

# EDUCATION MATTERS

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation



By McKenzie Allen

## There's More Support for School Choice

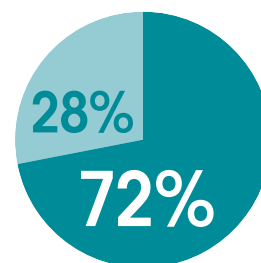
**S**chool choice means new and rewarding opportunities for educators, students, their families, and communities. Results of AAE's most recent membership survey reveal a high level of support for many forms of school choice, including charter schools, tax relief, and open enrollment, as well as changes to the classroom to better prepare students for the work force. This month AAE and AAE's state chapters will celebrate National School Choice Week, an opportunity to highlight the effective options available to students

nationwide and the educators who make them possible.

### Public Charter Schools

AAE serves members in all school types, including public charter schools, and as an organization has expressed support for public charter schools based on the results of previous member surveys. Charter schools are unique public schools that are allowed the freedom to be more innovative while being held accountable for advancing student achievement.

Because they are public schools, they are open to all students, do not charge tuition, and do not have special entrance requirements. Even though the majority of respondents do not teach in a charter school, **more than seventy-two percent of all surveyed members support or tend to support charter schools.** ▼



# Greeting the New Year with a Leadership Transition

My wife and I founded the Association of American Educators twenty-five years ago in response to stirring conversations we had with professional educators across the country. Many teachers were frustrated with the direction the national unions had taken the profession. They longed for a professional association focused on quality benefits, genuine teacher advocacy, and professionalism. I am proud to say AAE has become that association we hoped to create, in large part because of you, our members, who confirmed there is a need for a nonpartisan professional teacher association.

I officially retired from my fulltime responsibilities at AAE at the end of 2018. The board has elevated Colin Sharkey to Executive Director of AAE and AAE Foundation, and he will be serving on the boards of both organizations. I have the utmost confidence in his leadership, and know that with the love he has for educators, this team, and this mission, AAE is in great hands. I will still serve as chairman on the AAE and AAE Foundation boards, and will continue to work to support you as president emeritus.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you so that you may focus on what matters most: your students.

Warm regards,

Gary Beckner  
Chairman and President Emeritus



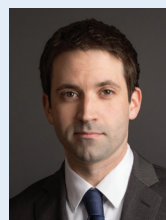
Gary's leadership helped turn an idea into an institution. For more than ten years I have worked alongside Gary to develop ways to better serve you, our members, including doubling job protection benefits without increasing dues, adding a membership discount program, expanding our teacher advocacy efforts, and defending teacher association rights nationwide. You and I are going to continue that work together in the years to come.

It is a privilege to serve America's educators and to lead this unique and vital pair of organizations and this phenomenal team of people. I am grateful to Gary and the board for entrusting me with this responsibility and for their many years of guidance and friendship. As a proud product of America's public schools and of countless unselfish educators—including my mother, Karen—I remain tirelessly committed to the vision of a teaching profession that is student oriented, well respected, and personally fulfilling.

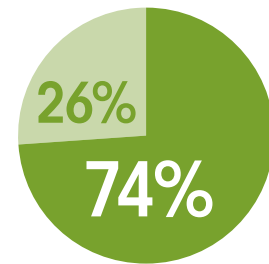
Thank you for your trust and thank you for your devotion to your students.

Sincerely,

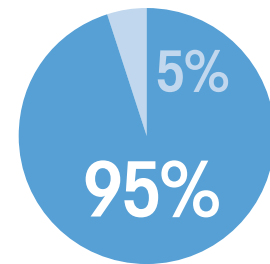
Colin Sharkey  
Executive Director



## Blended Learning and Course Choice



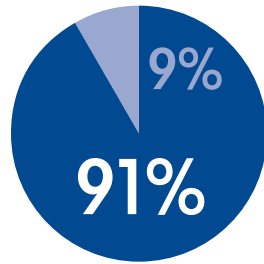
▲ Seventy-four percent of survey respondents expressed some support for a blended learning environment in which students spend part of their day with a teacher and part of their day receiving instruction through technology. Although the concept is exciting to many teachers, AAE members are evenly divided when asked about requiring students to take an online class to graduate from high school.



