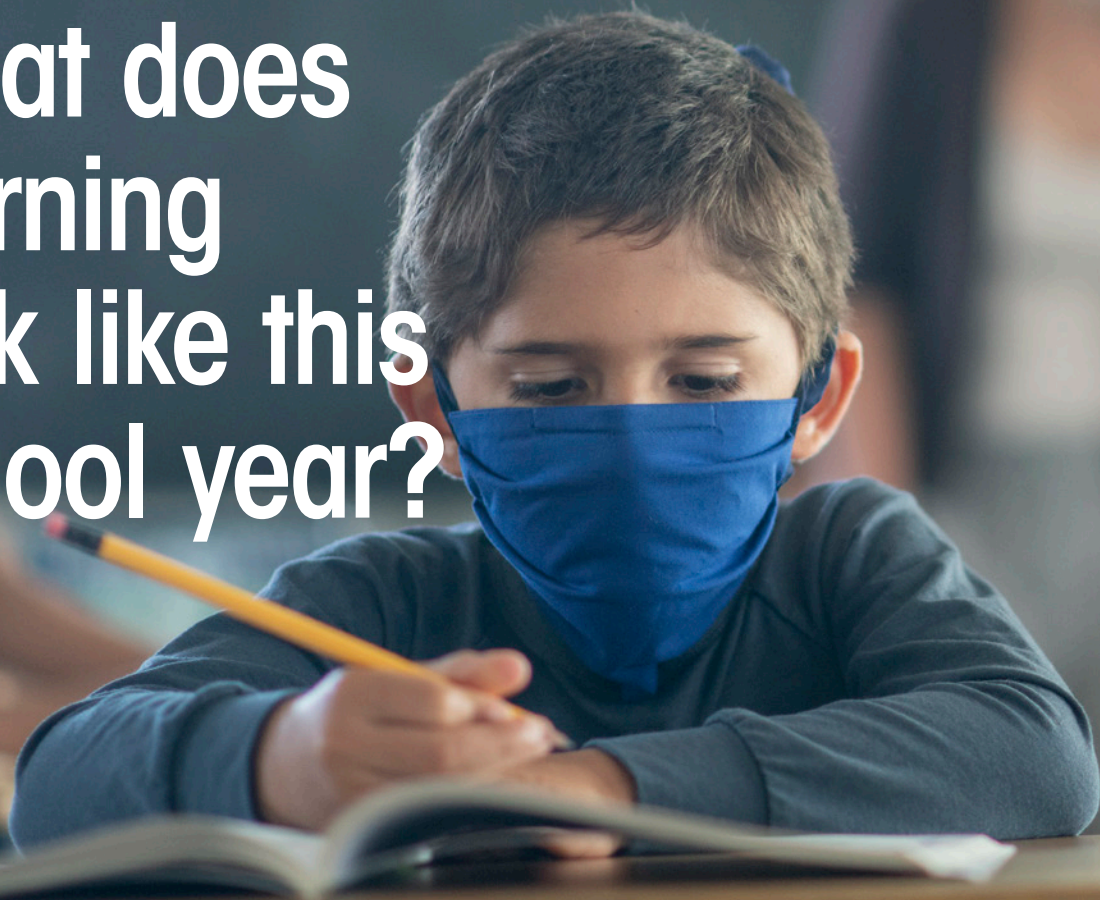


What does learning look like this school year?



By Tamia Mallory

Across the nation, school district officials, educators, and families grapple with the answer to one question: What does learning look like this school year?

Educators broadly agree that virtual instruction is not as effective as in-person instruction for many of their students, but the safety of students and staff is a critical component for the traditional classroom setting. According to a study conducted by NPR, most teachers are concerned about in-person instruction, and two-thirds of educators prefer to start the school year online. Eighty-two percent of the teachers sampled said they are worried about in-person learning. These results are not surprising, considering the continuing level of new confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the U.S. and the resurgence of hot spots. The fast-spreading virus already had an enormous effect on the end of last school year at educational institutions worldwide, so what does learning look like this school year?

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Nine of the top fifteen school systems across the country started school virtually, with two using an online and in-person hybrid approach.



In short, it depends where you live. Some school districts have decided to return to in-person instruction, while some started virtually until officials can determine the next best steps for students and staff. Some universities have already decided there will be no in-person classes all school year. However, some schools have already experienced a spike in COVID-19 cases only days after reopening. One Indiana junior high school opened the first week of August and immediately learned that a student tested positive for COVID-19. Every staff member and student who had been in contact with that student was instructed to quarantine for fourteen days, according to *The New York Times*. In Georgia, one high school student faced suspension after posting to Twitter a crowded hallway picture that appeared to show many students without masks. The student's suspension was later reversed, *CNN* reported.

Many school districts have decided to start the fall semester online. According to *USA Today*, nine of the top fifteen school systems across the country started school virtually, with two using an online and in-person hybrid approach. Virtual education ensures the health safety of students and staff, but what about learning? Many teachers have struggled with engaging students through a computer screen.

