

By Dr. Parker Huston

MENTAL HEALTH

A Back-to-School Priority for the Nation

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, children's mental health was a national crisis. One in five children is living with a mental health disorder. Half of lifetime mental health disorders start by age fourteen. Less than half of children who could benefit from mental health treatment get what they need. COVID-19 has only exacerbated these problems for our children due to ongoing stress and ever-changing expectations. Children's mental health matters now more than ever.

That is why we are proud to announce that AAE is a member of the *On Our Sleeves* Alliance. The Alliance is composed of education partners, youth- and parent-serving organizations, health care organizations, corporations, and individual champions representing diverse and powerful voices committed to breaking the silence surrounding children's mental health and taking action. If you missed our recent *On Our Sleeves* webinar, you can access it on our Professional Development Portal (<https://bit.ly/3gMI22d>).

Dr. Parker Huston, clinical director of *On Our Sleeves*, gives us an inside look at this national movement, including tools and resources, the importance of mental wellness and prevention, and why mental health matters inside and outside of the classroom.

Children's mental health is a national crisis hiding in plain sight. We originally started as a platform to start conversations around children's mental health and break the stigma. In the past three years, we've expanded our mission, and are committed to providing every community in America access to free, evidence-informed educational resources necessary for breaking child mental health stigmas, and educating families and advocates, so





everybody is comfortable starting these conversations and has the necessary resources to do so.

Our content is unique because it focuses on promotion of proactive mental health, wellness and prevention measures to help educators, caregivers, and parents start conversations with children to give them a voice to express their feelings and emotions and the tools to help manage the difficulties we all face in life. We currently have free information and resources available for more than fifty mental health topics, with more in development every month. Our how-to guides provide education and action-oriented strategies, activities, and tools to boost mental wellness in children. Resources have been developed to help support you in your understanding of mental health concerns, and teach you how to talk about mental health and wellness to children in ways that make sense to them at different ages. All these resources are evidence-informed and backed by pediatric behavioral health experts.

How can we support schools and educators to talk about mental health in the classroom?

Over the years, many organizations across the country have adopted social-emotional skills as a core learning component in their curriculum, which is a big deal. Throughout the pandemic, we have seen a rise in the need for mental health resources in schools. In the short-term, we don't want anybody to be struggling, but in the long-term, it's really about propelling these conversations forward.

We know that you, as educators, are on the front line to provide these important resources. That's why *On Our Sleeves* started the Million Classroom Project (OnOurSleeves.org/Million), with the goal to reach one million classrooms across America with free resources for students in pre-school through high school. A free guide, *Supporting Kids' Mental Health in the Classroom* (<https://bit.ly/3yBRnQT>), focuses on topics such as

gratitude, kindness, self-care, and starting conversations around mental health and includes activities. Several school curriculums are also available covering topics such as starting conversations, building resilience, and talking about emotions.

If you are looking for more activities and information on mental health and wellness for your classroom, some of the available resources and how-to guides on onoursleeves.org include:



Supporting Kids' Mental Well-Being
(<https://bit.ly/2YbF1SH>)



How to Start a Conversation with Kids
(<https://bit.ly/2WCLXHP>)



How to Develop Healthy Habits in Kids
(<https://bit.ly/3zB1C9e>)



How to Foster a Child's Emotional Development
(<https://bit.ly/2WBr1AG>)



How to Help Kids Manage Anxiety
(<https://bit.ly/3ywo81v>)

You can also join *On Our Sleeves'* e-community (<https://bit.ly/2XYWYDN>) to receive free, weekly mental health resources emails to help you start conversations, break stigmas, and boost mental wellness in your students. You can also email the On Our Sleeves team with any feedback at info@OnOurSleeves.org. ■



Dr. Parker Huston is the clinical director for *On Our Sleeves*. Dr. Huston works on population mental health initiatives. He develops, manages, and shares mental health content and advocates for children's mental health on local, regional, and national levels.

ON OUR SLEEVES
The Movement for Children's Mental Health

Why Having Protection *before* Something Happens Matters

It is hard to believe it is a new school year. Still reeling from the changes last year brought, many of you have returned to classrooms that continue to look very different from years past. The uncertainty of how the school year will progress only adds to this different situation. Having protection by joining a professional association such as AAE is vitally important for many reasons, some of which are discussed here.

Discipline

Discipline, warranted or not, is extremely stressful. When facing potential discipline, you could be required to engage in investigatory meetings, answer questions about your conduct, respond in writing to allegations, and more. It is important to have the support you need not only to get through this process, but also protect your rights afforded by law or contract. It is much harder to get discipline removed after the fact if proper steps are not taken during the disciplinary process to ensure this can be done. Membership with AAE provides you with legal support and often allows you to work with a local attorney to challenge disciplinary proceedings.