▲ Ninety-five percent of surveyed members support or tend to support a policy known as course choice. Course choice allows students to craft an à la carte education. Students are able to complete classes through traditional learning environments, online, college/university programs, apprenticeships, and various other providers uniquely tailored to their learning needs. It enables students to access Advanced Placement coursework, career and technical education industry programs, and allows them to earn high school and college dual credit, and industry-based certifications that best fit their needs.

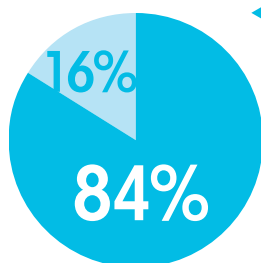


Educators are constantly tasked with preparing students to compete in an everchanging work force. That being said, by 2020 two-thirds of all jobs will require more than a high school diploma, but less than a bachelor's degree. With these future work force demands, states are starting to require computer science courses such as coding to graduate. Our educators know what students need and agreed with this by a resounding ninety-one percent. ▶



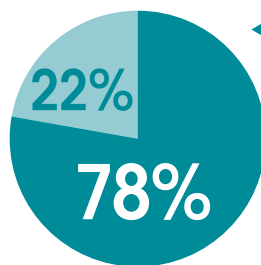
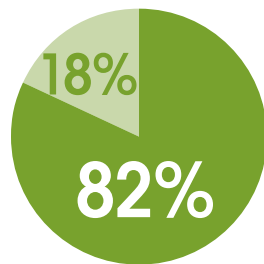
### School Choice Programs

School choice can look different depending on where you are located. Overall, our members were supportive of many policies associated with education choice.



▶ Eighty-four percent of our members surveyed agreed with policies that allow parents to receive state income tax relief for approved educational expenses, such as school tuition, books, supplies, computers, tutors, and transportation.

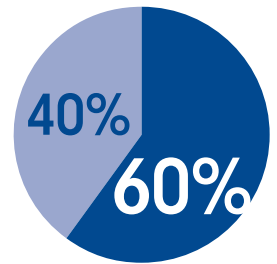
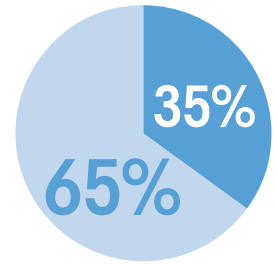
Eighty-two percent of members surveyed support or tend to support Education Savings Account (ESA) Programs. ▶ These allow parents to use some of the funding earmarked for their child to pay for services such as school tuition, curriculum, learning therapies, tutoring, and other education-related expenses.



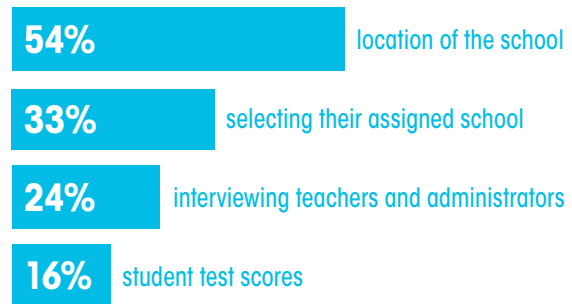
▶ Seventy-eight percent of surveyed members support or tend to support open enrollment. Open enrollment allows families to enroll their children in a public school district of their choosing.

### Members Are Parents, Too

Of those members surveyed, thirty-five percent have ▶ school-aged children. We asked those members if they use any school choice policies (e.g. open district enrollment, course choice, public charter schools, scholarships, etc.) and they were fairly split in their responses: sixty percent do not use choice, and forty percent do use some choice. ▶



We also inquired about how they make the decision on where to send their children and the top responses included: ▼



We love that our members are open to school choice options and feel empowered to make the best choice available for their children. ■



**McKenzie Allen** is director of advocacy, Association of American Educators Foundation. Previously, McKenzie served as the advocacy coordinator at Leadership for Educational Equity and taught in charter schools in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.



# Help Students Meet Their Goals This Year

**A** new year brings with it fresh beginnings, not only just for us, but also for our students. For many students, the first half of the school year may not have gone quite as they had wanted it to. Perhaps their grades weren't what they had hoped, or maybe they were struggling to balance all their extracurricular commitments with their personal life. For others, their school year may be going well thus far, but these students are looking ahead toward long-range planning for the next semester, the summer, or even next year. It may be a college in their sights, athletic try-outs, or a starring role in the next school musical. Whatever a student's situation, the beginning of the New Year marks a perfect time to begin working toward one's goals.

