

EDUCATION MATTERS

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation



“Working with young people means that I get to witness these small acts of brilliant humanity all the time.”

By Sydney Chaffee

This Is Why I #Loveteaching

Last spring, I stood backstage in a historic theater, peeking out from behind a thick velvet curtain at the audience filling up. My students paced around in the wings in various states of costume. They had been preparing for this play for months.

Every year, all of my ninth graders—including those with autism, English language learners, and even kids who begin the year with crippling stage fright—put on a play. That night marks the culmination of a yearlong partnership with Boston’s Huntington Theatre Company, nine months of deepening literacy skills through the arts.

I dropped the curtain back into place and turned around to see that my kids were completely melting down. One of the stars of the show, who was set to narrate the opening scene, began stalking around with his fidget spinner, muttering to himself, “I can’t do it. I just can’t do it. I’m not going out there.” Another boy, who fashioned himself as the toughest kid in the school, started yelling: “Why are you so scared? You’re just gonna quit?

That’s stupid! If he’s quitting, I’m quitting!” He plopped down into a chair and pulled his shirt over his face. A girl nearby burst into tears, the stage manager hurried past whispering into a headset, and somebody knocked over a bunch of props.

I was about to do my teacher thing—step in, comfort everyone, and manage the situation, but then something beautiful happened. The crying girl was surrounded by a gaggle of her peers, who threw their arms around her and told her, “It’s going to be okay. You know your lines. Let’s go practice again.” Fidget spinner’s friends shoved earbuds in his ears so he could listen to a song that would calm him down. And the tough guy? Two seniors who had been through this four years earlier pulled his shirt off his face to reveal streaks of tears running down his cheeks. “I’m really scared,” he admitted. They rubbed his back and gave him a pep talk. One by one, other ninth graders came over, hugged him, and told him, “You’re going to do great. We need you.” I stepped back, realizing that my students didn’t need me to fix anything for them.

At my school, we teach our students the value of five Habits of Scholarship: responsibility, effort, critique, collaboration, and compassion. Those first three fit pretty neatly into the work of school. Do your work, do it to your best ability, take feedback—these are obvious skills our students need to build as scholars. However, the last two—collaboration and compassion—aren't always as easy to teach. Sometimes, fifteen-year-olds have a hard time understanding why working together and being nice matter to their schoolwork. But there, backstage, as everything threatened to collapse, I saw my students taking the risk to truly demonstrate compassionate collaboration. Not for a grade, not because anyone was watching, but because they are amazing human beings with a boundless capacity for love.

Standing there in the wings, I remembered, again, why I am in love with teaching. Working with young people means that I get to witness these small acts of brilliant humanity all the time. I get to continually be inspired and challenged and amazed. I get to watch as students transform themselves into people who will change the world.

And I can think of nothing I could spend my time doing that is more powerful or rewarding than that. ■



Sydney Chaffee is the ninth-grade humanities teacher at Codman Academy Charter School in Dorchester, MA. She is the 2017 National Teacher of the Year. You can follow her at @SydneyChaffee on Twitter.

Sydney's blog is part of the #loveteaching campaign, learn more at weloveteaching.org.

AAE's Legal Corner: Criminal Accusation



A student has accused you of criminal misconduct. Your worst nightmare has come true. Suddenly you are being asked to interview with police, CPS investigators, administration, and more.

Regardless of whether you've engaged in misconduct, you should immediately consult with a criminal attorney. There are situations in which you can be accused of a crime but not formally charged. Even if you are not formally charged, your administration may discipline or seek to discipline you.

If you have been accused of a criminal misconduct related to your job:

1. Immediately contact AAE Legal Services.
2. Do not speak to the police, child protective services, or anyone at your school until you have had the opportunity to consult with legal counsel.
3. If you are friends with a student or former student, you must cease all communication with that individual until this matter is resolved. Do not text, call, or otherwise communicate with that student or former student until advised otherwise by your legal counsel.

4. Do not discuss the matter with anyone other than legal counsel or AAE Legal Services including co-workers, friends, students, or your administration.
5. Provide copies of any written documentation given to you to AAE Legal Services and your counsel.
6. If you do not have anything in writing from your administration, request that you be given a written document that details any allegations against you.
7. If you have been placed on leave, suspended, or otherwise asked to stay away from work pending an investigation, request a written document that indicates you are on leave as this will ensure a more timely processing of your insurance benefits.