Parent/Guardian Interaction

Violence, harassment, or other mistreatment from parents/guardians have escalated in recent years. Even before news of the pandemic broke, teachers often struggled with parents/guardians who made unreasonable demands, refused to work cooperatively for the good of the student, or were uninvolved in the student's education. While we recognize that this is a stressful time for parents and guardians as well as students and teachers, there is no excuse for abusing, harassing, or otherwise mistreating teachers. Having an association that protects you and will provide you with support is paramount.

Medical/Religious Exemptions

Mandatory vaccines have been announced in some states, and it is likely additional states will follow. Some of you may have medical conditions that prohibit you from getting the vaccine. Those same medical conditions could also make you more susceptible to illness. Others have religious objections to the current vaccines. Both exemptions are allowed under federal law, and a number of states have similar laws. There is no guarantee you'll get an exemption, and often the steps necessary to obtain one can be tricky. Having the support of an organization that can guide you through that process could make

the difference between the exemption being granted or denied.

Ethics Complaints

When applicable, extended legal benefits through AAE are generous when dealing with ethics complaints. Some of you work in states that allow the district to report you for an ethical violation if you resign during your contract or while an investigation is pending. When extended legal benefits apply, you have the opportunity to work with a local attorney to defend against those ethics charges. You've worked years and countless hours for a license. Taking all the steps you can to protect it makes sense.

Someone in Your Corner

Last but not least, the peace of mind you get from knowing there is always someone in your corner is hard to measure quantifiably. At any point you can pick up the phone and contact AAE Legal Services. Don't wait until it's too late. We are in your corner. 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.

AAE LEGAL SERVICES

Receive caring, professional support and direct contact with our legal team for confidential advice with no conflicts of interest.

📞 800.704.7799

✉ contactlegal@aaeteachers.org

CONGRATULATIONS TO Kristine Dalmas

Winner of the first Darrell and Suzanne Holmquist Student Teacher-of-the-Year Award

After one of the most tumultuous years that educators have ever faced, the Association of American Educators continues to celebrate teachers in more ways than one. This year, the AAE Foundation unveiled the Darrell and Suzanne Holmquist Student Teacher-of-the-Year Award to join our suite of annual awards programs. Student teaching is often difficult for many future educators as they balance their first real teaching experience and finishing up their own higher education journey. The AAE Foundation accepted nominations for educators from across the country who excelled in their student teacher experiences.

The 2021 Darrell and Suzanne Holmquist Student Teacher-of-the-Year Award was presented to Kristine Dalmas, history teacher and head dance coach at Owyhee High School in Meridian, Idaho. Dalmas' nomination stood out in its praise for her professionalism, skill beyond her years of experience, love for teaching, and attention to students.

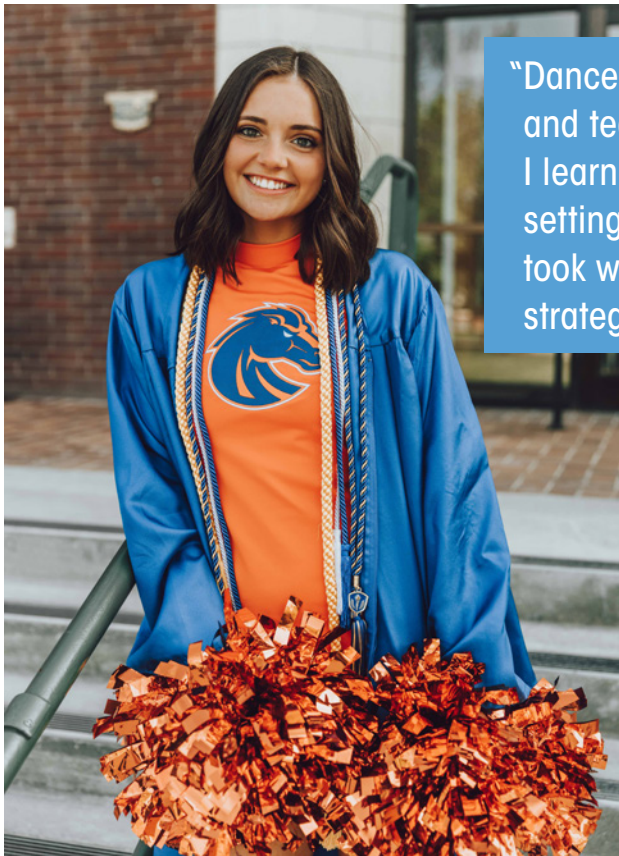
“Due to the challenges that schools were facing, I was given the opportunity to teach solo very early on in my student training. These experiences helped to prepare me to be a full-time teacher in my own classroom.”

