



By Ariel Sacks

Being Wrong Has Made Me a Better Teacher

When I was a brand-new teacher, my advisor from Bank Street College would observe me. Afterward, when I was expecting criticism, she would always point out a few positive moments that I usually hadn't noticed because I was so fixated on what needed work. Her positive observations helped me see a sliver of success so I could build in that direction. I easily identified what had not gone well, and we problem-solved those issues together, but her encouraging observations helped keep me from beating up myself when I wasn't meeting my own expectations.

Eventually, I developed my own version of her positive observer voice, which has been invaluable in a profession that will pull you in a million directions if you let it.

Lately, however, I've noticed a shift in how I hear my internal voice. Some of my most interesting moments as a teacher have arisen when I've found myself being wrong in the classroom. These days, my inclination is not to beat up myself for being wrong but to feel curious or even amused because I hadn't expected to be wrong in this way.

I've started to believe that collecting, observing, and learning from my own flawed judgments is the way forward for me right now. My new-teacher self had needed to build confidence in my capacity to grow; my experienced-teacher self needs to shed ego and embrace uncertainty to keep learning.

Here are just two of the "wrong" thinking moments that have amused and taught me recently.

Flawed Thought #1: I've Done This Well Before, So I Don't Need to Think It Through

One day, after a number of inspired days with students, I had an extra period with one of my classes in the schedule. I thought, "No problem; I don't need to plan this. I have so many tools in my toolkit. My classes are going well. I'll think of something." To be fair, that very thinking has worked before.

I decided to have the students dramatize scenes from the novel they were reading. This is one of my favorite activities, and one that has gone well in the past. I began by asking students to name significant scenes from the book while I listed them on the board.

When they had enough scenes, I hesitated, looking at the list and then at the students. I had an inkling of the organizational trap we were about to fall into but moved forward anyway. I told my 8th-grade students to form their own small groups of two, three, or four, and choose a scene from the list to dramatize. They were to assign each student a character from the scene and practice

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reading the dialogue directly from the book. Later, groups would share their scenes.

There were so many misses in this move, though, that I am laughing to myself as I write this. The class flopped big time in organizing themselves. The biggest flop was that students chose their groups first and then had trouble finding a scene with the right number of characters. The result was that several groups chose the same scene, not because it was so important, but because it was one of very few scenes with exactly three characters. Other groups spun their wheels for half of the period trying to decide on a scene. One group of five students quickly found a scene with exactly five characters, which happened to be super short. They declared themselves “done” preparing after a few minutes, and then made a lot of noise playing around.

All of this annoyed me at first. I was expecting a fun and enriching period, and I was disappointed with the outcome. I could have jumped into a “this class just can’t...” line of blaming. I could have delivered a tirade to the students, which would have been pretty out of touch with the reality in the room. Instead, I reckoned with myself. Who was in charge here? I was. Who created this mess? I did. Why? Because I thought I didn’t need to plan it out. There are a number of small ways I have structured this more successfully for students in the past. Just a little bit of planning would have prevented a lot of trouble.

Once I sorted this out in my mind, I felt a little amused. For some reason, it felt good to tell myself, “You don’t know as much as you think you do.” Recognizing my flaw without making a harsh judgment about my students or myself freed me to manage the situation from

there. I told students to pause, and asked them how they thought the activity was going. They identified all of the problems I was seeing, and though we couldn’t get back the time we’d lost due to the disorganization, students wanted to move forward with the activity, and were basically ready to do so.

The message for me, loud and clear, was that no matter how much experience I have, teaching is still challenging, and every group of students, every period, deserves thoughtful planning.

Flawed Thought #2: I’m Worried Students Won’t Be Able to Do X, So I Assume They Can’t

It was the end of our first novel study this year—the book was *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi. We had also read a shorter text, *The Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes. I asked my students to come up with a list of creative writing assignments based on either text. These included rewriting a scene from another character’s perspective, writing the first chapter of a sequel to this book, or adding a scene in which one of the characters goes to therapy.

Students came up with ideas for both books, and then one student asked, “Could we, like, merge the two worlds?” meaning the worlds created in each of the two texts. My mind was slightly blown by this idea. I never would have thought of this myself; I was also skeptical.