As their educators, we can teach our students so much more than subject-specific material. We can teach them how to achieve their short- and long-term goals, whether they involve focusing on areas of improvement or attempting something new.

**“As their educators, we can teach our students so much more than subject-specific material. We can teach them how to achieve their short- and long-term goals, whether they involve focusing on areas of improvement or attempting something new.”**

First, we must convey the importance of formalizing students' goals. Many people think setting a formal goal is not necessary. Be sure to discuss the research that indicates setting goals not only raises achievement, but also can raise self-esteem.<sup>1</sup> We also can make this research more concrete by giving them examples of celebrities and famous athletes who have benefitted from setting goals.

The next step is to help students distinguish between big, overarching goals and the more actionable goals that will facilitate achieving

larger goals. The overarching goal may be what they actually want, but their actionable goals are the efforts needed or the work that must be done. This process begins by taking the big goal and breaking it down into the smaller skills that contribute to or comprise the larger goal. For example, elementary school students may want improved math scores. For them, they could break this down into mastering 2-digit addition, doing their homework every night, and studying 30 minutes for each test. High-school students may want to make a varsity team next season. They would identify the specific skills they need to work on as their immediate goals, whether those are kicking accuracy or improved speed.

This process of goals assessment almost always requires some guidance and assistance. Many students struggle to think critically about their own work and to identify the specific areas they need to work on and in what order, especially if they haven't done this type of assessment before. Conversely, students may also suffer from the “kitchen sink” phenomena. This occurs when they list more actionable goals than they could ever hope to complete, let alone master. In this most essential of stages, it's especially important for students to have the help of their teachers and

classmates in identifying their weaknesses and prioritizing the ones they really should be addressing.

This is also the point at which to introduce students to the SMART goal format. Using the SMART goal format is one way to ensure that a goal is truly actionable. SMART goals are:

# SMART

Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant Time Based

# GOALS

For example, “study spelling words more” could be a goal created by students who want to improve their spelling test scores. It is to the point, and one would assume “Specific” but it is not a SMART goal, and it’s easy to see how it’s a goal that would easily fall by the wayside. This same intent when translated into a SMART goal becomes the much more actionable, “Practice spelling words by memory for ten minutes every week night.” Students in this case know exactly what they’re going to do and the goal asks neither too much nor too little of them. It dictates the duration of study, when to study, and how to study. Students with this goal are likely able to maintain it and also very likely to improve test scores.

Perhaps the most important role we have, though, comes *after* the goals are identified and written down. It is the role that educators perform so naturally: that of a coach and an encourager. Deciding on goals is relatively easy in comparison to actually achieving them. Students need caring adults in their lives who know what they’re trying

“Deciding on goals is relatively easy in comparison to actually achieving them. Students need caring adults in their lives who know what they’re trying to achieve and how they’re trying to achieve it.”

to achieve and how they’re trying to achieve it. They need these adults to check in on them. Checking in every couple of days can go far in helping students stay on track, as can encouragement when we see them struggling or praise when we see them excel.

As teachers, we are in a unique position to help our students. While they may not always admit it, they look to us for guidance and help both in and out of the classroom. When we help them in working toward what’s important to them, we fulfill our roles as educators. ■

<sup>1</sup>Price-Mitchell, Marilyn, “Goal-Setting Is Linked to Higher Achievement,” *Psychology Today*, [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-moment-youth/201803/goal-setting-is-linked-higher-achievement](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-moment-youth/201803/goal-setting-is-linked-higher-achievement)



**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 to teachers each year through AAE’s National Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant program.



# Why Are We Still Teaching Reading the Wrong Way?



Our children aren't being taught to read in ways that line up with what scientists have discovered about how people actually learn.

It's a problem that has been hiding in plain sight for decades. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, more than six in ten fourth graders aren't proficient readers. It has been this way since testing began. A third of kids can't read at a basic level.