The Association of American Educators asked members how they would like the return to school to look. "In person. Distance learning is especially bad for kindergarten," one member wrote. "I am ready to see my students! I am practicing air high fives! For those who need to see me but cannot attend school, I am planning some 'ring and run' (home visit, ring doorbell, and

run back to my car)," another wrote. However, some educators are not as eager, noting concerns for their health and the health of their students. "Online. It looks like we will have alternating days of synchronous and asynchronous instruction, pending board approval," one member wrote. "Remote instruction," emphatically, wrote another.

AAE member and AAEF fellow Jamila Jendayi says her return to teaching has been difficult. "There are so many uncertainties and we continue to press on. My school has chosen to go with a hybrid model along with a fully remote option for students," she said. "As the assistant director of operations, it is my responsibility to ensure that the school is completely safe. Meanwhile, I worry about my [own] children and their safety." Jendayi also expressed how difficult accommodating children can be for some parents. "Many of the teachers at my school have requested accommodations due to lack of child care, making it very difficult to even implement a hybrid model as we would need to hire several substitute teachers to be in the classroom with the students while we teach remotely," she said. AAE member and 2018-2019 AAEF fellow Terrance Anfield believes that the current education climate will forever change how teachers are viewed. "This has created a level of communication between educator and student families like never before," he said. "A positive outcome of the situation we are in now is that families will have a newfound appreciation for teachers and educational profession in its entirety, by having experienced some of the work that has been done behind the scenes for so long."

We want to hear from you. What does learning look like this year in your school? How are your students adjusting to the changes? How is the school leadership incorporating the input of educators? Email us at editor@aaeteachers.org.

Lastly, if your district has decided to return to the classroom, the CDC recommends many safety practices to keep you and your students safe and help mitigate the spread of coronavirus. The Association of American Educators website also has a "Big List of Coronavirus Resources" available for all educators, whether teaching in-person or virtually, and guidance on legal concerns.



Tamia Mallory is communications coordinator & social media manager for AAE. In this capacity she manages AAE's content and messaging across all social media platforms as well as supports internal and external communications and awareness efforts. Prior to joining AAE, she served as digital content producer at NBC 12 in Richmond, Virginia.

AAEF COVID-19 Relief Program Winners

As the consequences of pandemic-related school closures in the spring spilled into the summer months and continued to drive much of the planning process for back-to-school, the Association of American Educators Foundation realized that projected technology, digital access, and safety gaps, as well as proposed budget shortfalls, were swiftly becoming a reality for educators and districts nationwide. We immediately responded by offering a new cycle of grant funding.

The extension of the popular AAEF COVID-19 Relief Grant Program was embraced by hundreds of additional applicants. Proposals were accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis through August 31, 2020. “The unprecedented need expressed by educators in all school settings, facing an array of in-person, remote, and hybrid models and schedules for the return to instruction in the fall has been monumental to say the least,” said AAE Foundation Executive Director Colin Sharkey. “But the outpouring of concern for their students and creative solutions presented throughout the submissions we received were truly inspiring.”

We salute all of our applicants for their unwavering dedication and congratulate the following award recipients:



GAYE CALLICH, a high school educator in Lyons, Kansas, created a Job Olympics, providing a competitive opportunity for students with special needs to receive feedback from business leaders on their job skills.



CHRISTINA BARTLETT, a band director with Morrilton High School in Morrilton, Arkansas, purchased Smart Music software subscriptions for the school's three band directors and for 115 students, allowing them to incorporate at-home practice and assessment.



CYNTHIA MCKINNEY, a second-grade educator with Eagle Charter School in Salem, Oregon, has used her grant to purchase a water bottle filling station for the school as part of her school's reopening plan.



MARLA RICKARD, a science educator with Walnut High School in Walnut, California, is using her grant funds to build a hope pond for the school's Wellness Center, which will support students' emotional well-being when they return to in-person instruction.



ANGELA AMOS, a business and marketing educator with Siloam Springs High School in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, purchased an MBA Learning Center master license to provide a rich, engaging curriculum for all students taking entrepreneurship, small business, and marketing courses and ensuring a seamless transition between online and in-person instruction.



MIRIAM MARTINEZ, an elementary educator with Emerson Elementary School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is purchasing

new flexible furniture in response to physical distancing requirements as well as to allow students to easily experience outside learning activities.



JULIE OLSON, an educator with the Woodrow Cummings Elementary School in Conway, Arkansas, is using her grant award to purchase enough robotic kits, including coding software, for her kindergarten through second-grade students so they can maintain social distance while teachers work with them this fall.



LUCAS GALAN, a physics educator in Covina, California, is purchasing an X-Pen Artist Monitor and drawing software to facilitate all levels of remote physics instruction for his Northview High School students.



SARAH FORBES, an elementary educator with Sanderson Academy in Ashfield, Massachusetts, is purchasing software and extended licensing fees to create portable lessons on DVDs for students who lack at-home internet access.