Inside, I was thinking: This is a cool idea, but it won’t work. Lots of students will want to do it because it sounds exciting, but it’s going to be too difficult, and they won’t be able to create anything of quality. Or they will decide it’s too hard and switch assignments, losing time in the process.

I wanted to say, “That’s a great idea, but no, not for this assignment.”

Luckily, my core values as an educator kicked in and dissuaded me from vetoing the idea. In a moment, I decided that in this situation it was worthwhile to show students I was open to their ideas, rather than shut down an ambitious idea without having tried it. The worst-case scenarios I worried about still involved learning, even if they didn’t end up yielding great products. What I said to the class was, “That sounds really cool but really difficult. You can try it if you want.”

Guess what? The “merged-worlds” option was not as popular an assignment as I predicted it would be. More importantly, the handful of students who chose it produced incredible work. Each time I saw this outcome, I smiled to myself, shaking my head a little. I had been dead wrong. I was SO glad that I had not acted on my flawed judgment. The incident came to me as a strong message to not blindly trust my own judgments, especially about what students can and can’t do.

The learning moments keep coming. Much like trying to reach the horizon line, in teaching you never get there, because the more you move toward a goal, new planes keep opening up. In this new plane, being wrong is my best teacher. ■

This article was originally published in Education Week on December 26, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2tRh9Bh>



Ariel Sacks is a middle school language arts teacher and curriculum coach. She is the author of *Whole Novels for the Whole Class: A Student-Centered Approach*.

Member Survey:

Education Research and Resources

We received a fantastic response to our first quarterly survey focused on education research and professional resources, hearing from voices in 47 states, Washington, D.C., and U.S. territories. Thank you for participating. Below you will find an analysis of the responses. We were impressed by the amount of research educators are currently reading and putting into practice in the classroom. Our members continue to innovate and lead the way in education!

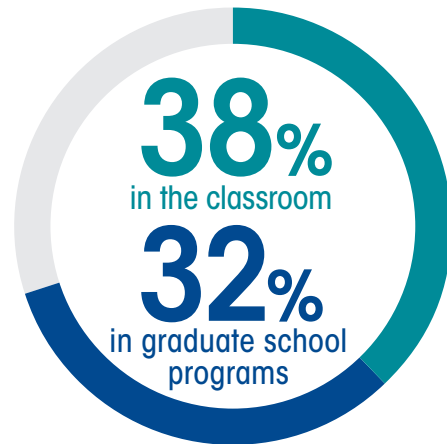


Lack of available time was identified as the major reason for not reading more education research at almost 70 percent. However, more than 44 percent of respondents are reading education research at least every other month.

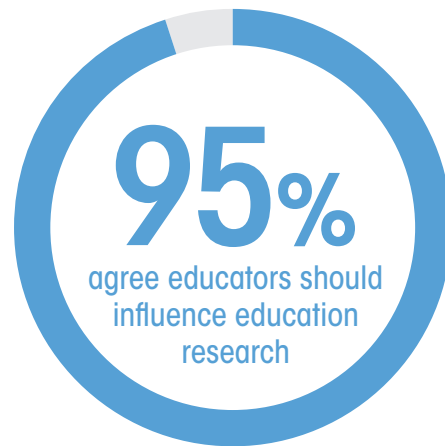


3 out of 4 use education
research in their classrooms

More than 76 percent of respondents are using education research in their classrooms to inform their lesson plans, activities, and actions. Also, greater than 31 percent of respondents have actively participated in education research. This indicates our members are using innovation to find new ways of meeting students where they are and allowing them greater access to succeed.



This correlates to the question we posed to respondents to rank where they interacted with education research. The highest ranking answer was in the classroom, at more than 38 percent. Graduate school programming was the second highest response with 32 percent of the vote.



More than 95 percent of respondents said that educators should be influencing education research in some capacity. Nearby universities' schools of education or your state department of education are excellent places to start to see how you can get involved!

This data will be shared with the U.S. Department of Education and Institute of Education Sciences, along with the media and think tanks across the country. We thank you for sharing your time and valuable insights for this survey. Our next quarterly survey will be available in April, so check your email and continue to share your voice! ■

For more analysis see page 12.

