aside from any concomitant increase in benefits. So, there's a need for substantial new dollars, but those dollars cannot simply be funneled into across-the-board increases.

That's because it's vital to recognize that both bad teachers are currently overpaid and it's ridiculous to design a system in which plenty of outstanding teachers spend two or three months a year bartending or painting houses. The simple truth is that some educators are especially valuable to their students and schools—they play leadership roles, design curricula, and mentor. Compensation should reflect that. New spending should be linked to turning the teaching job into something that's more of a full-time profession, at least for those practitioners who want the responsibility (and the accompanying compensation). Currently, for those teachers who are doing great work, want to work year-round, and have districts that would love to employ them that way, the job descriptions and pay scales simply don't exist. A substantial slug of any new taxpayer investment in pay should help to change that reality.

Finally, while taxpayers will need to pony up, teachers will need to do their part too by agreeing to overhaul outmoded and unduly expensive pension systems. As former Obama administration official Chad Aldeman has calculated, as a percentage of total compensation, teacher retirement benefits cost twice as much as those for other workers (10.3 versus 5.3 percent). Bringing the cost of teacher retirement into line with other workers could account for about one-third of a 15-percent salary increase. Such reforms need to honor promises made to current and near-retirees, while devising more affordable, portable, and flexible options for younger employees that will be good for both teachers and taxpayers. Consider Kentucky, the scene of a recent, high-profile battle over pension reform, but where less than one-quarter of teachers remain in the system for 30 years—meaning the fight was about preserving a system that will never benefit most teachers. Meanwhile, Kentucky's pension reform law makes clear that a state can reform pensions in a way that protects retirees, saves funds, stabilizes the system, and offers benefits that are *more generous* to educators through the first two decades of their careers.

Any deal must also address the crisis of underfunded pensions. After all, nationwide, in 2015, schools had *half a trillion dollars* in unfunded pension liabilities. Aldeman notes that for every \$10 states and districts con-

tribute to pension plans, \$7 goes toward paying down past pension debt—and just \$3 to benefits for current teachers. If states weren't carrying those obligations, which amount to about 12 percent of teacher salary, they could boost average pay by more than \$6,500 for every teacher in the nation. It's critical to tackle this head-on by infusing funds into pensions now—with the assurance that pension reform now will free up school spending going forward.

“That makes for an unappealing package. Of course, the upside is that it will benefit students, professionalize teaching, ensure that taxpayer funds are spent wisely, tackle the pension albatross, and put states on strong, sustainable footing going forward.”

None of this will be fun. It will ask more of taxpayers, it will require uncomfortable transitions for teachers, and it will produce uncertainty. It will require political capital and a substantial near-term boost in tax revenue to pay for salary bumps and pension shortfalls, which means the costs happen now and the benefits come later. That makes for an unappealing package. Of course, the upside is that it will benefit students, professionalize teaching, ensure that taxpayer funds are spent wisely, tackle the pension albatross, and put states on strong, sustainable footing going forward.

Such a deal requires common sense, compromise, and shared sacrifice—qualities that have been in short supply of late. Here's hoping that our luck is about to change. ■



Frederick Hess is the director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, where he studies K-12 and higher education. His books include *Spinning Wheels*, *Common Sense School Reform*, *The Same Thing Over and Over*, *Cage-Busting Leadership*, *The Cage-Busting Teacher*, and *Letters to a Young Education Reformer*. He's a former high school social studies teacher and teaches

or has taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Georgetown, Rice, and the University of Virginia. Dr. Hess is an AAE advisory board member.

Legal Corner:

More Work But Not More Pay

Every teacher generally has a contract. It specifies the position for which you are hired and your rate of pay. It can also include other provisions or benefits, and those items vary from state to state.

School has begun and suddenly your principal informs you that you are being assigned additional students, or an extra lab, or another class. Guess what? No extra pay.

What is your recourse? Well...that depends.

The first thing you should do is consult your contract. Does it give administration the right to assign more duties? Second, look through policies, procedures, or any other documents from your district. Do any of those documents indicate you can be assigned more duties without additional pay?

If you can find no documentation that allows for the additional duties, you may be able to challenge the assignment by either simply pointing out to administration that additional duties should not be assigned or going through a more formal process.

In reality, however, most contracts have provisions that specifically allow administration to assign more duties or tasks as “may be necessary.” Unfortunately this is true even if you have to work more hours in the week. You can wind up feeling overwhelmed and underappreciated.

Don’t despair, there is still a way to address the situation. The best approach is to share your concerns openly and honestly with administration if you are able to do so. Oftentimes a face-to-face meeting results in a solution that works for both parties.

