

Why I Love My School

Every school has powerful stories about the unique ways it fulfills the mission of educating all learners to be our next generation of citizens, scientists, authors, doctors and caregivers, builders, artists, engineers, entrepreneurs, leaders, and educators. Celebrating educators in each of these schools is why we participate in National School Choice Week each year. We asked members to share a story about what makes their schools so special and why they are safe and effective learning environments. Here are a few of their stories.

“ AXL Academy is a PK-8 Expeditionary charter public school located in Aurora, Colorado. AXL meets students where they are to engage, empower, and help all students achieve. I love how we do this with integrated curriculum and expeditions. Our teachers believe students learn when given the freedom to move, ask questions, and interact with the real world. Real connections are found here at AXL Academy.”



Bridget
AXL Academy, Colorado





What makes my school special is that we teach ethics education, and this allows us to truly help our students understand the complex world we live in. Our world is no longer simply about right and wrong or yes and no. As we learn to accept our everchanging world, we learn to become more flexible and adapt to each other's needs. Ethics education helps our students understand each other with compassion and develop tools to navigate our complex world.



Roseangela

The Ethical Community Charter School, New Jersey



There are schools that follow an outdated model of education so rigidly that they can disenfranchise the creative, the unique, the exceptional, and the underserved. Media Arts Collaborative Charter School is focused on media and media literacy connected to all other content, so we get students with incredible imagination and creativity, the flames of which we fan with absolute gusto. We embrace Project-Based Learning (PBL). This is a student-centered pedagogy, emphasizing twenty-first century skills, in which content is delivered via the experience of solving open-ended problems, and putting students in the driver's seat for their learning. The result of PBL has been noticeable increases in reading and math skills from sixth to eighth grade.



Michael

Media Arts Collaborative Charter School, New Mexico



The staff members at Columbus High make our school special. We have ventured out and challenged ourselves to rethink our profession and how we can better impact our students. We don't always like the idea of change; however, we know adapting is part of being a professional and will help meet the new student needs we've seen in the last ten years because we want what's best for students. Some students have left the district for greener pastures only to come back, realizing how much our teachers care about our students. This shared respect and positive culture are what make our staff able to tackle any problem; they're why my school is special.



Luke

Columbus High School, Kansas

When I am at ITINERIS, it's like being with family! Faculty and students readily have quick chats while passing in the halls. Between classes, during study times, and at lunch, our students will create their own small study groups! This is something not often seen in a high school setting. Also, as an early college high school, class schedules are flexible, and students are given more autonomy. This requires students to be responsible and it builds accountability. Because many students graduate high school with their associate degrees, as well as having developed these character traits, ITINERIS students are better prepared to move forward successfully in college and in life.



Diana

ITINERIS Early College High School, Utah





eAchieve Academy is special because it creates a diverse online learning environment that isn't confined to a one-size-fits-all approach. Students learn at their own pace, which allows flexibility and balance between family, work, and other personal obligations. Students attend school from the comfort of their own homes or wherever they have access to the internet. In addition, eAchieve is the only virtual school in the state of Wisconsin to offer the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program.



Amy
eAchieve Academy, Wisconsin

At Tecumseh, we know how important it is for students to feel connected to their school. When they feel a connection, they perform better academically and form better relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. Because of this, we offer many sports, clubs, and activities after school for students. The variety is wide: from drama club to gamer's club, swimming and diving to golf, academic super bowl to spelling bee, and the list goes on and on. To ensure that every student who wants to participate is able to do so, we offer activities buses that run after the clubs and sports practices are finished for the day. Transportation and cost of activities will never be reasons students cannot participate in after-school activities at my school. We believe in the power of connection, and we do what it takes to make that happen.



Angela
Tecumseh Junior High School, Indiana

There are many things special about my school. Our teachers love our students and help our students grow into the best version of themselves. Our school is special because our community supports us in so many ways that contribute to the success of our students. Lastly, our school is special because our students are amazing and they are working hard to develop into lifelong learners.