REGINA BELCHER, a mathematics educator with Polo Park Middle School in Wellington, Florida, is using her grant award funding to purchase individual Wipebook Workbooks as a safe alternative to previously shared workbooks or whiteboards.



STEPHEN PARCE, the principal of Denver Justice High School in Denver, Colorado, is using his scholarship funds to participate in the Mental Health Changemaker Fellowship, which will provide new tools and resources to catalyze mental wellness in his educational community.



How would you use a \$500 teacher scholarship or classroom grant?

Find out more at aaeteachers.org/awards

The Education Policy Landscape – 2020

Along with the pandemic and an economic crisis, this year's election has magnified national attention on the state of education in America. Since its founding, AAE has adhered firmly to its nonpartisan mission and this year is no different. It is not our intention to tell educators or anyone who to vote for or how to cast your vote. However, every member and every educator deserves to be an informed participant in the education policy discussion, debate, and decision-making process so that you may best advocate for yourself and your students. To facilitate that process, here is some information and commentary regarding education policy that we hope you will find interesting, challenging, and spur on further dialogue among you and your colleagues.



By Chester E. Finn, Jr.

Donald Trump, Patriotic History, and the Federal Role

The Republican party has no 2020 platform. They refer people looking for one to the 2016 version. That goes for education along with everything else. The Trump-Pence campaign website doesn't display policy positions either, although there's a section on "Promises Kept" that includes one skimpy page on education.

Thus anyone seeking a preview of what a second Trump term might mean for education (or anything) doesn't have much to go by, other than "past as prologue." That's unprecedented, so far as I can tell, and manifestly unhelpful to voters.

The president's lengthy acceptance speech to the GOP convention last Thursday did, however, include a short passage about his education plans and claims. The K-12 portion hit three points. Two were familiar and predictable: his insistence that schools open this fall and his praiseworthy advocacy of school choice and well-warranted denunciation of that portion of the Democratic party platform.

His third point was less familiar: "We will fully restore patriotic education to our schools," he declared. "We want our sons and daughters to know the truth. America is the greatest and most exceptional nation in the history of the world.... I want every child in America to know that you are part of the most exciting and incredible adventure in human history. No matter where your family comes from, no matter your background, in America, anyone can rise with hard work, devotion, and drive. You can reach any goal and achieve every ambition...."

He went on at some length about the country's impressive history and reasons why Americans should come to know and appreciate it. I share that view. Mike

Petrilli and I recently edited a collection of essays that includes several ardent, thoughtful, well-informed pleas for U.S. schools to take history education generally, and "patriotic history" specifically, far more seriously in the future. Here's an excerpt, well worth reading, from the *Education Next* version of Eliot A. Cohen's superb contribution to that book, including the crucial link between patriotic history and the improved civic-and-civics education that's now being urged by many people across the political spectrum.

Particularly for Americans, patriotic history is a kind of glue for an extraordinarily diverse republic. Lincoln used a patriotic version of the nation's revolutionary past and founding generation to hold the Union together and provide meaning and redemptive hope after the slaughter of hundreds of thousands during the Civil War. The Gettysburg Address, after all, begins by recalling the Declaration of Independence and defining the meaning of the Revolution. And Lincoln in turn became a figure to inspire succeeding generations....

Civic education requires students engage with their history—not only to know whence conventions, principles, and laws have come but also to develop an attachment to them. And civic education is also inextricably interwoven with patriotism, without which commitment to the values that make free government possible will not exist. Civic education depends not only on an understanding of fundamental processes and institutions (for example, why there is a Supreme Court, or why only Congress gets to raise taxes or declare war) but also on a commitment to those processes and institutions, and on some kind of admiration for the country that created them and the men and women who have shaped and lived

within them. In a crisis, it is not enough to know how the walls were constructed and the plumbing laid out in the house that Madison, Washington, and Lincoln built. One has to think that the architects did remarkable work, that as their legatees we need to preserve the building even if we modernize it, and that it is a precious edifice like none other.

Cohen is no Trump fan, nor are many other advocates of beefed-up civics and history education. Yet this they seem to agree on, and it ought to be something that lots of Americans could agree on—if we can agree on anything these days.

Tucked away in the president’s remarks on the topic, however, is a mystery posed by this pledge: “We will fully restore patriotic education to our schools.” What could he (or his team) mean by that? There’s a statutory prohibition against the federal government influencing curricula, much less mandating anything in that realm. This doesn’t mean Uncle Sam can’t help schools and teachers in various ways. Over the years, encouraged by patriotic legislators such as Senator Lamar Alexander and the late Senator Robert Byrd, both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Department of Education have sought to support better history teaching, although it’s been almost a decade since the last appropriation for the main such program, named Teaching American History. The two agencies did, however, recently join forces to support an ambitious

“convening project” that’s intended to strengthen both civics and history education.

That project is still underway—I’m one of many advisors—and is expected to produce recommendations that will likely include ways that Uncle Sam can help. Renewed funding for the mothballed history teaching program would be a good thing, and extending it to include civics would be even better. Additional convenings would help, too. So would support for quality research in this realm and regular NAEP testing of students in these subjects in grades four, eight, and twelve with results reported by state as well as for the entire nation.

