

By Chester Finn, Jr.

## Deconstructing Teacher Turnover

**D**uring the news lull between Christmas and New Year's Day, the *Wall Street Journal* published an alarmist piece about the high rate of teachers and other public educators quitting their jobs. Reporters Michelle Hackman and Erick Morath examined Labor Department data on employee turnover during the first ten months of 2018 and found that educators were exiting at the rate of 83 per 10,000 per month, which would work out to almost one in ten over the course of a full year. This, they noted, was the most since job departures began being tracked in 2001, although they cautioned that it didn't necessarily mean all were quitting public education altogether; some number of them were changing schools, relocating, etc.

It's worrying, though, especially when this turnover is combined with the teacher shortages that many districts (as well as charter and private schools) are facing, creating an absolute inability to fill some jobs with qualified individuals.

Yet making sense of these data requires some context and additional explanation. The journalists provided a bit of the former when they noted that the overall rate of turnover



among all American workers during that period—231 per 10,000 per month—was almost triple the rate for public educators. This, too, turns out to be a seventeen-year high. And it's a lot worse in other fields. Whereas close to 2 percent of educators quit monthly, other state and local employees have been leaving their jobs at almost twice that rate; for those in the “leisure and hospitality” fields, it's closer to thrice.

Part of what's going on in public education is, of course, the same as what's going on throughout the American economy. First, unemployment is very low right now and jobs are plentiful, so if you're bored, restless, mobile, or ambitious, it's

a good time to seek a better job, whether the job is in a nicer, richer, safer, or more convenient school, or in another field altogether. Second, tons of baby boomers are retiring, which produces more vacancies to fill—and fewer veterans to fill them. And third, we're living in an era of job-hopping, career-sampling, and impulse-buying, a time when the typical college graduate works at a bunch of different things before—if ever—“settling down” in something akin to a permanent career. Twenty-somethings going into education are like their agemates going into anything else: I'll try it and see if I like it. If I don't, or if I'm just keen to try something else, I can happily move on.



The larger part of what's going on, however, are the inevitable consequences—unintended, to be sure—of the education industry's conspicuous failure to anticipate and forestall the HR woes that beset it today. From where I sit, five such failures are particularly notable.

There's no mechanism for calibrating teacher supply to the demand via either the preparation pipeline or the compensation system. That's why we face (in most places) a surfeit of generic elementary teachers but a shortage of special-ed, math, and science teachers. Most of our colleges of education encourage people to enroll in whatever they think suits them, not the fields with particular shortages, and public education's union-enforced refusal to pay differentially means that the middle school gym teacher earns as much as the high school physics teacher. Given what's going on in the rest of the economy, that's certain to result in a plentitude of the former and a dearth of the latter.

Although teachers in most places aren't badly paid when one calculates their compensation on a per-day or per-hour basis (factoring in those six-hour school days and long vacations), and those who stick

with it are generally well taken care of when it comes to benefits, it cannot be said that public school teaching is a high-paying field. Even as per-pupil spending on public education has doubled and tripled over the decades, teacher salaries in most places have barely kept pace with inflation. (In some places, they've lagged behind; in some prosperous and heavily taxed communities, they've forged ahead.) The main culprit here, as I've written before, is our long-standing proclivity to hire more teachers rather than better compensating those we've got. Insofar as paying more generous salaries is a way to induce people to stick with jobs, and to attract abler, better-qualified people into those jobs, American public education has made decades of bad decisions, swelling its teaching ranks—nearing four million now—instead of settling for larger classes in return for smarter, abler, longer-serving—and more generously compensated—instructors.

The unions have encouraged that swelling while blocking the kind of professionalization they say they want for their members. Behaving more like teamsters or steelworkers than lawyers, accountants, or musicians, they have insisted that all teachers be treated alike and paid alike; that there be no differentiation or compensation on the basis of performance; that everyone be retained forever—and that weak performers be endlessly defended and protected. That's no way to earn professional respect or public admiration.

Schools and districts, too, have failed to structure themselves in ways that make the most of a high-turnover situation. Other fields—most obviously the military—do a competent job of integrating short-timers with career staff, blending the freshness, energy, and relatively low cost of those who

just do it for a few years with the wisdom, experience, mentoring, and leadership potential of skilled veterans. However, not K–12 education. Sure, some of the top charter networks have figured this out, and yes, some smart districts are engaging instructional coaches to soup up the newbies—although always by adding more staff, which squeezes everyone's pay. In most places, the beginner teacher is trying to figure it out in a classroom down the hall from a veteran who has mastered it.