John
West Fork Middle School, Arkansas

My school is a neighborhood charter school. Being a neighborhood charter school helps us to create a sense of family within our school. The children in the neighborhood attend the school and they have a sense of being a community as a whole, everybody knows everybody. I feel we are making a difference within the community because of what Roosevelt Charter Academy has to offer all of the students, not just a select few. We also offer rich, structured activities before, during, and after school to ensure that every child has an opportunity to participate in activities such as sports, digital learning, tutoring, art club, homework club, band, and choir. Recently we established a chapter of the National Elementary Honor Society to recognize outstanding students. To reach even more members of our families, we also offer ELL classes in the evenings for adults.



LynDel
Roosevelt Charter Academy, Colorado



Editor's note: These stories are personal reflections and may not reflect the perspective of other staff or administrators at the schools mentioned. Reflections have been abridged. ■

Members and Educators Nationwide Weigh in on School Choice Issues

Through national surveys open to all members we evaluate and analyze how your opinions on major national education issues compare with data from other recently conducted education surveys. We also analyze how teacher opinion is presented to policymakers and the media. AAE is committed to restoring the educator voice in policy discussions.

The 2019 *Education Next* survey was conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs, which sampled 3,046 adults in May 2019, including 667 public school teachers. Although AAE’s survey respondents are not exclusively teachers, comparing EdNext’s teacher responses with AAE’s educator survey responses should provide a worthwhile comparison.

Even though more than 90 percent of the survey respondents are not currently charter school educators, nearly 74 percent of AAE national survey respondents support or tend to support charter schools. Public school teachers, according to the EdNext survey, report only 42 percent support for charter schools, with another 9 percent indicating they are ‘neutral.’ Support for charter schools among nonunion teachers is higher (50 percent) than support for charter schools among teachers who are union members (28 percent).

Data excerpted from the 2019 *Education Next* Poll as found in “Public Support Grows for Higher Teacher Pay and Expanded School Choice,” by Michael B. Henderson, David Houston, Paul E. Peterson, and Martin R. West, *Education Next*, Winter 2020, <https://bit.ly/30hnR2N>.

AAE conducts member surveys on education issues, policies, teaching trends, school culture, and methodology. Your educator voice makes us a more impactful and responsive organization. And the educator voice advances the teaching profession in many ways. Be sure to check your in-box for the next AAE national survey coming soon! ■

AAE SURVEY: Do you support public charter schools?