No matter the allegation, 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.

National School Choice Week 2018



Do Your Colleagues Know Their Choices?

Even in today's atmosphere of growing professional freedom, many educators haven't heard about options when it comes to joining a professional association. These teachers often go without needed liability insurance, which is an imperative in today's litigious society. When working with other people's children, legal protection is simply a MUST. As you know, your professional association, the Association of American Educators (AAE), provides comprehensive liability insurance with robust legal support for employment rights and more!

Your membership in AAE not only includes liability insurance, but also provides additional valuable benefits, such as discounted rates on a host of other optional insurance policies (dental, auto, life, and more). AAE is continually adding to our benefits program. It would be a good idea to revisit our website periodically to see what you might be missing.

AAE is proudly professional and nonpartisan, and has been supporting members across the nation for a quarter century. Our members are kept informed about the latest news, research, and trends in education. From our years of experience in the field of education, we know what types of services teachers want and are looking for. We know because we ask.

There are probably teachers in your building looking for an organization with these services right now, but they don't yet know about AAE. They are counting on you to inform them!

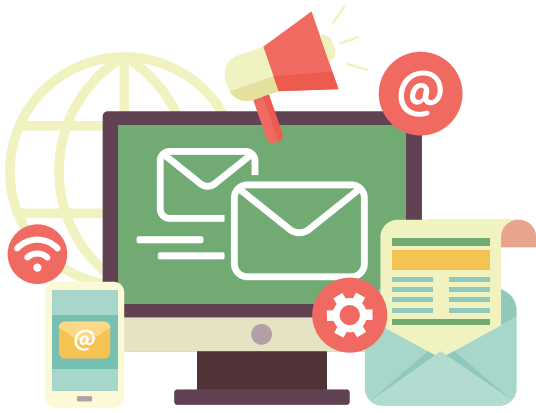
If you want to share but aren't sure how, it's easier than you think! You can share your story through a quick email to colleagues. You can place AAE brochures and applications in teacher mailboxes or post them on the bulletin board in the teacher's lounge. It really has an impact if you write a brief statement about why you affiliated with AAE, and include this along with the brochures. As professional courtesy, request permission from your administrators before doing so. If they're reluctant to give permission, ask to share about AAE's Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant program instead. They might be wary of a new professional organization they haven't researched yet, but our scholarship and grant program is open to all educators and has a clear benefit for the school and students.

“AAE is proudly professional and nonpartisan, and has been supporting members across the nation for a quarter century.”

You've now opened the door for colleagues to ask questions and you'll likely get one or two. When speaking to your colleagues about AAE, think about why you joined AAE and why you continue your membership. We are glad you do and honored to serve you. Your friends and colleagues want to hear your personal AAE story when deciding what is best for their career, their budget, and their values. Your coworkers don't want a hard sales push (does anyone?). They want to hear why you like this organization so much.

You can also share about AAE on social media. Sharing AAE on social media is easy: simply like AAE on Facebook and follow us on Twitter (@aaeteachers). We regularly share blog posts, helpful resources, and upcoming opportunities for educators. Your coworkers and other teacher friends will likely want to hear this





information, even if they're not interested in joining AAE at that moment.

Did you know that you could be rewarded for sharing?

Once a month, we have an online Leadership Academy seminar providing you with the history of AAE, important details about our mission, as well as ideas on how to share with colleagues. Upon completion, for each new professional member who joins as a result of your efforts, you'll receive up to \$50 paid quarterly. It's our way of thanking our member leaders for helping spread the word. You'll feel more confident sharing after you're empowered with information.



Sharing AAE is my passion. For me, it's personal as I feel strongly that educators WANT to know their professional association options and it's up to me to boldly share. AAE should not be the best kept secret any longer. I taught for ten years and never joined a professional association because I didn't know where my money was going. My parents are both veteran educators and will tell you they wish they had known about AAE. If you need ideas on sharing, please reach out to me at shanna@aaeteachers.org and I'd love to help you plan how to share AAE with your colleagues. I can also provide you with materials on AAE and walk you through the registration process for our Leadership Academy so that you can become a member leader. We're always here to help in any way we can. AAE is the gold standard association for educators in this country.