How do we know that a big part of the problem is how children are being taught? Because reading researchers have done studies in classrooms and clinics, and they've shown over and over that virtually all kids can learn to read—if they're taught with approaches that use what scientists have discovered about how the brain does the work of reading. However, many teachers don't know this science.

What have scientists figured out? First of all, while learning to talk is a natural process that occurs when children are surrounded by spoken language, learning to read is not. To become readers, kids need to learn how the words they know how to say connect to print on the page. They need explicit, systematic phonics instruction. There are hundreds of studies that back this up.

However, talk to teachers and many will tell you they learned something different about how children learn to read in their teacher preparation programs. Jennifer Rigney-Carroll, who completed a master's degree in special education in 2016, told me she was taught that children “read

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naturally if they have access to books.” Jessica Root, an intervention specialist in Ohio, said she learned “you want to get” children “excited about what they're reading, find books that they're interested in, and just read, read, read.” Kathy Bast, an elementary school principal in Pennsylvania, learned the same thing. “It was just: Put literature in front of the kids, teach the story, and the children will learn how to read through exposure,” she said.

These ideas are rooted in beliefs about reading that were once commonly called “whole language” and that gained a lot of traction in the 1980s. Whole-language proponents dismissed the need for phonics. Reading is “the most natural activity in the world,” Frank Smith, one of the intellectual leaders of the whole-language movement, wrote. It “is only through reading that children learn to read. Trying to teach children to read by teaching them the sounds of letters is literally a meaningless activity.”

These ideas had been debunked by the early 2000s. It may seem as if kids are learning to read when they're exposed to books, and some kids do pick up sound-letter correspondences quickly and easily. However, the science shows clearly that to become a good reader, you must learn to decode words. Many whole-language proponents

added some phonics to their approach and rebranded it “balanced literacy.”

But they did not give up their core belief that learning to read is a natural process that occurs when parents and teachers expose children to good books. So, while you're likely to find some phonics lessons in a balanced literacy classroom, you're also likely to find a lot of other practices rooted in the idea that children learn to read by reading rather than by direct instruction in the relationship between sounds and letters. For example, teachers will give young children books that contain words with letter patterns the children haven't yet been taught. You'll see alphabetical “word walls” that rest on the idea that learning to read is a visual memory process rather than a process of understanding how letters represent sounds. You'll hear teachers telling kids to guess at words they don't know based on context and pictures rather than systematically teaching children how to decode.

Many teachers learn these approaches in their teacher preparation programs. Publishers perpetuate these ideas, and school districts buy in. However, colleges of education—which should be at the forefront of pushing the best research—have largely ignored the scientific evidence on reading.

# Taking Care of You Is Not Optional



The National Council on Teacher Quality reviewed the syllabuses of teacher preparation programs nationwide and found that fewer than four in ten taught the components of effective reading instruction identified by research. A study of early literacy instruction in teacher preparation programs across the University of North Carolina system found that instructional strategies based on research were mentioned “in a cursory way, if at all, on most syllabuses.” (Some instructors required students to write their “personal philosophies” about how to teach reading.) Kelly Butler of the Barksdale Reading

Institute in Mississippi interviewed more than 100 deans and faculty members of schools of education as part of a study of teacher preparation programs in the state and found that most of them could not explain basic scientific principles about how children learn to read.

It’s not just ignorance. There’s active resistance to the science, too. I interviewed a professor of literacy in Mississippi who told me she was “philosophically opposed” to phonics instruction. One of her colleagues told me she didn’t agree with the findings of reading scientists because “it’s their science.”

There is no excuse for this. Colleges of education have to start requiring that their faculties teach the science of reading. Children’s futures depend on it. ■



## Emily Hanford

(@ehanford) is a senior education correspondent for APM Reports and the producer of the audio documentary “Hard Words: Why Aren’t Kids

Being Taught to Read?” The full 52-minute podcast is available at [apmreports.org](http://apmreports.org). This article originally published in *The New York Times* is based on her reporting for that project.

Recently, we spent a lot of time visiting classrooms in our partner schools, and we noticed time and time again that our teachers do not feel as though they have time to practice self-care. In fact, when we asked what people are doing to take care of themselves, knowing that teaching is stressful, many of our teachers looked at us either on the verge of tears or laughed us off saying things like, “Are you kidding? There’s no time for that!” However, we know that to do well in our chosen career, it is imperative that we take time to practice self-care. So, today we ask you to reflect on three important questions about habits.