Finally, and most obviously, we throw endless unpleasantness into the paths of teachers, starting with policies that make it impossible for them to discipline (or evict) the malefactors in their classrooms. Inconveniences such as no classroom (or desk or computer terminal or parking space) of one's own. Parents who don't do their part—and complain when the teacher is too strict or doesn't give enough A's. Politicians who meddle with curriculum. And administrators (and policymakers) whose overemphasis on test scores in reading and math squeezes out other content, even as they promote into one's class kids who are far below grade level.

Who in their right mind would want to stick with such a job? ■

*This article originally appeared in the Thomas B. Fordham Institute's Flypaper on January 3, 2019. It has been abridged for space. The complete article is available at <https://bit.ly/2URvoGg>.*



**Chester E. Finn, Jr.**, scholar, educator, and public servant, has devoted his career to improving education in the United States. At Fordham, he is now distinguished senior

fellow and president emeritus. He's also a senior fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution.

# Legal Corner Case Studies: Legal Services—The Real Deal

**A**AE's Legal Services Department is the real deal. We provide help on the real issues you face, from responding to general questions to managing your Friday afternoon crisis. Legal Services has successfully assisted members with their contracts, transfers, resignations, and severance agreements. Members reach out to us about their work duties, criminal matters, unemployment, workers' compensation, and problems with colleagues. We are proud of the assistance we provide on behalf of members. We are also proud of the fact that we get results. Here are a few examples of recent victories our members have had with AAE Legal Services.



## Case Study No.1

### Don't mess with a paycheck!

A member contacted us recently that he believed he was being denied a significant pay raise based on the employer's allegation that he did not complete the necessary credits to move up a step in salary. We first had to battle access because while the local union had done nothing to help the member, it didn't want AAE involved either and tried to block our efforts to meet with administration. After getting the union to back down, we turned our attention to the administration.

We kept getting the cold shoulder so we went straight to the top and not only got an audience with the right people but managed to convince them, with the member's help, that the salary of the member should be adjusted. It was a monumental win

for the member to receive the annual pay raise of \$6,000 he had earned.

## Case Study No.2

### Don't mess with our members!

Another recent accomplishment involved a member who was clearly experiencing discrimination because the member did not belong to the union. The member's contract was delayed and the position held by the member for nine years was up for grabs, simply because our member didn't belong to the union, it seems. Legal Services got involved and reminded the school district of its obligations under *Janus* and other case law to treat all teachers equally regardless of membership status. After just a few exchanges, the district realized it was on shaky ground, backed down, and imme-

diately finalized the contract for the member. Not only were we pleased with the result, but also the member got to return for a 10th year of teaching in a loved and well-earned position.

These case studies are just two examples of how we support you. Don't wait to reach out if you have a legal concern or issue. We're proud and honored to be on your side. ■



**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.

# Celebrating Educators: Teacher Appreciation Week 2019

**E**ven though we appreciate the big and little things our members do every day for their students, their colleagues, and their entire educational community that has really become a second family, we know the importance of taking a special, official opportunity to salute you and say loudly, THANK YOU!

This May 6–10, for Teacher Appreciation Week, we took that extra opportunity. We left surprises and treats for educators in schools throughout the country. We threw parties and we celebrated because we know that there is nothing little or insignificant about the work you do and the lives you impact. Your passion and your commitment to your students and the education profession are boundless. ■





“We believe that **increasing** teacher diversity **elevates** the teaching profession and **improves** the lives and outcomes of **all students.**”

## AAE Foundation's Letter on Teacher Diversity

I am pleased to share with you that the Association of American Educators Foundation has sent a letter signed by more than seventy-five education organizations to Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and to leaders in Congress calling attention to the lack of teacher diversity in our nation's classrooms and how this is negatively impacting students and the teaching profession. You may have seen news coverage of the letter in *Education Week* and *Politico*.

The letter, citing federal data and university studies, reports that 53 percent of public school students are children of color, while only 18 percent of teachers identify as a person of color. Studies reveal this disparity causes overall lower student achievement and outcomes, especially in populations of at-risk students and students of color. In addition, it means countless persons of color are being discouraged from choosing education as a career, which has a negative impact on the profession.

On the following pages you will find the complete text of the letter, the list of organizations that have signed on, two opinion pieces written by AAE members, and excerpts from other opinion pieces about our letter. In addition,

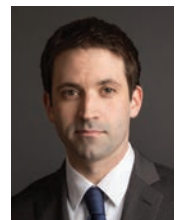
AAE Foundation has also put together a collection of resources—including proposed solutions, personal stories, and thorough studies of the problem—at [aaeadvocacy.org](http://aaeadvocacy.org).

We must find solutions that improve pathways for the next generation of educators and address issues of morale, training, and support that disproportionately impact teachers of color but are too commonplace for all teachers.