Happy sharing! ■



Shanna Morgason is the national membership team director for the Association of American Educators and a regional membership director in Arkansas.

By Dr. Matthew Lynch

Five Must-Have Classroom Management Apps, Tools, and Resources

For most teachers, classroom management is one of the biggest challenges. Managing twenty-six young people with a variety of interests, skill levels, and behaviors is no easy task.

Luckily, edtech can help. Use these five classroom management apps, tools, and resources to minimize classroom management issues and maximize instructional time.

1. NetSupport School



Award-winning NetSupport School Classroom Management software allows instructors to monitor and interact with any student desktop or device in real time. Deliver lesson content and assessments, show an instructor's screen to all or selected students, and promote digital citizenship and responsibility with internet and application usage controls.

Collaboration tools, including group chat and showcasing screens, allow instructors to demonstrate positive digital interaction while ensuring the safe and ethical use of information technology. Ideal for BYOD with dedicated Windows, Chrome, iOS, and Android versions, plus full support for thin, zero, or virtual client environments.

2. ClassDojo



Used in 90 percent of K-8 schools in the United States, ClassDojo is popular for a reason. It's a simple, fun way to manage classroom behaviors and keep your lessons on track. On ClassDojo, you award students points for positive behaviors and subtract points for negative behaviors.

Each student has a customizable “monster” avatar with his points total displayed. The app lists predefined positive and negative behaviors, but you can also create your own. Parents are able to track their child’s Dojo points in real time, and the app generates weekly behavior reports for parents as well.

3. Socrative



Socrative is a student response system that engages students in the learning process and gives you immediate insight into student understanding. You can pose multiple choice, true/false, or short answer questions to your students through Socrative. Students respond on any device, and you receive immediate data about their responses.

If needed, you can adjust your lesson to address confusion or misconceptions. Socrative also allows you to assign exit tickets, and it features the game Space Race, in which students race spaceships across the screen by answering questions correctly.

4. Google Classroom

Learning management systems like Google Classroom can help you conduct most of your classroom tasks from one convenient location. Through Google Classroom, you can make announcements, administer quizzes or surveys, and assign and grade classwork and homework.



Classroom is integrated with other Google apps such as Google Docs, which automatically saves student work and allows students to collaborate on assignments. Using apps such as Google Classroom can help you stay organized and reduce management issues such as student forgetfulness and lost papers.

5. Stick Pick

Stick Pick allows you to differentiate instruction and manage student responses. You can categorize students based on their proficiency level, and the app will pair each



student to questions that are most suited to his or her ability level. The app also allows you to select students at random, the perfect solution when no hands go up after you ask a question.

Conclusion

Whether your classroom management issue is student engagement, organization, or disruptive behaviors, there’s a classroom management app, tool, or resource for you. ■

This article was originally published by Education Week on September 26, 2017.



Dr. Matthew Lynch

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theadvocate.org, and *The Tech Advocate*, thetechadvocate.org.



Ability Grouping and Acceleration Can Help Teachers and School Leaders

Education is not an easy profession. According to the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, teachers and school administrators view managing resources and addressing individual student needs as the biggest challenges in their jobs. For example, 43 percent of teachers reported in the 2008 survey that they could not effectively teach because their students' learning abilities had become so varied. In the 2009 survey, 86 percent of principals and 77 percent of teachers reported that addressing the individual needs of diverse learners could have a major impact on improving student achievement.

What can educators do?

The above problems do not exist because we do not know how to help students with different learning needs learn. Concerned teachers and school leaders can find guidance from a recent study we published in the Review of Educational Research, "What One Hundred Years of Research Says about the Effects of Ability Grouping and Acceleration on K-12 Students' Academic Achievement: Findings of Two Second-Order Meta-Analysis." Our review of published research results found that most forms of ability grouping and academic acceleration succeed in addressing the needs of advanced learners without harming (and even helping) learning in other students.

Effective ability grouping involves placing students into groups based

on their demonstrated performance instead of their age and can be accomplished in several different ways. Schools can separate students into high-, average-, and low-achieving groups within their classes; place students into small groups across different grade levels; or place students into a gifted and talented program.