All good and all, I hope these are moves that the Trump administration would back, because both the country would benefit and because this would be consistent with his mysterious but well-intended pledge. Could we expect the same from a Biden administration? I sincerely hope so. ■



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 is also a senior fellow at Stanford’s Hoover Institution. This article originally appeared on the Thomas B. Fordham Institute website on September 2, 2020. <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/donald-trump-patriotic-history-and-federal-role>.

Former Vice President Joe Biden’s K-12 Education Platform

Wages and Benefits:

- Triple Title I funding, which funds schools with high percentages of low-income families. Districts would be required to use the increase in funds to offer educators competitive salaries and other investments prior to using funds for other purposes.
- Create a paid federal mentorship program. Funds would also be used to pay for teachers to receive new certifications in high-demand areas.
- Simplify the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

Resources for Students:

- Double the amount of psychologists, guidance counselors, nurses, social workers, and other health professionals in schools. Partner with colleges to expand these programs.

- Expand community schools by providing resources to meet unmet needs of the families of 300,000 students.
- Earmark funds in federal infrastructure legislation to improve public school buildings.
- Ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

Equity:

- Use the increased Title I funding to equalize funding in school districts, ensure preschool access, and that districts provide rigorous coursework at all schools.
- Support minorities in dual-enrollment classes. Work with HBCUs to recruit and prepare teachers.
- Increase federal funding under the Disabilities Education Act.

Middle/High School

- Fund vocational training and partnerships with high schools, community colleges, and employers.
- Allow Pell Grants to be used for dual enrollment programs.

Coronavirus:

- Require the CDC to provide guidelines and resources to schools on containment and mitigation of coronavirus.
- Increase federal funding to schools — including Title I schools — that have increased costs while providing remote education or after-school activities.

<https://joebiden.com/education/>

President Donald Trump's K-12 Education Platform

- Expand charter schools.
- Provide school choice to every child in America. While additional details are not yet available about President Trump's school choice agenda, the Department of Education under President Trump has supported the Education Freedom Scholarship and Opportunity Act. The bill would provide up to \$5 billion to individuals and corporations through a tax credit for donations

to school choice scholarships. An additional \$5 billion would be available through tax credits for donations to work force training organizations.

- Restore patriotic education.

Additional details about President Trump's second-term agenda will be released in upcoming policy speeches.

<https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/trump-campaign-announces-president-trumps-2nd-term-agenda-fighting-for-you/>

CARES Act Impact on Teachers

In March, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and the bill was signed into law by President Trump. Through the CARES Act, the federal government provided relief for individuals, businesses, and state governments. Included in the CARES Act were provisions impacting teachers and schools nationwide.

Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program and TEACH Grants

Under the CARES Act, the Department of Education may waive the requirement that educators participating in the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program must teach five consecutive academic years in a low-income school. The Department of Education may also waive the requirement that educators who received a Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant must teach at a low-income school for at least four years within eight years of completing their program. Teachers participating in either program will still get credit toward their service requirements for a school year that was interrupted by COVID-19.

For additional information about your participation in the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program, contact FedLoan

servicing at 1-855-265-4038. For additional information about your participation in the TEACH Grant Program, contact the Federal Student Aid Help Center at 1-800-557-7394.

Funding for Schools

Through the CARES Act, states received a total of more than \$13 billion in federal grants. These funds, which must be passed on to school districts, may be used to provide necessary resources to schools, including for distance learning, and to coordinate and improve coronavirus preparedness, prevention, and response efforts. Funds may also be used to purchase cleaning and sanitation supplies, or to provide training and professional development on sanitation and how to minimize the spread of infectious diseases. Under the law, school districts are allowed to use funds to purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) or other materials to ensure student and teacher safety.



Noelani Bonifacio contributed to this article. Noelani Bonifacio is the director of strategic partnerships for AAE. In this role, Noelani cultivates AAE's outreach to the broader education and labor reform policy community. Prior to her role at AAE, she worked in the U.S. House of Representatives as a senior policy staffer on education and labor policy.

Twenty-Five Years of Serving Educators



A Letter from AAE Founders Gary and Pietie Beckner

THANK YOU AAE MEMBERS

Dear AAE members & friends,

It is hard to believe it has been twenty-five years since Pietie and I founded the Association of American Educators. It has been a wonderful journey!

We really didn't envision where AAE would be this many years later, or even how teachers would respond to what we had formed, but respond you did. You are AAE. It has been demonstrated in so many ways that AAE members are true professionals who care more about what directly benefits the students under their care, rather than their own interests. And that is why we started AAE. We believed that the nation's two monolithic teacher unions were more concerned about their own interests rather than what was best for students. Our mission statement underscores the difference between AAE and the unions.

OUR MISSION

To foster the transformation of the teaching profession by
empowering and supporting
our community of professionals
for the benefit of our students
and the nation.