The broad range of organizations recruited by AAE Foundation to sign the letter represent teachers, principals, superintendents, preservice teachers, school counselors, education staff, charter school leaders, education reformers, tutors, and teacher educators. It is a testament to the significance of this issue as well as the growing influence of your association to build coalitions to solve problems for our students and our educators.

Sincerely,

Colin Sharkey  
Executive Director ■



# AAE Foundation's Letter on Teacher Diversity



May 22, 2019

The Honorable Betsy DeVos  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

America's schoolchildren and the adults who serve them face numerous challenges. One challenge in particular exacerbates many others: the current teaching population is not reflective of the students they serve. We know this can have a negative impact on our students, especially those in at-risk populations, and it also has a negative impact on those in the teaching profession.

We at the Association of American Educators Foundation and the seventy-five undersigned education organizations believe that this is a problem we can all work together to solve and that doing so rewards not only our students, but current and future educators as well. **We believe that increasing teacher diversity elevates the teaching profession and improves the lives and outcomes of all students.**

A solution requires an increase in the recruitment, training, hiring, and retention of a highly qualified, diverse teaching population reflective of the student population, especially for people of color<sup>i</sup>, while maintaining the integrity of the teaching profession. Virtually every individual, organization, and government agency involved in education has a role to play in developing and implementing solutions to this end, and no one entity alone will be able to solve it. Lasting improvements will be the result of significant changes as well as the accumulation of individual decisions and contributions by those not currently engaged on this issue. The gesture of a single teacher to a colleague to ensure that together they are making progress on this issue will not alone overcome the challenge, but with each individual effort solutions become more possible.

This is not a newly discovered or analyzed problem. Federal data show that 53% of public school students are children of color, while 18% of teachers identify as a person of color.<sup>ii</sup> Almost every state has a significant diversity gap and too many individual schools and communities have an even greater divide.<sup>iii</sup> The percentage of students of color, already a majority of students, is projected to increase in the coming years.<sup>iv</sup> Teacher diversity has nominally improved but continues to be outpaced by the growth in student diversity.

## Vision Statement

A teaching profession that is student oriented, well respected, and personally fulfilling.

## AAE Foundation Board of Directors

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*West Memphis School District (AR)*

Research has long shown evidence of large achievement gaps between white and non-white students in the U.S. One factor that contributes to these gaps is the lack of diversity of the public teacher workforce.<sup>v</sup> A recent university study concluded that low-income black students randomly assigned to at least one black teacher in third, fourth, or fifth grade were 18% more likely to express interest in college when they graduated.<sup>vi</sup> The same criteria also reported a reduction in a black student's probability of dropping out of school by 29%.<sup>vii</sup> For very low-income black boys, their chance of dropping out fell 39% when they have at least one black teacher in third through fifth grade.<sup>viii</sup> In that same study, very low-income black boys (those receiving free or reduced-price lunches throughout primary school) were 29% more likely to say they were considering college.<sup>ix</sup>

It has also been demonstrated that teacher diversity has a positive impact on all students.<sup>x</sup> It is impactful for all students to see diverse individuals thriving in educator roles to remove social bias and improve cultural acceptance—as well as improve student success.

Solutions must take into account (1) the unquestionable value of a highly qualified teaching corps that reflects the community it serves, not only for students of underrepresented populations but for all students and all teachers, (2) that numerous barriers to entry into the teaching profession pipeline are likely contributing to the problem, but simply lowering barriers may do more harm than good, and (3) that other problems impacting teacher morale, training, support, respect, and lack of leadership may also contribute to lack of teacher diversity.

Shortsighted solutions and halfhearted efforts will likely contribute to the problem rather than solve it, and will delay lasting improvements; for example, placing unprepared and unsupported teachers of color in classrooms as a quick solution to meeting measurable goals does a disservice to all, including those teachers.

A 2016 U.S. Department of Education report on racial diversity in education identified multiple points at which diversity in the teacher pipeline decreases, including postsecondary enrollment, enrollment in education programs, postsecondary completion, job opportunities, and retention efforts. This means a comprehensive solution is necessary and a broad coalition must work together on this issue—even and especially in groups who fervently disagree about other issues. Letting this important issue fall victim to an increasingly polarized political environment only makes solutions ever more elusive.

Increasing teacher diversity for all students necessitates a rejection of teacher segregation by school and district. Possibly well-intentioned efforts to increase the numbers of teachers of color in schools serving predominantly students of color may also further segregate the teaching population, may contribute to higher rates of turnover for teachers of color, and may discourage highly qualified white teachers from serving in highly diverse schools.