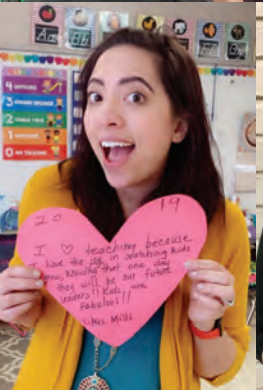
National School Choice Week 2019

We celebrated National School Choice Week January 20 - 26, with events from coast to coast in every type of school setting—public district, public charter, magnet, private, parochial, online, and homeschool. AAE-sponsored events and activities included all-school rallies, assemblies, districtwide celebrations, breakfasts, lunches, presentations, as well as videos, sign contests, door decorations, even a faculty/student volleyball game and of course dances and lots of yellow scarves. With 500 kits donated, that's 5,000 scarves and even more banners and signs! ■



#LoveTeaching Week 2019

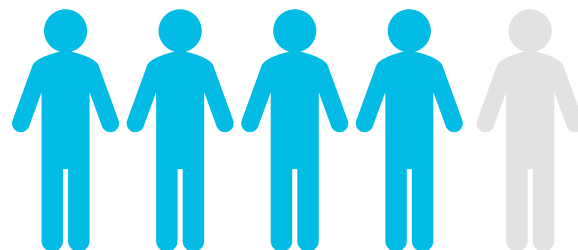
Teachers wore their hearts on their sleeves and everywhere else showing how much they love teaching, their students, and their colleagues during #LoveTeaching Week 2019. We love your love for teaching and we love serving you! ■



National Survey Highlight:

Compensation and Pension Policy

The *Janus* Supreme Court ruling in June 2018 ended requirements for nonmembers to pay union dues. This newly restored freedom of association for all educators may accelerate changes in how the teaching workforce wants to be compensated and organized.



support portable 401(k) option
for incoming educators

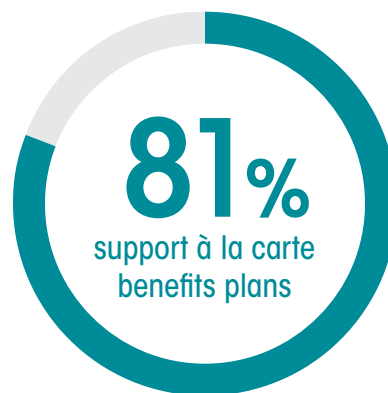


65 percent of members surveyed said they preferred to negotiate their own contracts so they can negotiate a salary and benefits package that best suits their lifestyles. Teachers want to be in control of their contracts based on their unique needs.

The sustainability of public employee pensions leaves many uneasy. Underfunded pension programs and reforms that may not grandfather in existing commitments threaten promises made to educators, but no change in the future is a path to insolvency. 80 percent of surveyed members support or tend to support a choice for incoming educators between a traditional pension plan or the opportunity to invest in a portable 401(k). To hire and retain great educators, states must offer competitive salaries and benefits packages with different types of individuals in mind.



69 percent expressed interest in a "Worker Choice" policy that would allow educators to opt out of the collective bargaining agreement in their districts and negotiate their own salary and benefits package. This reflects a significant departure from what the public is generally told about teacher satisfaction with negotiated agreements and traditional unions.



81 percent of our members surveyed support or tend to support à la carte benefits plans that allow individuals to pick and choose salaries and benefits based on need. An example of this could include a 401(k) plan. Regardless of the reform proposed, educators who made career and family decisions based on commitments should not pay the price of legislators neglecting their responsibilities. ■

Announcing AAE's Declaration of Educator Association Rights (DEAR Rights)

The Association of American Educators stands for educator rights in all schools, regardless of which professional association an educator has joined. We believe our students are best served when those closest to them—their educators—are protected, respected, enfranchised, and empowered.

Unfortunately, a steady campaign of misinformation and confusion regarding educator rights and where those rights come from is jeopardizing educators' jobs, finances, and values. It is getting worse in the aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Janus v. AFSCME* (2018).

Educators are being misinformed that they must join a union or pay a penalty, that they will lose compensation and benefits without union membership, that they cannot join a professional association like AAE, that they won't receive a raise unless they are a union member, that they cannot bring counsel to a disciplinary meeting, and other untruths. This misinformation does a tremendous disservice to educators and threatens the profession.