Academic acceleration allows access to educational opportunities earlier than typical (such as early entrance to kindergarten) or at a faster pace than normal (such as collapsing two years of math into one year). Some common forms of acceleration include grade skipping, early admission into kindergarten or college, curriculum compacting, dual enrollment, and early graduation. Results suggested that students who accelerated their learning outperformed their nonaccelerated peers of the same age and performed just as well as older students (who had become their classmates) who were not accelerated.

A recent review of state accountability policies in the U.S. showed that only five states track high-achieving students as a specific subgroup. Only four states use student growth for at least half the summative rating given to schools, whereas seven states and Washington, D.C., do not use growth at all. If gifted students are not offered learning opportunities that match their actual learning needs, billions of dollars might be wasted on teaching them what they already know, stagnating their intellectual

growth. Some estimates suggest that 20 to 49 percent of elementary and middle school students perform at least one grade level above their current grade in reading, with 14 to 37 percent scoring at least one grade level above in math. However, if state accountability systems do not use assessments that measure growth for students already beyond grade proficiency, whether such students learn anything will not be recorded. Unnecessarily wasting opportunities to help gifted students learn new material at a pace matching their ability will mean continuing frustration for their teachers and other educators. ■

This article was originally published by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute on February 24, 2017.



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The Rise of Tax Credits: How Arizona Created an Alternative to School Vouchers—and Why They're Spreading



With its recent adoption of a tax credit scholarship program, Illinois became the 18th state to adopt an innocuously named—but highly controversial—policy that critics have described as a “backdoor voucher.”

In some sense, the description is apt. However, by injecting a middle layer into the government’s support of private school tuition, tax credits help avoid some of the legal and political obstacles that have dogged efforts by advocates, like Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, to promote school choice through vouchers.

Perhaps as a result, more students now use tax incentive programs than vouchers to attend private schools in the United States. A federal tax credit is also seen as the Trump administration’s favored approach for promoting school choice at the federal level, although its immediate progress looks increasingly unlikely.

The twenty-year history of this approach offers insights into why it

has taken hold: resistance to legal challenge; limited government oversight, appealing among free market advocates of school choice; and a more politically palatable branding than vouchers.

“This is far better than vouchers—it is easier to pass and easier to uphold,” Trent Franks, a conservative activist and now a U.S. congressman, said in 1999 after Arizona’s state supreme court upheld its tuition tax credit program. “I think this is the direction the country will go in.”

He proved largely right.

Arizona’s pioneering approach

The first tax credit program was passed in Arizona in 1997. Arizona’s constitution, like most other states’, bars public dollars from going to religiously affiliated schools. Proponents knew any plan to promote private school choice would likely end up in court.

So they landed upon an ingenious approach that would make the

initiative more likely to survive legal challenge. Instead of issuing vouchers for private school tuition—like Milwaukee had done since 1990—the state would outsource that role to nonprofits. Those groups would get their money from donations, encouraged by generous tax credits.

It worked like this: An individual could donate up to \$500 to a nonprofit, then get a tax cut for the exact amount they donated. The nonprofit would take the donated money and use it to offer tuition stipends—essentially vouchers—to families that met certain conditions. That system allows the state to promote the tuition subsidy, losing \$500 in revenue for each maxed-out donation, without paying for it directly.

Arizona’s program has since grown, and the state has created a number of other tax credit programs. (This approach is distinct from programs that give individual families tax breaks for educational spending on their own children; Illinois has had such an initiative since 2000, while Minnesota has had one since 1955.)

Arizona's and Milwaukee's policies look similar. In both places, students can receive a subsidy to attend a private school, and it comes at the expense of state revenue. However, crucially, in Arizona, the government never had the money to begin with.

"The point was in part to ensure that these were not government-run programs," Lisa Graham Keegan, who was Arizona's school superintendent when the tax credit program passed, told Chalkbeat. "Those scholarships are completely separate, for both legal and philosophical reasons."

Tax credits: the legal survivors

Private school choice across the country has been inundated with legal challenges, but tax credits have proven remarkably resilient.

Although voucher programs have continued to grow and were upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2002, they have also faced legal challenges in state courts. Colorado's top court, for example, struck down a voucher program in 2015. (The case is currently being reconsidered in light of

a recent Supreme Court decision.)

However, tax credits have never ultimately lost in state or federal court, prevailing in Arizona, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, New Hampshire, and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Tax credits "grew up as a result of saying we need a different vehicle than vouchers in states that have legal issues," said Robert Enlow, the president of EdChoice, an Indianapolis-based group that backs both vouchers and tax credits. (EdChoice is a funder of Chalkbeat.)