No solution should imply that an educator *must* match the background of a student in order to be effective or that students should *only* experience educators who match their background—quite the opposite. Each student should be experiencing a diverse teaching population representing the community, improving attitudes and experiences in a proudly diverse nation.

<sup>i</sup> For most of the research used, “people of color” includes those who identify as African American or black and Hispanic or Latino/a/x. In some of the cited research, “people of color” also includes those of Asian, Pacific-Islander, or Native American descent, although sometimes these people are included in a group with white students or teachers, or their scores and information are not included because their numbers or size were too small to report.

<sup>ii</sup> U. S. Department of Education/Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development. (2016). *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/>

<sup>iii</sup> Boser, Ulrich. (2014). *Teacher Diversity Revisited: A New State-by-State Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/>

<sup>iv</sup> U.S. Department of Education/Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development. (2016). *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/>

<sup>v</sup> Putman, H., Hansen, M., Walsh, K., & Quintero, D. (2016). *High Hopes and Harsh Realities: The Real Challenges to Building a Diverse Workforce*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/>

<sup>vi</sup> Gershenson, S., Hart, C., Lindsay, C. & Papageorge, N. (2017). *The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers*. Bonn, Germany: IZA Institute of Labor Economics. Retrieved from <http://www.iza.org/>

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>x</sup> Wells, A.S., Fox, L. & Cordova-Cobo, D. (2016). *How racially diverse schools and classrooms can benefit all students*. New York City: The Century Foundation. Retrieved from <https://tcf.org/>

Teacher associations should expand on resources for members to take action in their classroom, school, and district at advocating for teacher diversity, facilitating productive discussion about increasing teacher diversity, supporting teachers of color, and more. Community and other nonprofit organizations working with students and teachers have the ability to support individuals in their efforts to become involved in education. Numerous organizations provide coaching and advocacy efforts to increase access and opportunity to a diverse group of people interested in working in and advancing the teaching profession.

There have been efforts made by several states, districts, organizations, and schools to improve diversity in teaching. Fifteen states have included diversity in teaching accountability measures and initiatives as part of Title II in their ESSA plans. Some of these items include tuition reimbursement, teaching residency programs, and alternative certification programming. Xavier University of Louisiana just accepted the second cohort of aspiring teachers into its Teacher Residency Program. Teacher preparation programs at The University of Colorado Denver and in the city of Boston are looking at creating pipelines from high school to classroom teacher for “homegrown teachers” that identify deeply with the communities they serve. The Fellowship of Black Male Educators in Philadelphia is working to encourage, develop, and retain black men in education roles through mentorship, support, and cultural connectivity.

Overall, there is no one way to improve diversity among teachers across America. Every school, district, agency, university, and state is currently in a position to make changes to the methods in which they recruit, train, hire, and retain all highly qualified teachers. By diversifying our teaching force, all students will achieve more academically and socially.

The organizations signing onto this letter stand ready to work with you and state and local leaders on this important issue. We ask that when making determinations about Department regulations you consider how they might increase or decrease teacher diversity. We encourage you to avail yourself of our assistance in making those determinations. We believe funding for additional research to evaluate solutions that are being implemented in states and districts across the country as well as the toll this issue takes on our students will be helpful in developing and implementing solutions.

We thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Colin Sharkey  
Executive Director  
Association of American  
Educators Foundation



Sekou J. Biddle  
Vice President, K-12 Advocacy  
United Negro College Fund

Alliance for Diversity and  
Excellence (ADE)

American Association for  
Employment in Education (AAEE)

American Association of Family &  
Consumer Sciences (AAFCS)

American Association of Physics  
Teachers (AAPT)

American Association of School  
Personnel Administrators (AASPA)

American Association of Teachers  
of German (AATG)

American Council on the Teaching  
of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)

American Guild of Organists  
(AGO)

American School Counselor  
Association (ASCA)

Arkansas State Teachers  
Association (ASTA)

Associated Professional Educators  
of Louisiana (APEL)

Association for Science Teacher  
Education (ASTE)

Association of American Educators  
(AAE)

Association of American Educators  
Foundation (AAEF)

Association of Teacher Educators  
(ATE)

Bluum

Branch Alliance for Educator  
Diversity

California Charter Schools  
Association (CCSA)

Center for School Change (CSC)