74%

Support/Tend to support

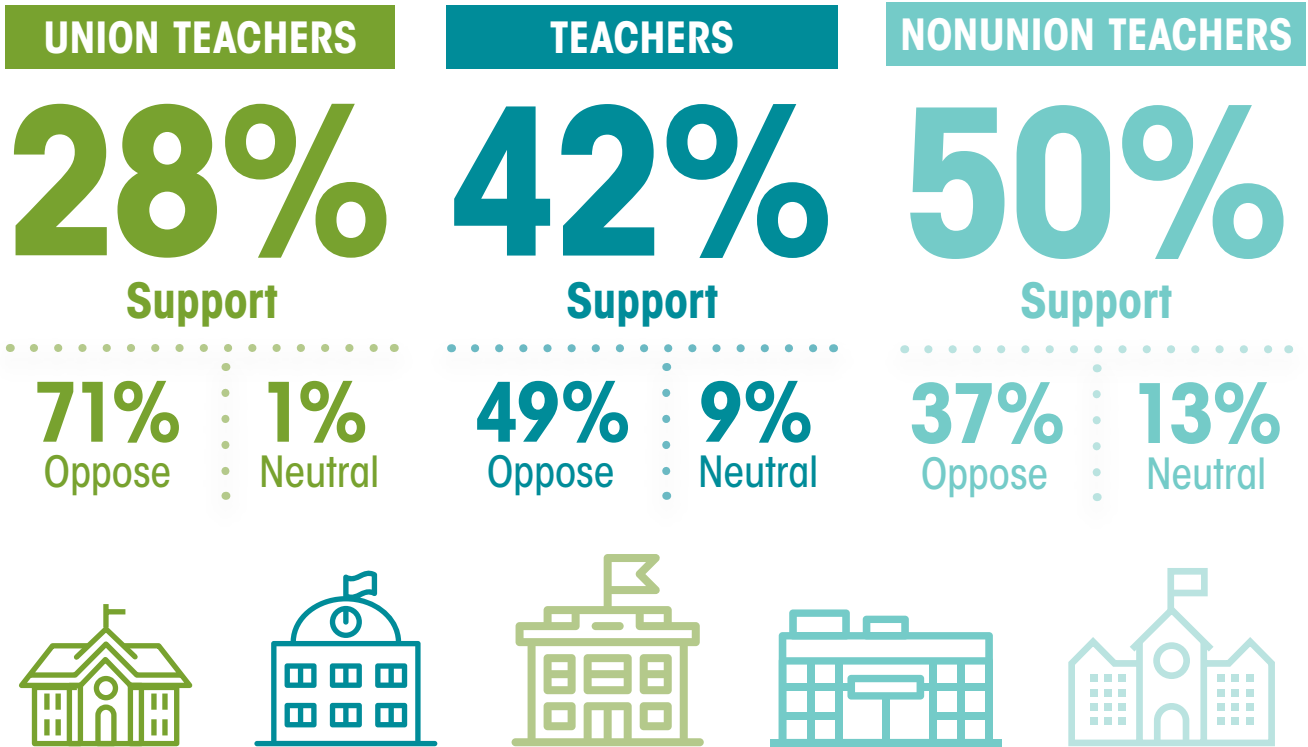


26% Tend not to support/
Do not support



EDNEXT SURVEY:

Do you support or oppose the formation of charter schools?



MEET OUR NEW STAFF

AAE and AAE Foundation welcome four new staff members!



Elizabeth Davis, Ed.D.
State Director, Professional Association of Colorado Educators (PACE)



Tamia Mallory
Communications Coordinator & Social Media Manager, AAE



Jennifer Sharkey
Director of Membership Development, AAE



Kira Tookes
Director of Advocacy, AAE Foundation

What Is Your School Choice Roadmap?

As a former special educator, I found that meeting the needs of each of my students was essential for success in the classroom regardless of the school type. During my teaching career, I had the opportunity to teach in a charter public school and in a traditional public school. As a special educator mainly in self-contained class settings, I advocated for my students first—guiding parents and administrators to engage in an inclusive and represented community. Seeking to ensure students are safe, happy, and successfully learning regardless of the school setting, gave me as an educator a feeling of success as well.

Andrew Campanella's new book, *The School Choice Roadmap: 7 Steps to Finding the Right School for Your Child* provides a valuable guidebook to help parents identify education environments that meet their children's needs. One key aspect in the decision-making process is the identification of one's top priorities, the most important things one's child needs from a school or learning environment. This identification process has application for educators also, as they explore the right school setting to begin their career or consider a new chapter of an established career.

What are your top priorities?

Teaching/Learning:

Do you have the resources and support needed to “set high expectations for students, offer rigorous and relevant coursework, make sure that



Andrew Campanella is the president of National School Choice Week, the largest public awareness effort in the U.S. focusing on opportunity in K-12 education.

every child is learning at or above their grade level, and regularly monitor students' progress to make sure that no one is falling behind”?

Safety:

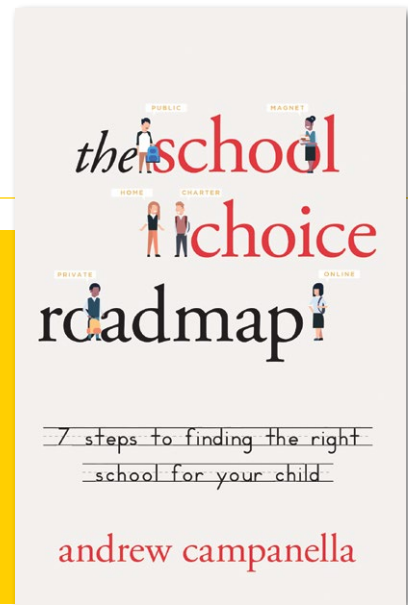
Do you feel that this school is set up for success with “well-executed plans for preventing and addressing violence, drug use, fighting, and bullying,” and are these plans carried out? Are conversations being held about school safety issues that you may be concerned about?