Our AAE staff and Board of Directors are so proud to be associated with professionals such as you. We are a membership organization and will continue to seek your opinion before we advocate for changes to our educational system. The nation is standing at a crossroad on the path to educational reform. Parents and teachers are growing increasingly tired of the political games being played in the guise of education reform. Now, more than ever before, classroom teachers' voices need to be heard! In that regard, we have accelerated our effort to train more of our members to become official AAE Advocates who represent the opinions of AAE to state and national stakeholders and the media. Changes to our educational system are meaningless, and even deleterious, if they do not ensure a better educated society. That is why it is so important for AAE to continue to grow so that our voice, YOUR voice, is not drowned out by those who are putting their own self-serving interests first above those of our children.

Pietie and I want to thank you again for joining AAE. Your voluntary membership affirms our vision of a teaching profession that is student oriented, well respected, and personally fulfilling. These past twenty-five years have gone by so quickly. Now we look forward to what the future has in store for AAE. We are confident that we have left the organization in a good place, with a staff that wholeheartedly embraces the mission and vision of AAE, and possesses the ability and energy to take AAE to the next level of success.

Gratefully yours,

What Has Changed in the

... and

There's an old saying, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Those who have been in education for a long time know this to be true.

When I started teaching English and yearbook in 1991, the only form of communication with parents was physical letters home. In my second year in Blue Valley, the district started to use voicemail, and a couple years later, the district gave us an email address so that even faster communication between parents and teachers could take place. The way we communicate with parents has changed, but the messages home have not.

My first classroom was one of only two in the building that had a handful of computers in a school of 1,800 students. Today, each student has his/her own MacBook Air. The technology and the software have all changed drastically, but the students still forget to do their assignments; or, instead of the dog eating their homework, now it gets lost in the cloud or the computer has crashed and the student lost all his/her work. No matter what the technology is, some students will always find creative ways to not do their work.

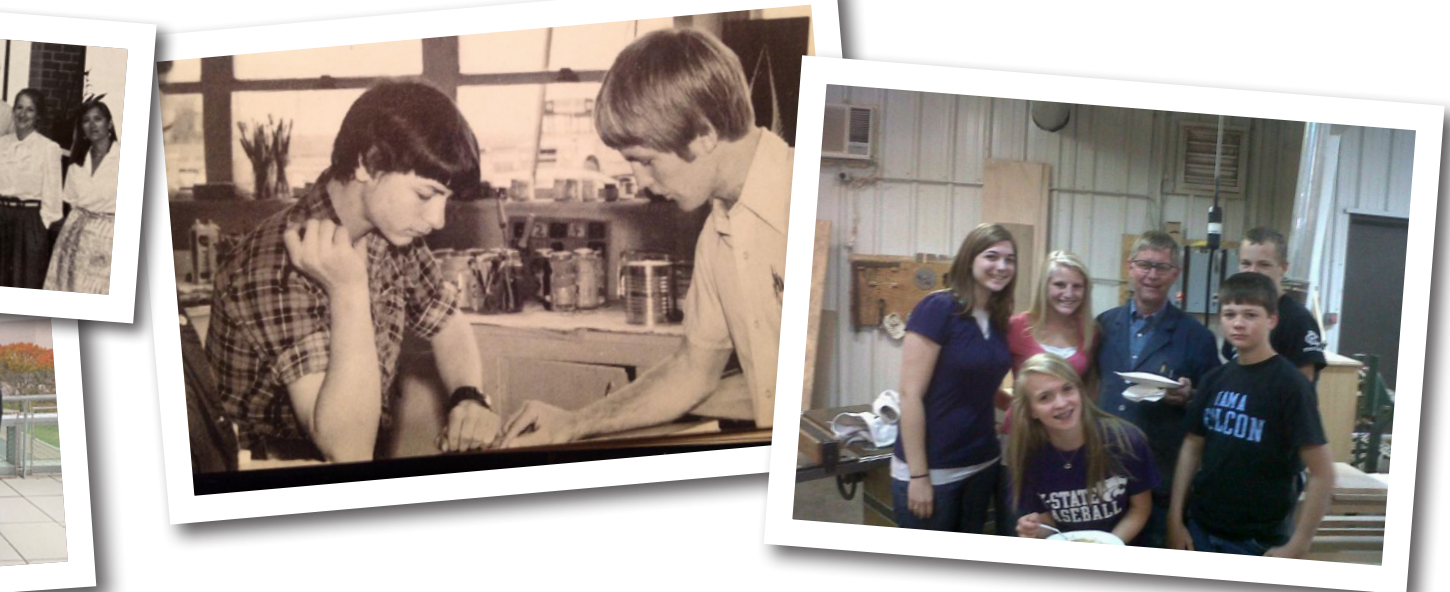
This is true for almost all technological changes, curricular changes, and structural changes we have had in education during the past twenty-five years. We often talk of the pendulum swing in education, and those of us nearer to the end of our careers than the beginning, have seen the pendulum swing several times. Although the faces over the years have changed, what has not changed is that there are amazing professional educators who spend countless hours, both on and off the clock, to help students. They are dedicated to their profession, their craft, and their students, and I don't ever see that changing. ■

Jim McCrossen, Educator for 29 years, KANAAE member 19 years



Classroom in 25 Years...