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|--|--|--|
| Charter Schools Association of Nevada (CSAN)                           | JerseyCAN  | New Jersey Charter Schools Association (NJCSA)                 |
| Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE)                             | Kansas Association of American Educators (KANAAE)                | New Schools New Orleans (NSNO)                                 |
| Colorado League of Charter Schools (CLCS)                              | Kansas School Superintendents Association (KSSA)                 | NewMexicoKids CAN  |
| ConnCAN  | Kappa Delta Pi (KDP)   | North Carolina Association for Public Charter Schools (NCAPCS) |
| Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)                                 | Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools (LAPCS)          | Northeast Charter Schools Network (NECSN)                      |
| Delaware Charter Schools Network (DCSN)                                | Missouri Charter Public School Association (MCPSA)               | Northwest Professional Educators (NWPE)                        |
| Diverse Charter Schools Coalition                                      | National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS)             | Oklahoma Public School Resource Center (OPSRC)                 |
| Educators for Excellence (E4E)   | National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME)          | Organization of American Historians (OAH)                      |
| Educators Rising, a division of Phi Delta Kappa International (PDK)    | National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE)            | Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools (PCPCS)       |
| Florida Charter School Alliance (FCSA)                                 | National Association of Educational Office Professionals (NAEOP) | Professional Association of Colorado Educators (PACE)          |
| Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools (FCPCS)                   | National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)     | PS305  |
| ForwARd Arkansas   | National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)              | Public Charter School Alliance of South Carolina (PCSACS)      |
| Friends of Choice in Urban Schools (FOCUS)                             | National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)      | Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE)               |
| Georgia Charter Schools Association (GCSA)                             | National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET)       | Tennessee Charter School Center (TCSC)                         |
| GeorgiaCAN   | National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE)                 | Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA)              |
| HawaiiKidsCAN  | National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)                   | Texas Charter Schools Association (TCSA)                       |
| Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS)                             | National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY)          | The Fellowship of Black Male Educators                         |
| International Literacy Association (ILA)                               | National Tutoring Association (NTA)                              | Thomas B. Fordham Institute                                    |
| International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI)               |  | United Negro College Fund (UNCF) ■                             |
| International Technology and Engineering Educators Association (ITEEA) |  |  |

# We Need More Teachers of Color

By Bridget Allison

It seems that there is a notion in some education circles that there are no qualified teachers of color candidates. However, I beg to differ. There has been an increase in the recruitment efforts for teachers of color in a few states, districts, and schools across the United States. More teachers of color are entering the classrooms but not enough. There are highly qualified teachers of color candidates out there who want to teach and are entering the classrooms, but are they staying?

The answer is no, many of them are not staying. Herein lies the purpose of my writing today. Educational systems need to do a better job of embracing teachers of color and supporting them so that they will stay in the profession and in the classroom.

Research is increasingly showing that teacher diversity is a very important component for improving learning for all students and for closing the achievement gap. The influence is especially noteworthy for students of color, who have higher test scores, are more likely to graduate from high school, and are more likely to be successful in college when they have had teachers of color at least once in grades three through five. Students of color see teachers of color as their role models and part of their school and learning support system. They also have less unexcused absences and are not likely to be frequently absent. They want to come to school, it's enjoyable, and they feel included and safe.

I have nearly twenty years of experience in education, working in various roles as a teacher, instructional coach and interventionist, and as an assistant principal. I feel very fortunate that for the majority of those years I have been in schools with diverse staffs and with immediate supervisors who are and have been men and women of color. In two of the systems where I worked the superintendents were people of color, and one of my immediate supervisors who was an African-American, years later became superintendent. They are the reason I stayed—intentional support, retention, and hiring of a diverse team.

For me, working in these environments, I felt I was seen, understood, supported, and appreciated. I am so grateful for those (and current) experiences and the collective of people who contributed to making those experiences possible as well as my colleagues who were educators of color.

Schools systems that employ significant numbers of people of color are sending a strong message that they value, respect, and are open to the diversity of people and their ideas.

Being in those environments, seeing and working with others who look like me gave a sense of belonging, that I mattered, and I was surrounded with people who understood me as a person. This makes a big difference for every teacher. I am so grateful and thankful to be currently working in this type of environment—an environment that values diversity and employs a diverse staff.

Many of the teachers of color entering the classroom are highly educated and capable. They have gifts and talents that they bring to various educational systems. For school systems that say they cannot find qualified teachers of color, there needs to be a genuine unbiased effort to recruit teachers of color with the goal and intention to retain teachers of color.

There is a win-win if more school systems chose to genuinely embrace this call to action to hire and retain more teachers of color. According to several research studies, diverse teaching staffs have great potential for contributing to increasing achievement levels for black and brown students as well as decreasing the absenteeism and suspension rates of the same students.