To combat this growing problem, our team, led by AAE's Director of Legal Services Sharon Nelson, a civil rights attorney with more than twenty years of experience, drafted ten fundamental educator association rights.

I am proud to share this list with you. These rights protect each educator's decision regarding association membership which we believe should be informed, active, and voluntary; they protect educator compensation and benefits; and they protect due process for educators.

In the coming months we will work to publicize this valuable new shield serving all educators. You can be proud that your association is affirming rights that empower all educators, regardless of which association they join.

Enclosed in this issue is a special pull-out poster version of this new document, the **Declaration of Educator Association Rights**. A full version of the document, which includes an explanation of each right and a listing of relevant statutes and case law, is available at aaeteachers.org/rights. If you feel any of your rights on this list have been threatened, please contact our legal services department at 1-800-704-7799. ■

AAE Legal Services Has You Covered

Are you an active professional member with a legal question? AAE employment rights assistance gives members access to legal counsel at the onset of workplace issues. Contact AAE legal services at **1-800-704-7799** to begin receiving the advice you need, today!



Colin Sharkey is the executive director of the Association of American Educators and the Association of American Educators Foundation. Colin oversees all operations of AAE, AAE Foundation, and its growing network of state chapters. Colin previously served as executive vice president, directing operating procedures that advance AAE's objectives and policies.

DECLARATION of EDUCATOR ASSOCIATION RIGHTS

Professional association or union membership is an important decision. You are entitled to make the decision about association membership for yourself with accurate information and without fear of reprisal by a union or employer.

The recent restoration of this right to all public educators in *Janus v. AFSCME* (2018) has led to some confusion, misinterpretation, and misinformation about what impact your membership decision can and cannot have.

This document provides general information and is not intended to offer legal advice about specific situations.

If you believe your rights related to abstaining from union membership are being violated, please contact your professional association, a public interest law firm, or an attorney. If you believe your rights related to voluntary union membership are being violated, including discrimination against you by an employer, please contact your union attorney.

Your employer cannot discriminate against you based on your union membership status.

1

The terms of the negotiated agreement apply to you regardless of your union membership status.

2

You have the right to join a union.

3

You cannot be required to join a union.

4

Nonmembers cannot be required to pay union dues or fees.

5

You have the right to join a professional association.

6

You have employment rights regardless of your union membership status.

7

You have the right to a representative at a disciplinary meeting.

8

The *Janus* ruling applies to all public employees in unionized workplaces, not just agency-fee payers.

9

The *Janus* ruling does not prohibit unions from offering local-only or contract-only membership categories.

10

The complete version of this document is available at **[aateachers.org/rights](https://www.aateachers.org/rights)** including an explanation of each right and listing relevant statutes and case law.

The Association of American Educators, as a national membership association, stands ready to take legal action on behalf of members to defend these rights and others for all educators.

This document was prepared by Sharon L. Nelson, Director of Legal Services, Association of American Educators, for AAE members and made public at **[aateachers.org/rights](https://www.aateachers.org/rights)** for all public educators. Ms. Nelson is a civil rights attorney with twenty years of employee rights advocacy. Licensed in Nevada and California, Ms. Nelson has practiced extensively in all state and federal courts in those jurisdictions.

Due to the nature of this content, the document will be updated to reflect continuing developments in legislation and litigation, and is not intended to offer legal advice for specific situations. If you believe you need specific legal advice, please contact an attorney.

As a 501(c)(6) professional association, the Association of American Educators does not seek to replace, challenge, or undermine a duly-certified union from operating within the law. Nothing in this document is intended to question or challenge a local union's status as the recognized bargaining agent, or to prevent a local union from operating, bargaining, grieving, recruiting members, or retaining members legally.

02/2019



Legal Corner: Will Your New Year's Resolutions Bloom?

Spring is just around the corner. Throughout our country, spring is a time for new growth. Seeds previously planted begin to germinate and sprout. Spring babies abound in the animal kingdom. Grass grows, flowers bloom, and trees blossom.

What will your spring be like? Did you “plant” and nurture the resolutions we discussed in the last issue of *Education Matters*? If so, you should see those resolutions “bloom” and grow, allowing you to focus on your students and not workplace stress. They should become part of your professional life.