Mutual Respect:

Are all students, staff, and families respected regardless of backgrounds, cultures, disabilities, or socio-economic status? Are families able to provide their input, and receive respect and value when doing so? Do educators feel they have a support system, and can lean on their administrators in times of need?

Happiness:

Are students, staff, and families able to “set and achieve goals, build strong character, build their confidence, and develop positive relationships with others”?



Success:

Are these top four priorities aligned so each student and teacher has every opportunity for success? Just as parents need to know that the big dreams they have for their children can be fulfilled, educators must consider whether the education settings they choose during their careers will be the best environment for fulfilling their own goals of providing the best possible education for every learner.

Use of *The School Choice Roadmap: 7 Steps to Finding the Right School for Your Child* by Andrew Campanella, published by Beaufort Books, is granted by the author. ■



Lauren Golubski is the AAE Foundation development manager. Prior to her position with AAEF, she was a special education teacher with the Dallas Independent School

District and an Urban Teacher Fellow and Mentor. She received a Bachelor of Science in Education/Teaching of Individuals in Elementary Special Education degree from Eastern Michigan University and a Master of Science in Education degree from Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

Legal Corner:

Educators Continue to Amaze Us

In the previous issue of *Education Matters*, we shared stories about members who expressed gratitude for the support provided by the Legal Services division of AAE. In this issue, we join our colleagues in celebrating educators, and we want to highlight just a few of the reasons why we love serving you.

1. Educators show an amazing capacity to love. We talk to educators day in and day out. We hear your stories about learners of all abilities and their different challenges, and what is abundantly clear in each story is how much you love those students. There are days when we are amazed at your boundless capacity to love, and for that, we applaud you.
2. Educators have ingenious ways of teaching others and not just in

“Educators have ingenious ways of teaching others and not just in the classroom.”

the classroom. While we are here to support you and use our expertise to provide legal guidance, we will be the first to admit that your ingenuity and creativity have been impressive. From the educators who use tactile learning tricks to those who go off-book, to those who present curriculum in a fun and entertaining way—you amaze us with your resourcefulness and innovation.

3. Educators stand up for others. Whether you are standing up for colleagues, students, or yourself, you advocate for what you believe in, and that takes courage.
4. Educators change lives. We know this from our own life experiences

but also from the stories you share. These are stories that include extra time spent with students, to dedication, to positive feedback, to supporting students in extracurricular activities. They express the many ways you go the extra mile.

5. Educators give back. In addition to all of the other amazing ways you change the world, you volunteer, you pitch in, and you go wherever an extra hand is needed. We’ve had the privilege of talking with educators who work with the elderly, support community gardens, assist at shelters, take shifts at food banks, go on mission trips, and more.

So take a moment to realize that you are inspirational, valued, and loved. As hard as your job may be, you make a difference and we are grateful for all that you do and give. We are here to help you have a long and rewarding career. Do not hesitate to reach out to us should you need legal support. We are proud to serve you! ■



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 more than twenty years.



Research Corner:

The Lowdown on Direct Instruction

IDEA Public Schools is one of the fastest growing charter school networks in the United States. The nonprofit charter management organization runs more than seventy-five schools across the nation. Consistent in every school is their lesson structure. IDEA uses Direct Instruction (DI) as their main instructional technique.