I am so grateful and thankful to have the opportunity to have a positive impact on and to offer positive motivation to all children, especially those who look like me. ■

*Originally published on March 29, 2019, SentinelColorado.com. The article is available at <https://bit.ly/31mG53m>.*



**Bridget Allison** is a teacher in Aurora, Colorado, and an AAE advocacy ambassador fellow. She has been an educator for 21 years, serving 5 years as an assistant principal and 4

years as a math content specialist. This is her first year at AXL Academy. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Curriculum and Instruction degree from Texas A&M University and a Master of Education in School Administration degree from Prairie View A&M University.

# The Knowledge Keeper

By Yannin Dominguez

I hope you can picture me, a 14-year-old girl from Mexico moving to a new city, a new school, and a new country. I mean being 14 is hard enough, now imagine becoming a foreigner in a foreign land. Needless to say, I did not fit in, but again, who at 14 fits in anywhere?

I was encouraged to be brave, to take risks, to push through barriers, and so I tried. Growing up, we weren't allowed to quit anything. If we started something, we had to see it through to the end. So, when I came home crying, begging my mom to take me back home, she reminded me of that. When I saw my dad come home after a long day of work, I realized they were surviving the same struggle. This challenge required a different type of resilience, a type of resilience I had not yet acquired. And so, the story began. Completely unaware, dependent upon the people around me, and those who were along for the journey, I embarked on the greatest journey of belonging in a foreign world.

When I think about why I selected my career path, I begin to understand the tremendous impact individuals had on me, especially those who supported a young, immigrant, 14-year-old girl. I decided to become a teacher because of all of those who saw me as more than just a foreigner. Often it was an educator who looked at me and said, "You will make a difference!"

One of those teachers was Ms. Martin. She looked nothing like me with her blue eyes and light hair. She cared so deeply about my

"More diverse educators build more inclusive classrooms and schools, which provide a lasting impact in our communities."

success and taught me how to read by translating every word in a book. She knew I was capable, even when I was frustrated and felt defeated. Her lasting impact allowed me to build a strong work ethic and create a plan for my future.

Becoming a teacher wasn't just because of those who told me I could do it, but also because of those who told me I could not. Having educators that didn't look like me, share my heritage, or know my native language was difficult. I was in a new country where I was unable to see someone like me as the teacher, the knowledge keeper, and an authority figure. In the few years since then, not much has changed. Nationally, only 18 percent of educators identify as people of color, while more than 53 percent of students identify as people of color. That means the majority of the students educated in the United States are still experiencing the same lack of cultural connectivity that I had experienced in school. While it didn't stop me from pursuing my dreams, it has for many others.

I set out to change that. I will graduate with not just one but two degrees. The first in education because I know the power knowledge brings, and the second in marketing because I know the power that messaging holds. Ironically, I want to prove to the world that a girl who immigrated to the US at 14-years old and did not know the language could become an English teacher.

Now, I get to be that mirror I longed for in an educator. Students who look like me, share my heritage, and my language will be able to see someone like them succeeding and being that knowledge keeper for them. I am not just doing this for them but for all students. As research from the US Department of Education states, all students succeed when more educators of color are in classrooms and in positions of school leadership. More diverse educators build more inclusive classrooms and schools, which provide a lasting impact in our communities.

When I was that little girl in a foreign land, I would have loved to have had an educator like me. Now, I have the opportunity to be just that. And, so do you. You have the ability to be that educator that so many of our students need. We need more passionate individuals of color to be highly qualified educators of color because what is at stake is the future of our nation, even our world. As a future educator, I did not choose this career for the money, I chose this career because I knew I "would make a difference." Will you? ■



**Yannin Dominguez** is a future English teacher, and an AAE student member. Originally from Chihuahua, Mexico, she is in her fourth year at North Central University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is a dual

candidate for a Bachelor of Science in Marketing degree and a Bachelor of Arts in Secondary Education degree.

# Teacher Diversity Opinion Editorials

Educators, national education advocates, school board leaders, preservice teachers, and others joined the call for greater teacher diversity through opinion editorials, guest commentary, and letters to the editor across the nation.

Clearly there is room for improvement, but what can be done to stem this chronic shortage of talent? One promising solution is to strengthen the pipeline of future educators by connecting with them before they have decided on their career path.

**The Star-Ledger**



—**Ron Rice, Jr., Sr. Director, Government Relations, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools**  
*NJ.com* and *Newark Star-Ledger*, Newark, New Jersey,  
June 4, 2019 ► <https://bit.ly/2WxuJWu>

## ADVOCATE

The need for a diverse and learner-ready teaching force has never been clearer. Students of color need to see teachers of color in positions of authority, esteem, and leadership so that they can aspire to be what is sometimes hard to see.