As you continue to grow in your career, pay close attention to the following resolutions:

Vow to be proactive. It is important to continue to be proactive. Report incidents or concerns immediately to your administration. Trust your inner voice. You have the right to work in a safe environment. You also have the right to use your voice to raise concerns about dangerous situations. You have the right to be protected by any negotiated agreement regardless of your union membership. Follow that agreement and assert your rights. Contact AAE for help in asserting those or other rights. Document, as discussed here.

Vow to be detail oriented. Document, document, document should be your standard practice! You have the right to be protected. You have the right to document meetings with your administration or to bring a representative with you who can document for you. You have the right to file workers’ compensation and other claims regardless of your union membership. You have the right to reach out to AAE Legal Services for help with documentation or any other concern.

Vow to protect you! You matter! The best protection you can have is a legal team that hears your concerns and acts upon them. We are in your corner. We are here to help.

From all of us at AAE Legal Services, we wish you a happy spring. May you continue to grow! ■



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 twenty years.

Here's Why I Became a Teacher and How One Philadelphia Summer School Student Became My Inspiration

In honor of #LoveTeaching Week, which started on Valentine's Day and ended the following Thursday, I want to share my story of why I chose to teach and how one student became my personal inspiration to continue working tirelessly for teachers and advancing student outcomes.

I officially started my teaching career in fall 2011 in Philadelphia, but I had been pursuing a career in education long before that. My mother, a full-time educator for more than 39 years who still volunteers twice a week in an elementary classroom, taught me that education is the key to life and that the work she did in her classroom allowed others to find their paths to happiness. I was hooked.

I spent evenings during high school tutoring younger students and went on to pursue an education degree in college. After receiving my elementary and reading licenses in Indiana, I traveled east to teach with Teach for America. As a young educator,

I thought, what better way to serve my nation than to teach in a place where I am needed the most? But it was also what I needed most. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to educate and coach students from backgrounds far different from my own. The more than 500 students I have had the pleasure to teach have taught me more than I could have ever imagined. The intersections and lines of difference have made me the person I am today.

My first educator assignment with TFA was in a summer school chemistry class at Frankford High School in Philly. That first day, I was terrified, as 20 students ranging in age from 16 to 23 stared back at me as they shuffled through an assignment on the Periodic Table of Elements. We were asked to have one-on-one conversations with each student, and I took that very seriously, learning unique things about each student.

One student in particular struck me. A young man, very tall and athletic, sat at the desk across from me, and I asked why he was in summer school chemistry. I expected the same answer I had received over and over: "I failed." But this time, it was different. His eyes welled up with tears and he told me he had chemistry first period, but due to public transportation issues, he often had not been able to get to school on time



and had been often marked absent or late. This resulted in a failure for the course, and worse, a lack of a future. You see, this young man was a football star, but because of his poor grades, he was not going to be allowed to play during his senior year and his coach refused to send his highlight tapes to college scouts. This huge kid was just sobbing across from me without any hope for his future.

I didn't know what to do. This raw, genuine emotion was not something I expected from a student who barely even knew my name.

I tried to calm him down, and we worked out a plan. He would do his best to be early everywhere he went. He would pass his summer school classes, history and chemistry, and we would talk to the coach about his improvements at the end of the summer. Just having one educator in his corner changed that young man's perspective. He got it together and passed summer school, and I held up my end of the bargain.



Analysis on Education Research and Resources

Unfortunately, I lost touch after we parted ways that summer, but he was the catalyst for my work now. I will never stop fighting for students to have access, opportunities, and multiple pathways to success. In my classroom and in my life, there are no dead ends.

This is why I #LoveTeaching. Whether they teach in rural county schools, urban charter schools, or every type of school in between, teachers make all the difference in the success of a child. They do not do it for fame or the money, but for the future of our world, the light-bulb moments, and the success of others. We teach because we know what is at stake. We teach because we love these students, these communities, and these families. We teach because without educators, we would have nothing.

Educators are change makers. I thank every educator from whom I have been blessed to learn and to work with during the last 30 years. Let an educator know how much of an influence he or she has had on *your* life. Who knows? Maybe that teacher will share the impact you made on his or her life. ■

This article was originally published in The 74 Million on February 21, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2tQfFHq>.