**How are you sleeping?** There’s nothing like a good night’s sleep to propel you into having an amazing day at work. We know that a good night’s sleep makes us feel less cranky and more energized, but did you know that sleep also helps your cognition and memory? Take a look at this recent *New York Times* article, “The Simplest Way to Drastically Improve Your Life: More Sleep,” by Tim Herrera for specifics on how sleep deprivation can negatively affect you, while mastering sleep can improve your overall mental and physical health.

**How mindful are you?** Mindfulness is when we are completely centered on a given moment. Someone who is mindful is not multitasking or doing one thing while thinking about another. Sure, mindfulness is not quite

possible (especially for teachers) during many parts of the day. However, you can spend ten, twenty or even thirty minutes of mindfulness as a way to calm your mind and train yourself to be mindful in other situations. A great app for mindfulness practice is Headspace—the Leadership founders use it and have seen tremendous results in our ability to be present and in the moment when needed.

**How often do you get your blood pumping?** In other words, do you fit regular exercise into your week? Exercise is one of the best ways to beat stress. Many physicians suggest 150 minutes per week of exercise, so consider taking five 30-minute walks or three boxing classes over a 7-day week. Get that blood pumping and feel your stress and anxiety begin to melt away.

You deserve to take care of yourself, and your students deserve and crave a teacher that feels healthy and energized. Make this a priority this New Year. ■



**Liz Szporn** is co-founder of Leaderally. She and her partners work to inspire and develop educators to be the best leaders they can be. Leaderally offers online, micro-content courses focused on the foundational leadership skills of communication, management, and strategy. They support teachers and administrators nationwide with personalized, on-demand and virtual live courses that allow quick integration and more consistent, low stakes practice.

# Positively Viral: How #LoveTeaching Week Started

Sometimes big ideas can show up in small packages, even 140-characters small. In 2015, one teacher noticed that teacher resignation letters, of all the things, were going viral. Another teacher sent a call into the Twittersphere that asked whether we could make reasons to love the work go viral instead. A few days later, the first **#LoveTeaching** campaign was born.

Now in its fifth year, **#LoveTeaching** celebrates the many positives of the teaching profession. It is an unapologetic excuse for educators nationwide to

admit—or perhaps reclaim—why they first chose this challenging and rewarding profession. During the week of Valentine’s Day each year, join educators nationwide as we take to blogs and social media to connect and share all there is to love about our vocation.

It was just a few teachers reaching out to some friends at first, but it turns out to be true: There’s nothing more powerful than sharing a love for something.

## How AAE Members Can Participate in #LoveTeaching Week 2019

AAE sponsors **#LoveTeaching** Week each year because now more than ever, we need to share the positives about our profession—with each other and with the next generation of teachers. Take a look at the activities below and pledge to participate.



### Write a Blog Post



You ignite a passion for learning. You introduce children to new worlds. You change lives. You inspire. You heal. You make a difference. Tell your story. Share the inspiration from your classroom. You don’t need to be Ernest Hemingway or Maya Angelou to express yourself in writing. We should

all have at least one story that makes it all worthwhile. Email your story to [editor@aaeteachers.org](mailto:editor@aaeteachers.org) if you are interested in having AAE post your blog.

### Share on Social Media

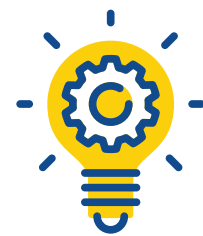


Use the **#LoveTeaching** hashtag to share your passion across your preferred social media platforms. Tag **@aaeteachers** so we can share your post with tens of thousands of fellow educators nationwide.

### Get the Twibbon



Celebrate by changing your profile picture and add our Twibbon to your social media selfie at [is.gd/ltwaac](https://is.gd/ltwaac), courtesy of the **#LoveTeaching** Week team!