If you do not feel you have the type of working relationship that allows for this, contact AAE Legal. We’ve stepped in countless times to assist members in similar situations. We are here to help. ■



Sharon Nelson is the director of legal services for the Association of American Educators. In this capacity, Ms. Nelson oversees AAE’s extensive legal teams across the country and works daily with members and panel counsel to address members’ legal concerns. A passionate advocate for educators, Ms. Nelson has been a lawyer focusing on employee rights issues for nearly twenty years.

What’s Next After Janus?

The recent Supreme Court ruling in *Janus v. AFSCME* in favor of Mark Janus impacts union and non-union education professionals across the nation. Effective immediately, no educator can be required to pay fees to a union without clearly and affirmatively giving consent. Any educator who wants to join and fund a union, a professional association, or neither is empowered to do so. AAE is in full support of this ruling because it preserves freedom of choice, including all educators’ freedom to choose the association that is best for them. Here is the statement AAE released the day the decision was announced: [aateachers.org/januspress](https://www.aateachers.org/januspress).

What does that mean now? What next? If you or your colleagues want more information or are seeking help in the opting out process, there’s a new, easy online resource. It’s called **TeacherFreedom.org**. It’s a major nationwide effort to help teachers and education staff

explore the complex union opt-out process and allows you to understand your professional association options and rights. This content-rich website and community for educators includes information and provides context through an interactive map, videos, links and resources to pursue the option that best suits your beliefs, values, budget, and career aspirations.

Now is also a great time to share with your colleagues why AAE works for you and provides the benefits, protections and professional development opportunities that support your professional goals. Long before the Janus decision, AAE has always believed in educators’ rights to make active, informed and voluntary decisions about their profession and personal career.

If you or your colleagues have any questions, contact us today at dcoffice@aateachers.org. ■

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Instruction: Call to Action for Schools

We hear it all the time: social and emotional learning (SEL) in our schools is critical. It was also recently a part of the “additional resources” recommendations received at a recent New Jersey State Board of Education meeting, along with trauma-informed training. Yale University Professor Marc Brackett, the founder of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, said, “I’ve worked for 20 years to get schools to take a more systematic approach to SEL and to move away from assemblies and other one-shot strategies.”

I couldn’t agree with Professor Brackett more.

“Teachers have more job satisfaction and are more effective in the classroom when they work for a principal who has high emotional intelligence,” Professor Brackett said Monday at a lunchtime session, kicking off the ASU+GSV Summit in San Diego.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. In addition, SEL is a research-driven approach based on the tenets of self awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Through this approach to learning, students are

able to emotionally regulate and recognize their emotions, solve problems effectively, and develop positive relationships. The research has shown a direct correlation to improvements in academics and reductions in problem behaviors.



As a special education advocate and mother of a child on the autism spectrum, I have witnessed firsthand the importance of SEL in the classroom. Despite the overwhelming research on how students’ emotions affect their academic performance, our schools are still not jumping at the notion of the implementation of this evidence-based approach. I am, however, thrilled to see the importance of mental health and the whole child being more actively discussed at the recent joint hearings on school security hosted by the New Jersey Senate and Assembly Education Committees.

Nowhere is the need for SEL more critical than with our children on the autism spectrum. Children with autism have a social, communication disorder, not a cognitive

disorder. I wish I had a dollar for every time my son’s former child study team said to me, “but he’s doing well academically, so there is no need for speech, more social, emotional goals, etc.” It is heart-breaking as a parent to recognize the importance of and the need for increased social skills and SEL competencies, only to be met with resistance by a child study team. What can result is that a child study team implements social and emotional goals in their Individual Education Plan (IEP) for children on the spectrum, but the frequency of these goals will fall short of where they need to be in order to be truly effective.

In the months following the Sandy Hook shooting, mental health officials delved into Adam Lanza’s state of mental health. One of their key findings was that the public school district did little to address his deteriorating mental health. One positive result is schools have begun to teach social skills and emotional awareness, with the hope that students will develop skills to cope with the stress, anger and desperation that contributed to Adam Lanza’s tragic spiral. ■



Liz Parlett Butcher

is an AAE regional membership director in New Jersey. Liz is a passionate education advocate who has represented children with disabilities for

several years. She successfully lobbied the governor and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) regarding speech language services eligibility criteria for New Jersey’s autistic children.

Teachers Kept Quitting This Indianapolis School. Here's How the Principal Got Them to Stay.

When Jeremy Baugh took the helm as principal of School 107 three years ago, staff turnover was so high that about half the teachers were also new to the struggling elementary campus, he said. For his first two years, the trend continued—with several teachers leaving each summer.

“In the back of my mind,” he said, “I just assumed that that was going to be the norm, that I was going to have to always be on the lookout for good talent.”

However, when he surveyed his staff this year, Baugh got some unexpected news: about 97 percent of teachers said they plan on returning. “I was thrilled,” he said.