McKenzie Allen is director of advocacy at the Association of American Educators Foundation and a former educator. She has spent much of her career working in education policy and advocacy that focuses on more equitable outcomes for students and teachers across the United States. She currently resides in Baltimore.

In our first quarterly survey, we identified patterns in how teachers consume educational research. It should surprise no one that there is a gulf between education researchers and classroom teachers (practitioners), but there is evidence that this is not as wide as generally assumed among our members. Most members report using education research in their classrooms and consuming education research on occasion.

How can we best support teachers and facilitate access to the latest research? We provide you the research in short, consumable components. The number one reason teachers report for not being able to stay up-to-date with education research is lack of time. The intensive time required to source, read, evaluate, analyze, compare, and implement the dense and data-driven content in many education studies all on one's own is often more than many teachers have on their already full plates. This is a barrier that AAE can help to overcome.

We are committed to aid teachers in their searches for research-backed and -vetted classroom resources. All too often the time-strapped teacher may turn to a Google search or social media for classroom ideas. However, with a more curated selection of pedagogically sound practices and techniques, which are also licensed for reuse, the teacher's time is already more efficiently spent with higher gains to be achieved in the classroom.

Finally, we help teachers locate the research that is most relevant to them. When teachers are looking for research, they require it to be specific to the topic they're teaching and address the methods they're likely to use in class. Teachers are especially interested in information about how to efficiently implement differentiation and how to adopt best practices for classroom management.

Teachers want access to sound educational research that meets their needs and is applicable to their students' needs, and our role is to facilitate that access. ■



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.

Meet the AAE 2019 Advocacy Fellows



During the last year, the AAE Foundation has been building new member programming around educator advocacy. Our goals are to encourage and train you, our nation's educators, to influence policy through advocacy and education. This is how you will advance our profession and transform the lives of more students for the better. We believe now is the perfect time to consider getting involved in educational advocacy.

We are pleased to announce our first cohort for AAE's Advocacy Ambassador Fellowship. These educators from across the country are dedicating time throughout the 2018-2019 school year to advocate for policies and issues that directly impact their students, communities, classrooms, and themselves. The fellows receive monthly one-on-one coaching calls, participate in trainings with their cohort, conduct various advocacy projects including published op-eds, meetings with legislators, testifying before committees, and more. Also, fellows will foster and build the skills and knowledge for advocating and organizing, increased familiarity with policy and bill tracking, and growing their network and sphere of influence.

Like you, these fellows share a commitment to AAE's mission and vision. They are harnessing the motivation to advocate for policies that provide more equitable outcomes and opportunities for educators and students. In the first month, we have already had two op-eds published and a testimony on a bill hearing at a state capitol. We cannot wait to see what else this year has in store! Congratulations and welcome! (If you would like to learn more about AAE's advocacy project, contact mckenzie@aaeteachers.org)



Bridget Allison Colorado

Bridget Allison currently serves as the first through fourth grade math interventionist at AXL Academy in Aurora, Colorado. The majority of her career has been in teaching math. Teaching math is her passion. Her other roles include curriculum support as well as in administration. "I love being involved in a career that

allows me to give back to my community through helping students," said Bridget. "I loved school as a child and consider myself to be a life-long learner." Bridget notes, "I am proud to say that I am well versed in using data to analyze and plan for differentiated learning. I also love and have experience in assisting teachers with differentiated math instruction and small group planning."

In her spare time, she enjoys aerobics classes, symphony concerts, and hiking.



T. Cedric Anfield Georgia

T. Cedric Anfield is originally from Stockton, California. He moved to Daytona Beach, Florida, to attend Bethune-Cookman University where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with a minor in Biology. Upon graduation, he moved to Atlanta, Georgia, and worked with the Department of Behavioral Health serving as a community support specialist. He began his teaching career as a pre-K teacher in Fulton County as well as gaining infant and toddler experience. His first position with Rise Grammar Charter School was as a kindergarten instructor. Cedric now heads the Physical Education Department at The Rise Schools.