Find out more ways to participate, including:

- the B&W Photo Challenge
- Vintage Valentines
- #LoveTeaching Grams

And more at:  
[weloveteaching.org](http://weloveteaching.org)

If you have any questions about how to participate, email [editor@aaeteachers.org](mailto:editor@aaeteachers.org)





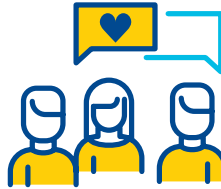
### Treat Your Colleagues

Let #LoveTeaching week be a time you show appreciation for your colleagues and the other staff at the school—especially those who might not hear often enough how much you value them. Bring in a treat, leave gifts in mailboxes, or place a thoughtful note on a colleague’s desk. Take a photo and share with the #LoveTeaching hashtag to inspire others.



### Encourage Your Colleagues to Participate

One of the best ways to treat your colleagues is to have them join the #LoveTeaching Week excitement. Share this page with your colleagues so they, too, can express their passion for teaching.

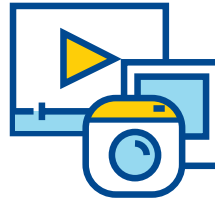


### Twitter Live Chat

There are numerous live chats on Twitter, including a Slow Chat hosted by AAE with daily prompts. Follow @aaeteachers on Twitter to join in.

### Post a Picture Or Video

Social media and smartphones make it too easy to not film a quick testimonial about why you love teaching. No need to get fancy, Oscar nominations are closed—let your passion for teaching be the story. ■



**Gary Abud, Jr.** is a member of AAE’s Advisory Board. Gary was named Teacher of the Year for the state of Michigan in 2014. He is the author of *Science with Scarlett*, a children’s book. In addition to his years as a science teacher, Gary has been a principal, an adjunct professor, a curriculum specialist, and an educational consultant.

## AAE and Our Members Giving Back

Thank you to all of the members who voted for the fifth charity to be part of AAE Foundation’s Member Give Back.



My Stuff Bags Foundation is a national nonprofit headquartered in California that provides new belongings, comfort, and hope to thousands of children each year who are rescued from abuse, neglect, or abandonment throughout the United States.

► Learn more at [mystuffbags.org](http://mystuffbags.org)



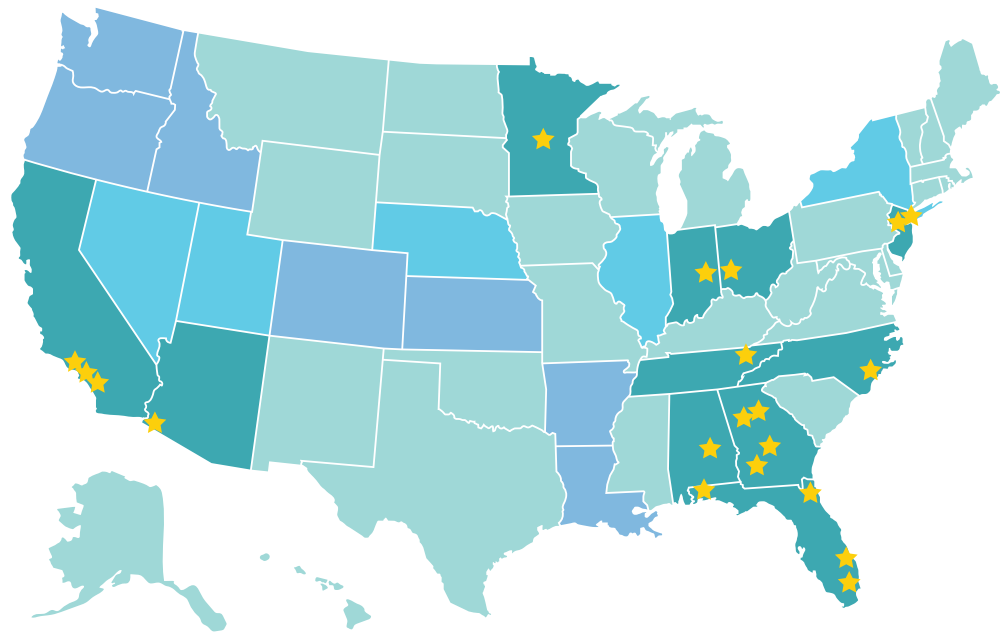
Are you or someone you know interested in joining the AAE family?



Visit [aaeteachers.org/membership](http://aaeteachers.org/membership) to find out why more and more educators are making the non-union choice with AAE membership.