Dalmas split her time between two schools during her student teaching journey: a middle school where she taught world civilizations and a nearby high school teaching sociology. She says that being a student teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a bittersweet experience. “Teaching during the pandemic was challenging but also offered me some unique opportunities. There were a lot of teachers who had to leave on short notice, and I was asked to step in and take



over their classes. I was able to have experiences outside of my content area and assigned age group,” Dalmas said. “Due to the challenges that schools were facing, I was given the opportunity to teach solo very early on in my student training. These experiences helped to prepare me to be a full-time teacher in my own classroom.”

Dalmas currently teaches Eastern geographical perspectives and cornerstone to ninth graders. She noted she felt especially prepared for this role with the help of her mentor, Tracy Son, saying, “She provided guidance on equipping my own classroom and was a great example



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of positive interactions with students. She taught me to have empathy, be flexible with students’ needs, and not get hung up on the little things.” Dalmas also shared that her dance background has influenced her career as a teacher. She serves as the head dance coach at her current high school, a role she’s been training for since the age of three. “Dance helped to cultivate my love for education and teaching,” Dalmas said. “During my college years, I taught and coached dance at a local studio and high school. My mentor teacher mentioned that I transitioned into teaching smoothly due to my past coaching experience. I was able to transition the skills I learned in teaching dance into the academic setting. Throughout my college years, I immediately took what I learned in class and implemented those strategies in my dance teaching.”

When asked what she loved most about teaching, Dalmas explained that she loves helping her students reach their goals and pushing them to be their best selves. “What I love most about teaching is helping students reach their potential and get excited about learning. This is what drives me as an educator and a coach. I also enjoy helping students to set goals and watch them progress toward those goals,” Dalmas explained. “A great example of this was my high school history teacher, Julia Digrazia.

She pushed me to be my best and helped me to get excited about history. Her passion not only made her class enjoyable but also helped me to decide a path for my profession. I hope to encourage my students in the same way because I saw the impact a great teacher had on me.”



FUN FACT

Kristine is a Harry Potter nerd!

She has read the series over twenty times! According to online tests, she is a proud member of the Slytherin house.

Although Dalmas is thriving in her role as a full-time high school teacher, she will never forget her first group of students. “During my student teaching, as I learned more about my students, I was able to better tailor my lessons and challenge them,” she said. “At the end of my student teaching, it was hard leaving my students due to the relationships I had with them. I will always remember this special group of students.” ■



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.

ADVOCACY UPDATE

By **Kira Tookes**



**This School Year,
Make Your Voice
Heard with AAE**

AAE's Advocacy Department has been hard at work preparing for your return to school. With new challenges and opportunities to uplift educator voices arising, we have heard your desire for more training, support, and opportunities to share your opinions. As we kick off this back-to-school season, we invite you to explore the many benefits available to AAE members, including your exclusive access to our educator voice training and advocacy products and services.

Learn through Training

AAE supports families' right to choose when it comes to the education of their children. That's why we offer a variety of products, training, and services to meet your needs. Interested in learning more about unionization or the school authorization process? Do you desire to become a better charter school advocate? These tools and more are available to AAE members, free of charge, through our Professional Development Portal.

Educator voice is a critical component of sound decision-making in our profession. When new ideas are formed, and new policies are created, AAE is committed to having our members at the forefront of the conversation. Through our dedicated member training, we ensure that you have the tools, stories, and confidence to advocate for the changes in which you believe! Stay tuned for our State of Education Townhall event in October 2021, and start your advocacy training coursework on AAE's Professional Development Portal today!

Receive Quality Support

AAE's Advocacy Department is available to support you at any time, in any way you need. Through one-on-one coaching with our director of advocacy, you can receive the support you need for your unique circumstances. Whether you are advocating for policy changes within your district, seeking to learn more about engaging your students in advocacy, or are interested in sharing an uplifting story with the media, the AAE Advocacy Department is here to help.

The AAE Advocacy Department also hosts an annual educator fellowship designed to support emerging advocates on their journey to create better outcomes for students and our profession. Each year, AAE carefully selects educators from across the country, representing diverse backgrounds, experiences, and school types. Over the course of the year, AAE Advocacy Fellows receive genuine one-on-one support to write and publish articles in local and national publications, meet with and testify before local and state decision-makers, and form public opinions of education and educators. Look out for an invitation to learn more about our fellowship this fall!