Lydia Dillon Arkansas

Lydia Dillon is a passionate second-grade teacher at David O. Dodd Elementary School in Little Rock, Arkansas, where she has taught for the last four years. She graduated from The University of Central Arkansas with a Bachelor of Science in Education degree in Early Childhood Education in 2014. Lydia is certified in Cognitively Guided Instruction and is trained in Kagan Cooperative Learning. In her free time she enjoys volunteering as the second grade girls' leader at her church. Lydia currently resides in Little Rock, Arkansas.



Amy Goldberg New Jersey

Ms. Amy Goldberg is an enthusiastic teacher with the iLearn Charter Schools. She is currently teaching special education mathematics, directing the school’s musical, and is a member of her school’s child study team at the Passaic Arts and Sciences Charter Middle School in Passaic, New Jersey. Ms. Goldberg is a graduate of Rowan University where she earned teaching certificates in elementary education and TOSD, as well as earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Studies for Math and Language Arts.

Amy began her teaching career in Taiwan teaching first grade for two years at a private bilingual school. She also has teaching experience at public schools, as well as a year of experience at a private dyslexia school. Amy loves playing music and doing crafts. She is currently working toward her personal trainer certificate and recently married Eric, a flight instructor she met while in Taiwan. Amy hopes she can share her cultural awareness with all of her students and encourage them to reach for all of their dreams.



Roseangela Mendoza New Jersey

Roseangela Mendoza has been with The Ethical Community Charter School (TECCS) since 2011. Ms. Mendoza graduated from New Jersey City University in 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts in History degree. Upon graduation, she began her career in traditional public schools teaching various grade levels. During this time, she volunteered with several North Jersey organizations including the Salvadoran Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Salvadoran Consulate of New Jersey and Delaware. Her role as the director of public relations and her dedication to the Salvadoran community were recognized by several local newspapers and led to Ms. Mendoza being named “Salvadoran of the Year” in 2011.

Since her arrival at TECCS, she has been a teaching assistant and head teacher. In 2013, Ms. Mendoza became the community outreach & service learning coordinator and anti-bullying specialist. From 2014-2016, Ms. Mendoza received a mayoral appointment to the Ridgefield Anti-bullying Committee. In 2016, Ms. Mendoza joined the Middle School team as the middle school social studies teacher as well as working with the school’s marketing team.

When not working or volunteering, Ms. Mendoza enjoys spending time with her family.

“My high school band teacher once said to me, ‘Are you thinking about becoming a teacher? You are great at helping others.’ Then, it hit me. Yes! I do want to become a teacher! Very early on, these teachers, without realizing, planted a seed for a passion that I had no idea I would have.”

Op ed by Roseangela Mendoza,
Newark Star-Ledger March 9, 2019
<https://bit.ly/2TEknHy>



Luke Henke Kansas

Luke Henke is enjoying his ninth year teaching mathematics in southeast Kansas. Passionate about developing youth into leaders who can navigate change, Luke focuses on developing growth mindset, persistence, and integrity in his students. In his effort to be a role model for continued growth, he hopes to obtain his doctorate in educational leadership by 2020. As a project-based learning and standards-based grading trailblazer for his school, Luke helps students focus on what matters, and engages them through new, innovative ways to reach a generation often labeled unreachable. He coaches cross country, scholars’ bowl, and the math team, which all provide avenues to develop students beyond the classroom. When he isn’t challenging his students or himself academically, he enjoys kayaking, construction, and computer gaming. What he enjoys most of all is spending time with his wife and little boy.





Angela Sheffield  Arkansas

Angela Sheffield was born in Mountain Home, Arkansas, and has lived throughout the United States, so she knows what it is like to move from school to school. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Education degree from Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City with certifications in special education and history. Throughout her career she added certifications in PK-fourth grade general education and fourth- through eighth-grade English, social studies, math, and science. She has been an educator for twenty-six years, teaching in Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, and Indiana. Sheffield earned her Master of Science in Education degree in reading at the University of Central Arkansas and achieved National Board Certification in the area of Middle Level Generalist. She will graduate with her Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis in May. In 2017, Sheffield moved to Lafayette, Indiana, where she teaches seventh-grade language arts. She serves on various committees focused on increasing student success. She loves reading and traveling, but most of all, spending time with her husband, Matthew, and children, Emily (who attends Vanderbilt Law School) and Elijah (completing his degree in advertising this May from Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas). Those three are her cheerleading section in everything that makes life an adventure.