—**Kimberly Eckert, Teacher, West Baton Rouge Parish, 2018 Louisiana Teacher of the Year**  
*The Advocate*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, June 3, 2019  
► <https://bit.ly/2Rc2MT8>

Many Black children have never had a teacher that looks like them. Conversely, many white kids have never been led by a teacher who wasn't white. Eight hours a day. 180 days per year. Twelve years. Not one Black teacher. Representation matters. A lot.

—**Sharif El-Mekki, Director, Center for Black Educator Development**  
*Philadelphia Inquirer*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,  
May 30, 2019 ► <https://bit.ly/2Zik6IU>

**The Philadelphia Inquirer**

## THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

We need scholarship resources for traditional and alternative paths to teacher licensing, a living wage for preservice and current educators, and more support for culturally relevant curriculum.

—**Diana Schooling, Preservice Teacher, Arizona State University**  
*Spokesman-Review*, Spokane, Washington, June 8, 2019  
► <https://bit.ly/2MCXXn6>

With teacher shortages across the country in specific content areas and grade levels, we must tear down barriers that prevent amazing individuals from becoming educators.

—**Roseangela Mendoza, Teacher, The Ethical Community Charter School**  
*NJ.com*, Iselin, New Jersey, May 29, 2019  
► <https://bit.ly/2KHaeLa>



When students have diverse educators and school leaders, there is an opportunity for a transformational, profound impact across the entire student population. As we become a more diverse and highly-complex global society, it is incumbent upon us to keep up with this reality relative to workforce, economic, and educational development.

—**Michael Anthony Vargas, President, Board of Trustees, San Benito School District**  
*The Monitor*, McAllen, Texas, May 28, 2019

► <https://bit.ly/2X7hkbO> ■

**THE MONITOR**

# Book Review and Educators' Summer Reading List



Recently, AAE staff attended the SxSWedu conference in Austin, Texas. This younger, newer sibling of the annual SxSW conference is a different sort of education conference. Educators from across the globe gather to explore topics in education through the lenses of technology, innovation, and creativity with the hope of finding solutions to challenges that teachers and schools face every day.

Indicative of this approach is a book that was mentioned repeatedly at the conference. *Neuroteach: Brain Science and the Future of Education* was written by two educators to rethink our approach to teaching through neuroscience.

Authors Glenn Whitman and Ian Kelleher recognize the swiftness with which fads in education come and go, and in their book they offer a different approach. Instead of a quick fix or complete overhaul of curriculum, they recommend that teachers slowly adopt what they know, using general principles and best practices from scientific knowledge.

The book serves as an introduction for teachers who may be new to the field of mind brain education. Instead of a deep dive into a single area, it is a comprehensive overview of issues including the role of practice, memory and recall, attention and engagement, homework, and how emotions impact learning.

No line is drawn for how much or how little technology to use; instead, teachers have several

frameworks through which they can process their decisions.

*Neuroteach* is a breath of fresh air for teachers. It makes research accessible without oversimplifying, and it trusts that if teachers are provided with good, solid information, they will make good, solid decisions for their students. For that reason, the book tops our summer 2019 reading list.

Here are other recommendations.

*Adequate Yearly Progress: A Novel* by Roxanna Elden

Each year brings typical educational challenges to Brae Hill Valley, a struggling high school in one of Texas's bigger cities. Its teachers face plenty of challenges of their own. A new celebrity superintendent is determined to leave his own mark on the school. The fallout will shake up the teachers' lives both inside and outside the classroom.

*What School Could Be: Insights and Inspiration from Teachers Across America* by Ted Dintersmith

Innovation expert Ted Dintersmith took an unprecedented trip across America, visiting all fifty states in a single school year. He set out to raise awareness about the urgent need to reimagine education to prepare students for a world marked by innovation. However, America's teachers one-upped him. He met teachers in ordinary settings doing extraordinary things, creating innovative classrooms where children learn deeply and joyously as they gain purpose, agency, essential skill-sets and mind-sets, and real knowledge.

*Answering Why: Unleashing Passion, Purpose, and Performance in Younger Generations* by Mark C. Perna

If you've ever struggled to motivate young people, *Answering Why* is the game-changer you've been looking for. From the urgent skills gap crisis to the proven strategies to inspire our youngest generations, *Answering Why* addresses the burning questions faced by educators, employers, and parents everywhere.

*Think Like Socrates: Using Questions to Invite Wonder and Empathy into the Classroom, Grades 4-12* by Shanna Peebles

Socrates believed in the power of posing questions rather than lecturing to his students. But how did we get so far away from his method of inquiry? Shanna Peebles, 2015 National Teacher of the Year, discusses how teachers can create an engaging atmosphere that encourages student questions and honors their experiences. ■



**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.

# How Much Do Rising Test Scores Tell Us about a School?

Reading and math scores have long been the currency of American schooling, and never more so than in the past two decades since the No Child Left Behind Act. Today, advocates will describe a teacher as “effective” when what they really mean is that the teacher’s students had big increases in reading and math scores. Politicians say a school is “good” when they mean that its reading and math scores are high.