Often, cases have been thrown out before substantive arguments can be made, amounting to a win for the programs: Some courts have ruled that private organizations or individuals do not have legal standing to challenge tax credits since they aren't government expenditures.

That was the decision in the 2010 Supreme Court case *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn*, in which the majority said equating government spending and tax credits was "incorrect."

"When Arizona taxpayers choose to contribute to [scholarship organizations], they spend their own money,

not money the State has collected," Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote.

Light regulatory touch proves a blessing and a downside

To Arizona conservatives skeptical of both regulation and the education establishment, the system had an additional benefit.

"The point was in part to ensure that these were not government-run programs," said Graham Keegan, and additionally that "these don't become government dollars."

Nationwide, tax credit scholarship programs appear less regulated than voucher programs, some of which require private school students to take state tests or for schools to undergo financial audits.

Free market-oriented supporters "see neovouchers as much less likely to be regulated and have restrictions—the government strings attached—than a traditional voucher law," said Kevin Welner, a University of Colorado professor who wrote a book on the rise of tax credit programs and is generally critical of them.



A 1998 essay published by the Mackinac Center, a conservative Michigan think tank, made this case explicitly: “Tuition tax credits also create very different effects than vouchers. . . . Vouchers are more likely to be viewed as a rationale for regulating the entity that receives the subsidy.”

This has played out in practice. One analysis compared several voucher programs to a number of tax credit programs and found that, in almost all cases, vouchers were more regulated. Most tax credit systems had few, if any, financial reporting or disclosure requirements. (Notably, Florida’s program, the largest in the country, was the most regulated tax credit initiative.)

Many tax credit programs do not require participating students to take state exams, and if they do, the tests are rarely comparable to the assessments taken in public school. This means that while voucher programs have been widely studied, there is little research on the effect of receiving a tax credit scholarship.

Supporters of this approach argue that such requirements discourage private schools from participating.

Limited oversight, however, has proven something of a political liability, insofar as it has allowed for financial malfeasance. National media have drawn attention to how one prominent politician and advocate for Arizona’s program was also able to profit personally from it, for example.

“I think [limited regulation] is a feature that has some bugs,” said Enlow of EdChoice. “We need to have transparency. The programs, like Florida, which are very transparent and very open to data collection, I think are very important.” He declined to name any tax credit programs that, in his view, lacked

Have an Opinion on the Rise of Tax Credits? On Other Reform Proposals?

Participate in the AAE 2018 National Membership Survey to provide your thoughts on school choice, pension reform, charter schools, tenure, testing, teacher preparation, and much more.

AAE members will receive email invitations to take the survey in March 2018.



sufficient transparency.

The use of the tax code has also raised another concern: Under some tax credit systems, “donors” can actually earn a profit by taking advantage of both state and federal tax breaks.

Selling tax credits

How exactly to brand tax credit programs has been the subject of fierce debates. Opponents have called them neovouchers and voucher schemes, while supporters sometimes portray them as entirely distinct from vouchers.

Tax credits tend to poll better than vouchers, and Welner thinks that may be because it’s less clear to most people what they are.

“People’s eyes get bleary and they tune out when people start talking about tax credits,” he said. “That helps to avoid a situation where they respond to it the same way they respond to a voucher proposal.”

Tax credits are essentially a tax cut, which can be a selling point for some, especially conservatives. Advocates

sometimes also downplay the costs of tax credits to the government.

“Is it foregone revenue? Sure, but it doesn’t mean it’s the state’s revenue,” said Enlow.

The distinctions between vouchers and tax credits, though, may ultimately matter less to lawmakers in states where they are being debated. In Illinois, critics connected tax credits to vouchers, and Democrats were largely opposed to the tax credit initiative that ultimately passed.

“In my experience the arguments have been the same whether it’s a tax credit bill or a voucher bill when you’re talking with legislators,” Enlow said. “There’s some nuances, but it’s still the same.” ■

This article was originally published by Chalkbeat.org on September 18, 2017.