What Has Stayed the Same?



I joined the field of education in fall 1978, when I was hired to be the woodworking and mechanical drawing teacher at Riley County High School in Riley, Kansas. At that time mechanical drawing was a paper- and pencil-based communication tool. However, with the rise of personal computers, it wasn't long before I was learning computer-aided drafting, plotters, and a different form of drafting communication. As drafting technology became more available, I integrated it into my curriculum while continuing to value the need for paper and pencil instruction. I continued using both forms throughout my teaching career until I retired from teaching to join the staff at AAE in 2011. Other changes included how my teaching field was identified. Industrial arts became industrial technology because of the obvious influence of the technology aspect in our field.

In addition, schools went through the phase of integrating module instruction into the curriculum, which fortunately at the high school level, I was able to avoid. Modules were better suited for middle school exploratory instruction. I believed a project-based education that allowed a more in-depth study of a specific area was the best direction for my program. Woodworking and engineering drafting continued to flourish as the program provided the instruction my students needed.

Students will always be students. Challenging them to be the best they can be as individuals and as it relates to the classroom instruction we provide will never change. ■

Garry Sigle, KANAAE Executive Director, Educator for 33 years



What Has Changed in the Classroom in 25 Years... and What Has Stayed the Same?

In fall 1984, I walked into a high school classroom as a teacher. I was armed with a box of chalk, a teacher’s edition of the district-approved textbook, and all of the idealism a 22-year-old could embody. In short, I was scared to death. My first years in education were influenced deeply by the 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education’s report “A Nation at Risk.” The Federal Department of Education, along with the states, began to emphasize the need for standards, standardized testing, and all that goes with holding an entire system accountable. Reform was the buzzword of the day. There was a demand for systemic change and improvement at every level of education. As a new teacher, I experienced it in my classroom every day. We have to do better, teach more, and dig deeper for our students.

From my perspective now, that pressure has increased exponentially. I made the shift to virtual education in 2003. It was exciting. We talked about personalizing education. I heard the phrase “school of one” referenced to how individualized the possibilities were for our students. I continue to be passionate about being present for my students. Yet I wonder how much further we could go if there was less emphasis on standard-

ized tests and more emphasis on helping students imagine and build their own futures. I wonder if it is important for students to learn specific facts—when in the information age, if one doesn’t know something, one simply uses Google to find it.

I hold great hope that what we can contribute to our society as teachers may be the wisdom that comes with knowing that how to think, how to problem-solve, and how to negotiate positive and productive relationships. This may be the most powerful learning in which our students can engage.

I believe that all teachers are idealists at heart. They work daily in an environment where change is inevitable. Much has changed in our culture since I began this work in 1984. I know that I have been able to speak positively into the lives of many of my students and colleagues—and yet, I continue to proactively seek ways to do it better, teach more, and dig deeply. Like every teacher, I have a heart for this. ■

Elizabeth Davis, Ed.D., PACE State Director, Educator for 34 years

A Letter from the Board of Directors

The Association of American Educators’ silver anniversary is one that not only warrants celebrating, it is also a time for reflection. Speaking on behalf of the entire Board of Directors, we salute all our members and staff across the country. We on the Board take our responsibilities very seriously and know that tens of thousands of our nation’s educators depend on the vitality and growth of this special organization for support, protection, for valuable resources and professional development, and to be a strong and clear voice for student-focused policies and practices. Our efforts to empower every educator to develop your own voice and secure a place in the decision-making process

for the future of your education communities is our greatest mission. We are deeply proud of our role in helping you hone your advocacy skills for the advancement of the profession and learners in all education settings.

We are humbled by your selfless, tireless commitment to your students, and your creativity and ingenuity to see that all learners achieve their fullest potential. AAE remains as committed as you are to seek the very best education for our nation’s most precious asset, our children. Congratulations AAE on your first twenty-five years of serving educators nationwide!

Member Memories


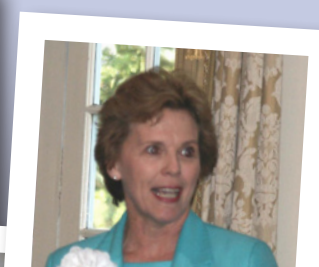
I have been teaching for thirty-one years. The first fifteen years I was in public schools. The past sixteen years I have been teaching for a hybrid charter school. I have learned so much through all of these years of teaching.

I started my career teaching with an amazing mentor and team teacher, Sharon Andreason. She was the best mentor and friend anyone could have.

She learned about AAE when it first started as an alternative to the union. She shared with me all of the reasons we should not be part of the local, state, and national union. We were very concerned about the way our money was being spent. When she found out about AAE, she helped me go through the process to get out of our union. We joined AAE immediately, and have been so thankful for the support and comfort in knowing we are putting our money into an organization that cares about things we care about.