# Saluting AAE Scholarship and Grant Award Winners

**W**e are pleased to announce AAE Foundation's National Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant award winners for the fall 2018 application cycle. These teachers embody our core values and exemplify their dedication to the field through innovative ideas and projects. As always, we had many excellent applications, and we wish we could award them all!



-  Fall 2018 Award Winners
-  Spring 2018 Award Winners
-  States with separate scholarship and grant programs

## THE WINNERS FOR AAE'S NATIONAL COMPETITION: FALL 2018

- Winifred Anderson**  
Sauk Rapids-Rice High School, MN
- Cindy Boesiger**  
Southwest Junior High, AZ
- Brian Cheek**  
Centerville Junior High, IN
- Donna Gill**  
SouthTech Preparatory Academy, FL
- Megan Hayes**  
Cape Fear Center for Inquiry, NC
- Terra Hitchcock**  
Cirrus Academy, GA
- Patti Howell**  
Baconton Community Charter School, GA

- Christina Lane**  
GLOBE Academy, GA
- Pauline Morales**  
Synergy Quantum Academy, CA
- Jessika Olivares**  
Beloved Community Charter School, NJ
- Hannah Pasquale**  
Brywood Elementary School, CA
- Jignasha Patel**  
Thomas Edison EnergySmart Charter, NJ
- Liza Pereles**  
Normandy Village Elementary, FL

- Kriston Peterson**  
Brighten Academy Charter School, GA
- Meredith Powers**  
Berryhill Elementary, FL
- Brian Smith**  
Oak Ridge Schools, TN
- Todd Tayloe**  
Carroll High School, OH
- Nabin Timilsina**  
Avant Garde Academy, FL
- Ben Vallejo**  
Valley Academy of Arts and Sciences, CA
- Keshia Williams**  
Robert E. Lee High School, AL

The Association of American Educators Foundation is committed to offering individual educators a variety of opportunities for improving their effectiveness and student outcomes. The teacher scholarships provide teachers with funding to pursue additional professional training, participate in workshops, or attend specialized conferences.

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, educators! Thank you to everyone who applied. We encourage all of you to submit a proposal in the spring. ■

## 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 explore professional development opportunities and for classroom projects and materials. For more information, visit [aaeteachers.org/awards](http://aaeteachers.org/awards).



# Legal Corner: Ringing in the New Year

**A** new year means a new beginning, complete with resolutions. A resolution is a promise we make to ourselves. It is also a promise to improve some aspect of our lives, whether it is our health, relationships, or our finances. Resolutions also implicitly include a promise to look forward, to learn from the past, and to enjoy the future.



We should do the same in our work lives. Here are a few New Year's resolutions geared toward making your 2019 smoother:

**Resolution 1:** Vow to be independent. Independence is a goal for many of us but what does that mean in the workplace? It means to follow through on assigned tasks, be self-sufficient, and hone classroom management skills.

**Resolution 2:** Vow to be innovative. We recently heard from a teacher who designed a mechanism to use instead of barricading a door in emergency situations. The member's administration was so impressed they shared that design with the superintendent. That's awesome but not all of us can invent the next great gadget. We can, however, practice innovation in how we teach, deliver services, or information.

**Resolution 3:** Vow to be proactive. Report incidents or concerns immediately to administration. Trust your inner voice. If student behavior concerns you, do something about it. Proactive classroom and workplace management skills can help avoid stress and dangerous situations in the future.

**Resolution 4:** Vow to be detail oriented. Document, document, document! Negative interactions with a student, colleague, or even administration should be documented. Teachers should file workers' compensation claims for personal injuries inflicted by students. If a student has threatened you or others, file a police report.

**Resolution 5:** Vow to protect you! You matter! The best protection you can have is a legal team that hears your concerns and acts on them. Recently AAE Legal Services has cleared teachers of false allegations; was able to get union dues refunded following the Janus decision; helped employees obtain necessary ADA accommodations; negotiated favorable separation and resignation agreements and many more successes. We are in your corner. We are here to help.

From all of us at AAE Legal Services, we wish you a happy, successful, and peaceful 2019. ■



**Sharon Nelson** is the director of legal services for the Association of American Educators. In this capacity, Ms. Nelson oversees AAE's legal services team 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.

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