Nabin Timilsina  Florida

Nabin Timilsina is a certified professional science educator based in Miami, Florida. After graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biological Sciences from the University of Louisiana at Monroe, he was a science teacher at one of the most challenging inner-city schools in North Miami. His passion for teaching, leadership, making a difference in the lives of children, and giving back to the community propelled him to take this opportunity. His consistent hard work, determination, and love for his students established him as a highly proficient educator within his first year of teaching.

Mr. Timilsina has established a successful track record as a highly effective science educator by working at a wide range of schools. A Harvard trained aspiring school leader, Mr. Timilsina is currently pursuing a joint program Master of Arts Doctorate in Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction/NASA Endeavor STEM Leadership Certificate, a collaboration of U.S. Satellite Laboratory, Teachers College, Columbia University, and Adams State University.



John Unger  Arkansas

John Unger was born and raised in Arkansas. He attended the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville and earned a Bachelor of Arts in History degree in 2003. Unger accepted a men's basketball coaching position at Louisiana State University in Shreveport. While working at LSUS, Unger earned his Master of Science in Education degree. Unger spent seven years in Northwest Louisiana, three years at LSUS, and four years as an instructor in the Behavioral Science Department and men's basketball coach at Bossier Parish Community College.

In 2010, Unger began his public school teaching career in Decatur, Arkansas. During his time with the Decatur School District he has served as teacher, coach, dean of students, acting principal, athletic director, and alternative learning director. Unger has been a leader in school innovation in rural, diverse districts across Arkansas, and has presented at several conferences on school redesign. Unger serves on the Harding University-Northwest Arkansas Advisory Board for Education, is a member of the Arkansas Educators Association, and serves on the Northwest Arkansas Educational Cooperative Teacher Committee.

Unger is married and has two children. He currently resides in Siloam Springs, Arkansas.



Amanda Whittington  Georgia

Amanda Whittington is an educator, instructional technologist, and passionate writer, with experience in early childhood, elementary, and secondary education. A 2012 Honors Graduate of Elizabeth City State University, in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, Amanda has served on many committees, participated in many service projects, and taught grades six through twelve. While she has taught in North Carolina and Southern Georgia, she is currently a seventh-grade teacher at Leadership Preparatory Academy in Dekalb County, Georgia. Ms. Whittington also serves as an instructional technology liaison for the school. From an early age, her goal has been to improve the lives of others through the written word and the implementation of technology. Ms. Whitt, as most call her, believes that fostering innovation, combined with love and creativity, is the true recipe for success. ■

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Spotlight on AAE Advocacy Fellow: LynDel Randash

We are excited that our inaugural cohort of AAE Fellows is diving right in, doing the challenging, and sometimes scary, work needed to advocate for teachers and students. At the first opportunity to testify before a state senate education committee, our Fellow, LynDel Randash, of Colorado didn't hesitate. Here are some of her thoughts about her experience.

To prepare for my testimony before the Colorado Senate Committee on Education, I wrote down my thoughts, and then organized them and typed them. I was adding to the testimony right up until just before I testified. I also researched the Colorado teacher shortage and salaries as well as the bill itself and studies that supported the Senate bill. I have been a teacher for more than twenty years, and it was exciting and a bit scary to testify! I am comfortable teaching and interacting with large groups of students; however, in front of adults, it's a different ball game!

It was very disappointing when the bill did not pass through the committee. I would definitely testify again if it were a bill that I supported. It is important to me because everyone has a voice and by testifying, my voice was heard. I would encourage other educators to support legislation pertaining to education by testifying or becoming involved with the legislative process. Together we can make a difference in Colorado and across the nation!



LynDel Randash Colorado

Ms. LynDel Randash began her career in education with the Bilingual Education Department on the Ft. Peck Indian Reservation in Poplar, Montana, as a computer lab instructor. She transitioned to teaching positions at the fifth-grade and sixth-grade levels. After several years there, she moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado, where she taught in Harrison School District 2. During this time, she earned a Master in Education degree with a focus in Technology and Curriculum. This opened the door for a position as a technology curriculum specialist. When this position was eliminated, she returned to the classroom. Her current position is as a K-5 computer/reading teacher at Roosevelt Charter Academy in Colorado Springs. ■