Staff say the change is heavily driven by a new teacher leadership program Indianapolis Public Schools has rolled out at fifteen schools. Known as “opportunity culture”, some teachers are paid as much as \$18,300 extra per year to oversee and support several classrooms. Educators at School 107, which is also known as Lew Wallace, say opportunity culture helps retain staff in two ways: It gives new teachers, who can often feel overwhelmed, support. And, it allows experienced teachers to take on more responsibility without leaving the classroom.

As districts across the country struggle to hire teachers—particularly in hard-to-fill specialties such

as math and science—many schools are especially interested in retaining the teachers they have. Although little research directly links leadership opportunities with retention, some research suggests one reason teachers leave the profession is because they feel they don't have influence in their schools and they have few opportunities to advance.

At School 107, which began the program last school year, three multiclassroom leaders each oversee several classroom teachers. Their role is to offer advice, training, and support to their peers. They are ultimately responsible for the test data in all the classrooms they oversee.

One of those teachers is Deanna Schmidt. With five years of experience and a master's degree, she was looking for a job where she could train teachers and continue to work with students. “I loved teaching but I just wanted to do something different. I tossed around the idea of maybe going back for an admin license,” she said, “but I don't really want to be a principal.” Instead, Schmidt left her job at the Butler Lab School to work as a multiclassroom leader at Lew Wallace. “I think I found the perfect fit,” she said.

Lew Wallace is one of the most diverse campuses in the city. The neighborhood it draws from, near Lafayette Square, is full of recent immigrants and refugees. And that's reflected at the school, where 38 percent of students are learning English.

That's just one of the challenges facing students and teachers. Over 80 percent of students come from families that are poor enough to qualify for free lunch, according to state data. And mobility at the school is so high that more than half of its 606 students are new this year, Baugh said.

The result is that teaching at School 107 can be particularly hard, Baugh said. In one classroom, for example, there might be several students who are learning English (who the teacher struggles to communicate with) and four children with difficult behavior.

“Those four children create kind of this shaken pop bottle syndrome in the classroom where everybody feels on edge,” he said. “That can be difficult to teach in because you don't have this sense of calm all the time.”

School 107 has long struggled on state tests. Fewer than a quarter of students passed the state ISTEP exam in 2016-2017. Over the last two years, however, individual students have made gains in test scores from one year to the next. Those improvements began before the school started using opportunity culture. However, a recent study of three districts using the teacher leadership model found multiclassroom leaders raised student math scores—although they did not appear to raise reading scores.

The idea behind opportunity culture is that teachers, especially



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newer teachers, are not alone in handling challenges. They have mentors helping them in a range of ways, including modeling lessons, pulling small groups, and working on lesson plans.

Abby Campbell, who is in her first year of teaching, has thirty-one students in her fourth-grade class. Her students run the gamut from those who are far below grade level to those who are above it. Close to half of them are English language learners, and about five have special education plans. When she started teaching, she was overwhelmed. “I had a lot of nights with tears, and not sure if I was going to survive the year,” she said.

Campbell not only survived the year but also plans on returning in the fall. One of the main reasons, she

said, is because of the support she’s gotten from her multiclassroom leader, Jessica Smith. Smith helps Campbell with nearly all the pieces of her job—from lesson plans to emotional support, said Campbell.

“I can’t even imagine doing it without Jessica,” she said. “I would’ve been a hot mess.”

Initially, some teachers at Lew Wallace were uncomfortable with having multiclassroom leaders essentially overseeing their classes. However, the classroom leaders are supposed to be team members, and most teachers are more at ease now that they’ve gotten to know them, staff said.

“I was wary,” said Steve Carr, who teaches sixth-grade math. But Brandon Warren, the classroom leader he works with, helps him

without being prescriptive, Carr said. “It’s not me telling you what to do. It’s what we’re going to do together,” Warren said.

Multiclassroom leaders also lead regular training for teachers. After struggling to tackle everything during teacher training, the multiclassroom leaders at School 107 eventually decided to focus on a small number of issues. This year, they are working on strategies for improving student writing and for keeping students engaged—particularly English language learners, who may not feel comfortable answering questions in front of the class.

Because so many of their teachers are returning next year, they will be able to move on to new focus areas (strategies for teaching math and English language learners) instead of repeating the same teacher training, said Smith, one of the classroom leaders.

“It’s so hard to keep training new teachers all the time,” she said. “If we can keep our teachers, they are going to be such a higher caliber because we’ve put our time into them, and we’ve invested in them.” ■

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Dylan Peers McCoy

is a staff reporter for Chalkbeat Indiana, where she covers Indianapolis Public Schools. Previously she covered education for the *Lafayette Journal*

& Courier, the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* and *American RadioWorks*. Her reporting on parks and regional policy also has appeared in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. She came to education reporting by way of public radio, and her documentary work has aired on WCAL, Latino USA, and Studio 360.