Direct Instruction is a model of instruction that is highly structured, and the flow of information is directed by the teacher. Curriculum is carefully designed to promote subject mastery. When students are failing to learn, the assumption is that there is a fault with either the curriculum or the instruction, and adjustments are made. Often, DI is widely interpreted to be a teacher-based lecture, but it is not limited to that method. Almost any technique used in the classroom, such as projects, simulations, and discussions can be part of Direct Instruction. What sets DI apart are four main features:

1. Students are taught at their current skill levels.
2. Emphasis is on content mastery with lessons that are mostly review with a small amount of new material.
3. Instruction is modified to accommodate students' rates of learning.
4. Curricula are rigorously tested before use.

What the Research Says:

In 2018, the *Review of Educational Research* published a meta-analysis of the research surrounding Direct Instruction. Like previous meta-analyses, this one found that there was a statistically significant positive correlation aligned with the use of Direct Instruction in the classroom. In fact, a large body of research supports Direct Instruction as a potent teaching tool. It appears to be at its most effective when used with economically disadvantaged students and with students in Special Education classes. Some of the most effective curriculums, such as Open Court reading and Saxon Math, rely on DI methods.

When evaluating Direct Instruction in research, some caution should be used. Often, the words 'direct instruction' are used in place of 'explicitly teaching,' with the



focus on a short lecture. In these instances, they are not evaluating the method IDEA uses and what we refer to here. Papers that look at long and short lecture-based teaching do not have the same consistent positive effect that Direct Instruction has. When reviewing the literature or information on the web, look for references to DISTAR or Siegfried Engelmann, the educator who originated the method, and confirm that it incorporates the four main features listed above.

How to Use This Information:

As stated before, educators should not confuse the effectiveness of Direct Instruction with a reliance on lecture as the main method for conveying information. Nor does using DI as your structure for planning lessons mean an abandonment of strategies such as cooperative learning or experimentation.

In fact, DI calls for the use of groups in classes. Unlike many group learning strategies that call for groups to be mixed level, the groups used in Direct Instructional methods are homogenous. In the past, homogenous groups were often assigned based on perceived ability, but when using DI as a base, groups should be decided based on the skills that each student needs to work on at that particular moment. Because Direct Instruction incorporates Mastery Learning, as soon as students have a good grasp of a concept, they should move to a dif-

ferent group. Groups in }DI classes are extremely flexible, sometimes changing daily, and should not be used as a way to label a student.

The keystone of Direct Instruction, however, is the lesson plan. A lesson built on DI will reinforce what students already know and use that as a scaffold upon which to build new knowledge. This requires a solid sequencing of skills and a knowledge of the “big ideas” educators want students to understand. It will also clearly communicate to students what they should be learning in each lesson and activity. Direct Instruction lessons will also be filled with formative evaluations that allow instructors to change and alter what is being taught.

Educators interested in working more with this strategy do not need to go it alone. Many curricula are available that employ DI as a framework. If you're interested in a curriculum that employs Direct Instruction, or want to learn more about the method, you can do so at www.nifdi.org. ■



Melissa Pratt is AAE's senior professional programs manager. She is responsible for creating and managing

programs that help AAE members increase their professional capacity. Prior to AAE, Melissa taught science and social studies to middle school students in both public and private schools.

Advocating for School Choice

A AEF Advocacy Fellow and 2019 New Jersey Charter School Advocate of the Year Roseangela Mendoza has been the beneficiary of school choice for her entire career as an educator. Her experience at The Ethical Community Charter School (TECCS) in Jersey City has opened her eyes to the many possibilities of choice in mapping one's educational path that were not available to her until college.

Everyone likes and often expects to have choices for the many decisions in life. What car do I want? Which congregation is right for me? What is the best way to get to work today? We are, in fact, rarely without choices even for the smallest tasks.

In Jersey City, we are fortunate to have so many choices for schools at each academic level, whether it is for preschool, elementary school, high school, and even universities. All types of K-12 choices are here too: public charter, traditional public, private, magnet, and county!

I grew up in a town where our choices were traditional public school or private schools. In my family, we couldn't afford private schools, so like many, we attended traditional public schools. I had a great experience at the public schools I attended. However, if there had been a choice in high school programs for me, that would have been great. Without hesitation, I would have chosen a school that offered a performing arts program. That would have made me feel more at home! Fortunately, I had great teachers who guided me to the path I am in now, teaching.