Unfortunately, my wonderful friend passed away a few years ago and I miss her dearly. However, I am so thankful for everything she taught me and for her guidance at the beginning of my teaching career.

Shannon Rapp, 4th grade teacher, AAE member since 1994



Do you remember your first days as a teacher?
Is there a special moment when you knew you'd found your passion for teaching?
Tell us! And share your pictures today.
Send them to editor@aaeteachers.org.

Advocacy, Action, and Engagement

Why Families Need Grace More Than Grades

Since March, parents have taken on several additional roles and responsibilities to support their children. From consultant to assistant teacher, to office manager and mental health specialist, parents have exercised superior patience, positivity, and poise as the education system innovates to address changing needs due to the pandemic.

While parents have displayed great strength for their families, their pleas for help are now receiving national attention. Parents have taken school choice matters into their own hands by leveraging pod learning groups, private tutors, and pulling their children from schools that are no longer serving them. While these strides have been made in hopes of avoiding a catastrophic learning loss in the future, two key components of this choice remain quietly unmentioned — equity and access.

Although schools are reopening, families, along with educators, face unique challenges. As we innovate around connectivity, utilization of new platforms, and communication, a renewed commitment to equity and access is required to ensure all children receive high-quality education, no matter the format.

Before COVID-19 revealed its first cases in the United States, children from rural communities, children of color, children with disabilities, and children from families enduring low socio-economic mobility faced systemic challenges that led to absenteeism or poor performance on measures related to academic growth. Often, these groups graduate from high school at a fraction of the rate of their affluent, middle-, and upper-class peers.

Many students from populations like these continue to be underserved as learning begins this fall. With many school buildings physically closed and liabilities waived in response to the pandemic, students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP), English Language Learners (ELL), English as a Second Language (ESL), and many other groups, have not received their special services at all. What's more, schools continue to report losing contact with students and families, especially those who were homeless or between housing situations during the school year.

Teachers and school leaders need to be aware of not only the challenges students and their families face outside of school but also the solutions they want to see. Each family is approaching this semester with unique needs. For example: can their student get online? Is a Wi-Fi hotspot outside of the school a practical solution for a family without reliable transportation? The relationship between families and the school needs to take priority. Who can parents turn to at your school when they need assistance or are facing challenges related to their child's schooling? The system for accountability should be clear to all stakeholders so that they can engage constructively in the education system.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused untold and often invisible trauma, and children need to develop the skills to understand and cope with their pandemic experiences. It falls to educators, as significant adults in children's lives, to prioritize Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). SEL encompasses what students learn in the school building outside of content, including working with others, setting goals, and making responsible decisions. It will be challenging to engage students in SEL when they return to school, and educators must be intentional about how they establish their learning environments to account for the anxiety many students and families are experiencing.



This school year a renewed sense of urgency is also required to **identify, locate, and continue critical contact** with students from special populations, especially our students who have faced or are currently facing homelessness. Ensuring their access to the learning environment, and being conscious and sensitive to their circumstances will be critical components in their ongoing academic success.

Throughout the school year, reflect upon these critical questions, and consider them a top priority as schools work tirelessly to serve children and families:

1) Where are your students?

Use this question to ground you in a commitment to ensuring all children are able to access education. Where are your students physically, emotionally, and socially? Who have they been with and how are they feeling? Most importantly, how might you, as their beloved educator, create space to build relationships around this?

2) Do students have access to appropriate technology and are they trained in their use?

Specifically, has your school community done everything in its collective power to ensure that students have access to the platforms you will use for learning?

3) How have we incentivized attendance, learning, and academic growth?

As innovation creates a “new normal” in education, we must commit and constantly ground ourselves, our families, and our students in **why** their education is important. Incentivizing learning and creating exciting experiences for children while meeting community needs may assist in closing achievement gaps.

Within our learning communities, a commitment to advocacy, inclusion, responsiveness, and **grace** will ease much of the confusion, frustration, and tension that come along with innovation in the midst of such uncharted territory. None of this (school closures, quarantine, or even wearing face masks in grocery stores) is normal, and it is futile to behave as if it is. Parent and student advocacy must be a priority for our schools to create cultures where families are able to ask for what they need, admit when they don’t understand, and receive additional support if needed.

The lens of equity requires reconsideration of conventional instructional design. It is important to understand the variety of experiences students have had during the COVID-19 pandemic and to incorporate equity into instructional design. Traditional measures of understanding do not translate well into online and blended

learning environments, and their use will cause a great deal of stress for families. Finding proof of the “COVID Slide” should not be used to discourage students or educators. Consider how assessment can be used in your classes to inform productive conversations *with* students and their families.

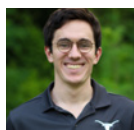
Framing formative data as “gaps” or “poor performance” does little to inform what needs to be done. While accountability data is important for state policy discussions, it should not be used to add additional strain on families. Assessments should be a starting point in developing a strategy for individualized learning, not a factor in determining what is achievable “given the circumstances.” Everyone — students, parents, and teachers alike — needs to be involved in ensuring that this school year is productive and equitable.