Funding Your Classroom with Grants

Classroom funding is tighter than it has ever been before, and when teachers begin to count up all the things they need for the school year, many feel they have no option but to dip into their own pockets for supplies. This practice has become so common for educators that no one even questions it any more.

It's just expected that teachers will spend their own money to buy necessary classroom supplies. There's little that an individual teacher can do about classroom funding issues; however, there are options for teachers who are seeking avenues to gain funding for classroom supplies. An often overlooked form of funding for classroom educators is that of grants.

Grants typically fall into two categories: **crowdfunded grants** and **formal grants**. Crowdfunded grants are increasingly popular these days and take advantage of platforms like **DonorsChoose.org** where anyone with money can contribute toward the needed amount. They can contribute a small portion or fund the entire project. While formal grants are often more intimidating, submitting a formal application to a granting organization can mean the opportunity to get the needed funding all at once.

Often, teachers lean toward crowdfunding platforms because they feel the process is more accessible and

transparent; however, by doing so, they are neglecting the equally powerful formal grant process. Applying for a formal grant can seem intimidating on the outside, but at the heart of it all, the process is the same as for a crowdfunded grant.

The backbone of both processes is the **proposal**, which outlines what you want to do with the money, why you want to do it, and how you'll get it done. Writing a proposal for a formal grant application can seem daunting at the outset, but like many other things in life, it is merely a skill that needs to be learned. Once an educator knows how to write one, he can easily reproduce the process. More importantly, the same proposal can be used multiple times, either to fund the same project year after year or to submit to multiple funders and platforms to ensure full funding.

Writing a Proposal

When speaking to educators writing grant proposals for the first time, I encourage them to think of the proposal as having two parts: the **project** and the **plan**.

The **project** is the part of the proposal that lists what you want to do. It is active, engaging, and fills a clear need. This part of the proposal answers what you're

“Writing a proposal for a formal grant application can seem daunting at the outset, but like many other things in life, it is merely a skill that needs to be learned.”

doing, why you’re doing it, and, most importantly, why someone should give you money to do it. Even if what you’re applying for is basic classroom supplies, word your request in such a way that it makes clear the funds are accomplishing something. Remember, your goal is to convince someone to give you money! Funders like to know they are putting their money to good use and you need to show them that you are a good cause, a cause worth giving to. For example, “create a nonfiction-heavy classroom library to better align with language arts standards,” is better than “purchase nonfiction books for classroom.” Both statements are asking for the same thing, but the former has a clear vision and need while the latter is missing both. The project part of the proposal should inspire the funder, and one statement does that better than the other.

The *plan* is the section of the proposal where you describe how you’ll bring your project into existence. This part should always include a budget, a simple table that includes what you’re purchasing, how much you expect each item to cost, and the total estimated cost for the project. You’ll also want to include who besides yourself will be involved, what will happen to the materials after they’re purchased, and how you plan to use them in the classroom. If applicable, you should also think about how you will evaluate the program, project, or materials. Just like you want to inspire when you describe your project, when you describe your plan you want to reassure the potential funder that you are competent and professional. You want to come across as professional and competent as possible and this holds true for whether you’re sending your proposal to the U.S. Department of Education or putting it up on DonorsChoose.org.

Submitting Your Proposal

The great thing about writing that initial two-part proposal is that once you have it written, you can submit it numerous times. There’s no hard and fast rule that says you can only apply to one place! In fact, since you won’t know when or if you’ll be provided funds, it’s wise to plan to submit the same proposal to a number of places, and if your project is large and relatively expensive, you may need multiple submissions in order to receive enough funding.

The next step is deciding where you want to submit your proposal. Once you have a foundation or site in mind, you’ll want to read their materials carefully. Many sites will have their timeline, form, and/or a specific proposal format. They may ask that information be put in a certain order or require you to use a certain layout. Not reading and adhering to their instructions may cause your proposal to be disqualified before anyone even reads it!

The upside of all this is that since all funders need and want to know the same basic information (the project and the plan you prepared before), adjusting the proposal is as easy as copying and pasting material into the right places and doing a quick edit.

Overall, the entire process is much easier than many educators expect and like so many things, the more practice one gets, the easier it becomes. Many educators who win funds from one proposal go on to write more proposals at ever-increasing levels. Recently, AAE had a chance to be the latest funder to a school media center specialist who had funded their entire library through grants! Don’t be disheartened by large well-known organizations or paperwork with small type. This is something that every educator can and should try to do! ■



Melissa Pratt is AAE’s professional programs manager. In that capacity, she creates and manages programs that help AAE’s members increase their professional capacity. Her favorite part of the job is the funding that she is able to provide teachers each year through AAE’s National Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant program.

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