Depending on what your family's needs are, you can find a school that best fits your child. Many families look for schools that offer a strong

STEM program, a strong community-based school, and, like my school, a strong ethics program.

This school year, I met many new families and students who had the opportunity to apply to a school of choice such as the charter school I work for. Students always talk about feeling great in our learning environment and most importantly, feeling safe. I've worked at TECCS for almost nine years. Just as for our students, schools of choice, like TECCS, have offered me vast opportunities to grow and learn from teachers, parents, and students. TECCS has supported my teaching style, paths for growth in education, and advocacy. Schools of choice aren't for everyone, but for those looking for options, having a choice can make all the difference in the world! ■



Roseangela Mendoza has been with The Ethical Community Charter School (TECCS) in Jersey City, New Jersey since 2011. She received her Bachelor of Arts in History degree from

New Jersey City University. Ms. Mendoza serves as the Middle School Lead and Social Studies teacher at TECCS. In addition to her teaching responsibilities she is the school's Community Outreach and Service Learning Coordinator.

Students Enter the World of Podcasting with AAEF Grant

One of AAE's goals of the scholarship and grant program is to help teachers try something new and innovative with their students. That's why we were ecstatic to hear from Matthew Persico, who applied for an AAE Foundation Classroom Grant to help purchase podcasting equipment. Below is what he had to say about his experience:

This experience has helped me provide professional-quality equipment for my school that we were seriously lacking. We had no forms of recording software available to students even though many students have expressed interest in such opportunities. My podcast elective in particular has benefited from the grant; however, the equipment will be used in many areas. I've already started planning how students in other classes can use this equipment to the fullest extent and then broadcast their recordings to a larger audience. The students' excitement has spilled over into my teaching practice—I can't wait to see how far they take this opportunity!

Within days of receiving the podcasting equipment, my students have already conducted multiple interviews with one another as well as with students at our other divisions (an interview with high school students and a recorded 'book talk' with elementary-aged students). They are incredibly



“Additionally, the students were able to get to know students at our other division with whom they, historically, have had very little connection. These bonds have enhanced our K-12 school community.”

excited to master the production of podcast-making and then begin extending this interest to include a number of different topics. Other students have asked if we can use the equipment in our other classes, which I am happy to do. To see the students excited about the devices has been a great joy in my teaching career. Additionally, the students were able to get to know students at our other division with whom they, historically, have had very little connection. These bonds have enhanced our K-12 school community.

The high school students who participated in recorded interviews immediately asked if they could start an after-school podcasting club. I'm looking into ways that high school teachers can use the equipment to do so. My students are also reaching out to members of the community to record another podcast interview episode. They hope to interview recently elected officials from the local election as well as some other important members of our small community.

This has been such a great experience. The students are incredibly excited by this opportunity, and I am looking forward to finding additional ways to use the podcasting equipment to enhance the educational engagement of my students.

The AAE Foundation National Teacher Scholarship and Classroom Grant program provides awards of up to \$500 to educators across the country for classroom materials, innovative projects, and teacher professional development.

In addition, many states have their own scholarship and grant programs. Applications are awarded twice a year. The next national deadline is March 1, 2020. Apply now and don't miss out! ■

SCHOLARSHIP & GRANT APPLICATIONS DUE MARCH 1!

The AAE Foundation's National Teacher Scholarships and Classroom Grants competition is held twice a year, in the fall and spring. The deadlines are March 1 and October 1. For more information, visit aaeteachers.org/awards.



AAEF and Our Members Giving Back

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

Blessings in a Backpack is a national program, headquartered in Louisville, Kentucky, that mobilizes communities, individuals, and resources to provide food on the weekends for elementary school children across America who might otherwise go hungry.

► Learn more at blessingsinabackpack.org.



BLESSINGS IN A BACKPACK

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