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How Kim Bearden Gave Me a Crash Course

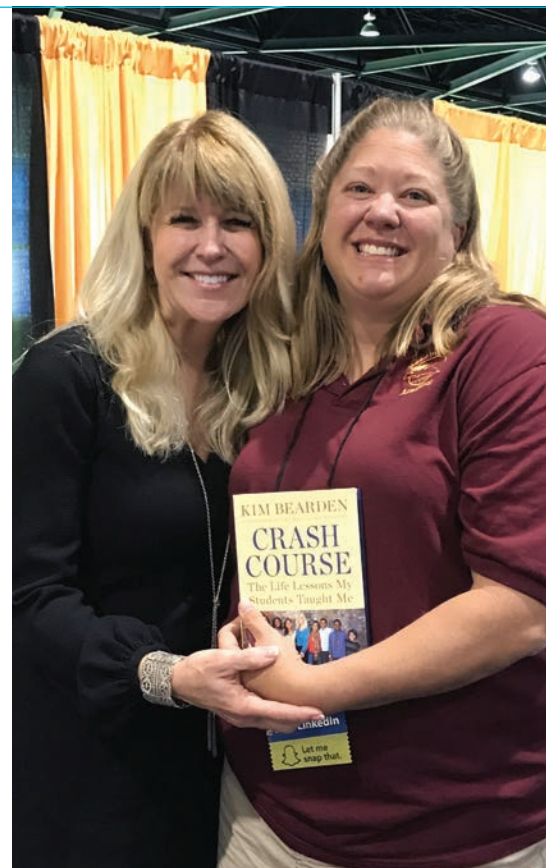
I recently had the pleasure of attending the Florida Charter School Conference where Mrs. Kim Bearden gave the keynote address. Mrs. Bearden is the cofounder and administrator of, and a teacher in, the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta, Georgia. RCA is an innovative, independent school that serves a diverse community of children from all backgrounds. In addition, RCA is a demonstration school—a place where visiting educators engage in a vibrant professional development experience by observing best practices in action before participating in hands-on workshops. In the past nine years, more than 38,000 superintendents, district-level administrators, and teachers from 42 states and 22 countries have participated in the RCA Experience to learn better ways to engage students, promote academic rigor, and create a school climate and culture that promotes success.

Kim Bearden is also the author of a self-help book titled, *Crash Course: The Life Lessons My Students Taught Me*. I purchased this book while at the conference and finished reading it in one day! In this book, Kim, a National Hall of Fame teacher and Milkin Award winner, takes stories from some of the 2,000 students she has taught over the last 30 years to illustrate life lessons she has learned over that time, starting in her very first year with her very first class and a student named Mitchell. Mrs. Bearden describes Mitchell as your typical disinterested student and herself as a very normal first-year teacher. He was hard to manage and she struggled daily to make sure he was ready to advance. She describes

making it through the year as many first-year teachers do, focused on survival. Unfortunately, she found out that eight years after Mitchell left her class, he took his life. In the book, she describes turning her profound sadness and regret into a life lesson. She struggled with wondering whether she could have helped Mitchell more if only she had gotten to know him better. Would this young man be here today if she could have figured out why he was disinterested in school and behaved so badly? Kim emphasizes the power behind building relationships with your students and really getting to know what makes them tick.

Stories like this are placed in each chapter of the book with a connection to a corresponding life lesson. For example, in the chapter titled “Optimism,” there is a story about a very positive young lady named Zharia. Her family happened upon some misfortunes that caused them to have to spend Christmas Eve and Day in a “creepy” motel. Mrs. Bearden explains how sympathetic and even concerned about the situation she was, but Zharia insisted there was nothing to be sorry about because they had a great time and looked at it as an adventure with the family. Over and over, she emphasizes the fact that life is full of positives and negatives, and ultimately, every situation becomes what we perceive it to be and how we respond to it.

Kim Bearden stated in her keynote address that she gets her joy in life from “lifting others up!” She has certainly lifted me up with this book. I found it to be touching, motivating,



and most importantly, inspiring. *Crash Course: The Life Lessons My Students Taught Me* reminds all of us to focus on the important things in life and not get caught up in trivial moments. Anytime I am feeling discouraged or defeated in action, all I have to do is open her book to the cover page where she signed it for me and wrote, “You are significant!” Thank you, Kim! ■



Rhonda Lochiatto is an instructional coach at Reading Edge Academy and a long-time AAE member.

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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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