Guilt, shame, and fear associated with missed assignments, missed class time, or struggling students should be completely abandoned and replaced with the creating and sustaining of a culture of listening and responding to needs with urgency, transparency, and grace. Start this work as soon as possible, and continue to revisit it during professional development, and throughout the school year as a part of teacher evaluation.

Finally, when we take a step away from the planning, the pressure, and the performance related to metrics and data, we should all humbly admit that in many ways, parents, educators, and students alike have all been affected by this pandemic. We are all processing and grieving some kind of loss without an end in sight. Whether we are grieving the loss of our beloved summer vacation, or missing our friends from school and work, when we treat each other and our children with humility, grace, and understanding, and work together to ensure children have access to high-quality learning experiences, we may just find that we are able to create an education system that is responsive, inclusive, and prepared to address the challenges of America’s future. ■



Kira Tookes is the director of advocacy for AAE Foundation. In this role, Kira is responsible for recruiting, training, developing, and empowering teachers to make strategic and impactful policy advancements for the benefit of all children.



Eli Rolfes is AAE's educator fellow. His most recent educator role was as a secondary mathematics teacher in Covington, Kentucky. Prior to teaching, he worked in the Office of Student Success at The University of Texas at Austin. Eli is originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, and now resides in Arlington, Virginia.



What You Need to Know about Masks in the Workplace

If you had an opportunity to attend one of our *Discussion with Legal Services* webinars, you know the topic of wearing a mask at school as recommended by the CDC came up frequently. I want to give you an update on how that scenario is playing out now that most of you are well into your new school year.

The law allows states to set rules related to health and safety during a pandemic including wearing masks. Schools generally must follow state mandates, although some districts have been allowed to opt out. To help stop the spread of COVID-19, many states and schools have included a mask requirement as part of their in-person or hybrid reopening plan and a number of schools are providing PPE or medical-grade masks for educators.

If your district requires a mask, there will be limited exceptions. Those include educators or staff with a health condition that interferes with wearing a mask. To qualify, you should obtain a doctor's note that indicates you have a health condition that interferes with your ability to wear a mask. Exemptions or exceptions for constitutional, religious, or moral grounds are generally not currently available.

If you and students are required to wear a mask, it will be important for you to know and understand your school or district's policies. For example, can the mask be removed in the classroom to eat or drink? Are you expected to enforce a mask policy as it relates to students and if so what actions are you allowed to take when a



student refuses to wear a mask? If you feel students need to see your face, are you allowed to wear a face shield instead of a mask?

These are different times to be sure. Educators are pivoting to address the unique challenges they face if expected to return to the classroom. We recognize how difficult this time has been for all of you and encourage you to reach out to AAE Legal Services at any time. We are here to help. ■



Sharon Nelson is the senior 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.

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What We Know about Students and COVID-19

Last spring, schools nationwide closed their doors in an effort to keep students safe. Now as classes have begun, educators are still wondering, “Can we have in-person classes safely?”

There is a lot we still don’t know about how coronavirus spreads in younger populations, but there has been some research into its effects on children and the classroom.



What the Research Says:

Before we get into the research, a few notes on why this column is different from others. Usually, I rely on literature studies and meta-analysis that provide a broad overview of the research. In the case of COVID-19, these do not yet exist. Because we’re interested in what can be proven, I skipped over studies from early in the pandemic or that were focused on hypotheticals. This focus is on the spread of COVID-19 in schools, not the other effects that could come from school closures.

Several studies have looked at the spread of COVID-19 in schools. While limited in nature and full of uncertainty, these studies did indicate that there was relatively little spread between very young students. This was not always the case with adult staff. One observational study of a preschool in Singapore found that sixteen adult staff and eleven extended community members contracted COVID-19 from an outbreak beginning with an asymptomatic adult staff member.

This is consistent with other research that has shown children are less likely to contract and spread the virus than other age groups. The older children are, the more

likely they are to spread the virus, but viral infections in children of preschool and early elementary ages are very low.

High school students have viral rates closer to adults and seem just as likely to spread the disease. Unsurprisingly, observational studies have tied COVID-19 outbreaks to high schools. One study documented an outbreak at a high school in Israel after mask rules were relaxed. The outbreak in that school caused the researchers in the study to examine COVID-19 spread in relation to school openings. This study found a jump in cases in 10-19-year-olds in the weeks following school reopenings, followed in subsequent weeks by a slight increase in the general population.

How to Use This Information:

While some studies have been done on the spread of COVID-19, these studies are very limited in nature and tend to be observational, so it is difficult to apply their findings globally. Still, it seems that in the right circumstances and for the right students, some schools can open.

The right circumstances include a low rate of transmission and schools that are actively attempting to mitigate transmission. The right students appear to be students who are younger, but could include older students if they are vigilant about masking, hand washing, and maintaining social distance.

In all cases, it’s important for educators to remember that transmission is most likely between adults. Even when schools open, spending time in the teachers’ lounge or speaking with coworkers at length are among the most likely ways for the virus to be transmitted.



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.

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