So, how much do test scores really tell us, anyway? It turns out: a lot less than we’d like.

For all the attention to testing, there’s been a remarkable lack of curiosity about how much tests tell us. Last spring, for instance, researcher Collin Hitt, of the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, and two coauthors examined the research on school choice and found a striking disconnect between test score gains and longer-term outcomes. They reported, “Programs that produced no measurable positive impacts on achievement have frequently produced positive impacts on attainment” even as “programs that produced substantial test score gains” have shown no impact on high school graduation or college attendance. More generally, they observe:

*The growing literature on early childhood education has found that short-term impacts on test scores are inconsistent predictors of later-life impacts...Studies of teacher impacts on student outcomes show a similar pattern of results...It turns out that teacher impacts on test scores are almost entirely uncorrelated with teacher impacts on student classroom behavior, attendance, truancy, and grades...The teachers who produce improvements in student behavior and noncognitive skills are not particularly likely to be the same teachers who improve test scores.*

You would think this disconnect would prompt plenty of furrowed brows and set off lots of alarm bells. It hasn’t. And yet the phenomenon that Hitt, et al., note isn’t all that surprising if we think about it. After all, test scores may go up for many reasons. Here are a few of them:

- Students may be learning more reading and math, and the tests are simply picking that up. All good.
- Teachers may be shifting time and energy from untested subjects and activities (like history or Spanish) to the tested ones (like reading and math). If this is happening, scores can go up without students actually learning any more.
- Teachers may be learning what gets tested and focusing on that. In this case, they’re just teaching students more of what shows up on the test—again, this means that scores can go up without students learning any more.
- Schools may be focusing on test preparation, so that students do better on the test even as they spend less time learning content—meaning scores may go up while actual learning goes down.
- Scores may be manipulated in various ways, via techniques as problematic as cheating or as mundane as starting the school year earlier. Such strategies can yield higher test scores without telling us anything about whether students actually learned more than they used to.

It matters which of these forces are driving rising scores. To say this is not to deny the value of testing. Indeed, this observation is 100 percent consistent with a healthy



“This makes the question of *why* reading and math scores change one that deserves careful, critical scrutiny. Absent that kind of audit, parents and communities can’t really know whether higher test scores mean that schools are getting better—or whether they’re just pretending to do so.”



emphasis on the bottom line of school improvement. After all, results are what matters.

However, that presumes that the results mean what we think they do. Consider: If it turned out that an admired pediatrician was seeing more patients because she’d stopped running certain tests and was shortchanging preventive care, you might have second thoughts about her performance. That’s because it matters how she improved her stats. If it turned out that an automaker was boosting its profitability by using dirt-cheap, unsafe components, savvy investors would run for the hills—because those short-term gains will be turning into long-term headaches. In both cases, observers should note that the improvements were phantasms, ploys to look good without actually moving the bottom line.

That’s the point. Test scores can convey valuable information. Some tests, such as the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), are more trustworthy than others. The NAEP, for instance, is less problematic because it’s administered with more safeguards and isn’t used to judge schools or teachers (which means they have less cause to try to teach to it). But the NAEP isn’t administered every year and doesn’t produce results for

individual schools. Meanwhile, the annual state tests that we rely on when it comes to judging schools are susceptible to all the problems flagged above.

This makes the question of *why* reading and math scores change one that deserves careful, critical scrutiny. Absent that kind of audit, parents and communities can’t really know whether higher test scores mean that schools are getting better—or whether they’re just pretending to do so. ■

*Originally appeared in Forbes.com on September 18, 2018.  
<https://bit.ly/2GEsUT3>*



**Frederick Hess** is director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, where he studies K-12 and higher education. He is also an AAE Advisory Board member. His books include *Spinning Wheels*, *Common Sense School Reform*, *The Same Thing Over and Over*, *Cage-Busting Leadership*, *The Cage-Busting Teacher*, and *Letters to a Young Education Reformer*. He is a former

high school social studies teacher and has taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Georgetown, Rice, and the University of Virginia, and holds a M.Ed. in Teaching and Curriculum degree and a Ph.D. in Government degree from Harvard University.

We say farewell to our director of advocacy, McKenzie Allen. All of us at AAE wish her the very best in her new role as executive director of the Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools.



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aaeteachers.org • editor@aaeteachers.org • 800.704.7799



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# AAE Out and About