**Through our dedicated member
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the tools, stories, and confidence
to advocate for the changes
in which you believe!**

Share Your Voice

AAE's policy and advocacy priorities are informed by the interests, concerns, and convictions of our membership and stakeholders, and that is why we are committed to regular surveys, focus groups, and interest studies on educational topics you care about most. Every quarter, AAE releases a new survey to gather your thoughts on subjects such as School Reopening, Teaching Civics and Civic Engagement, Improving Teacher Compensation, and more! Additionally, we are eager to connect our members to the media when opportunities arise. If you are interested in being considered for media interviews seeking educator voices, let us know on your next survey!



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Educator Voice Sign-Up

As a continuation of our advocacy training and services, we are excited to announce a brand-new engagement opportunity for the busy educator! As an Educator Voice Ambassador, you are AAE's first line of support for surveys, listening sessions, focus groups, media opportunities, and more! Educator Voice Ambassadors will commit to uplifting AAE's policy and advocacy priorities, attending quarterly training, and joining a coalition of national educators who are passionate about their profession. Ambassadors should expect to spend about one hour per month on AAE advocacy activities. Learn more and receive your application by emailing kira@aaeteachers.org. ■



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.

Want to take your educator voice farther?



Become an Educator Voice Ambassador TODAY!

ENGAGE in Quarterly Training

PARTICIPATE in Surveys and Focus Groups

RESPOND to Media Inquiries and Advocacy Opportunities

Contact Kira Tookes at kira@aaeteachers.org for more information

Educator Recommendations for a Successful Back-to-School

The past eighteen months have been unprecedented, life-changing times. Challenges such as school closures, distance learning, mitigating the virus, and reopening have impacted educators, students, and families alike. While we all have practiced the utmost resilience, patience, and poise, circumstances still continue to inform how we show up at work and home. Many students were thrust into learning-from-home with little access to trusted adults at school and even less access to their peers and friends. This school year will likely reflect these challenges and more, and the AAE Advocacy team has a single recommendation for you to consider as you return to school this fall: **Stay Connected.**

Now more than ever, children are in need of connection with their friends, families, peers, and trusted adults at school. As one of those trusted adults, you should focus on building community and rebuilding student capacity

in an in-person setting. COVID-19 shutdowns can be considered an adverse childhood experience, depending on each student's unique circumstance. Students may have experienced trauma or are struggling with mental health concerns as they come back from more than a year of the restrictions of the pandemic. You need to help students navigate the intricacies of connecting in person through socialization and collaboration with their peers. Additionally, educators might consider providing short moments of social and emotional learning (SEL) through mindfulness practices or other types of human connection.

As part of this human connection, children need to reconnect with their individual empowerment and autonomy. As a trusted adult, you have the ability to help students reconnect to their love of learning that may have been depleted over the course of the past eighteen months. Aid this reconnection by giving them choices

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and agency over their learning through choice boards, expanding and diversifying your library, or allowing them to teach the class for a while. Tailor your learning experiences to the interests of your students, and watch their passion for learning reignite.

Students are not the only ones who need connection this school year; educators are in dire need of connection not only to the learning environment, school staff, students, and families but also to the hope that less uncertainty and disruption are on the horizon.



Commit to a “cut-off” time each day and work-free weekends as much as possible.

One of the ways educators can begin to reconnect to the classroom environment is by committing to classroom structure. Students feel safest when there is a clear structure in the classroom, and educators feel that they can better control more aspects of their day. Maintaining structure helps to generate less anxiety and more impact, especially after more than a year of confusion and uncertainty.

To begin developing structure in your classroom, hone in on classroom management with buy-in and investment from your students. With students, co-create systems to allow more ease and streamlining throughout your day.

One teaching best practice is to begin trusting students with classroom responsibilities from day one.

Although some educators may be tempted to never look at a screen again after an extended time of distance learning, take advantage of the tools and skills you have developed over the past couple of years to incorporate technology into the classroom. Use this connection to technology for classroom organization, clerical tasks, assignments, grading, and celebrations and rewards.

Finally, as America’s trusted professional educators, you should reconnect with your autonomy and empowerment outside of the classroom. During the past eighteen months, many of you have developed new hobbies, interests, and passions. Use these new interests to reconnect with others in your community. In addition to connecting through your interests, spend some time on things you are good at and enjoy outside of school. Allow yourself to put down the work to rest and recover fully. Commit to a “cut-off” time each day and work-free weekends as much as possible.

At AAE, we appreciate, acknowledge, and affirm the amazing work you do each day. This school year, we want not only your students to feel reconnected and fall back in love with learning, but also our educators to feel the same. ■



Ashley Lee, recently served as AAE's Leadership for Educational Equity Policy and Advocacy Fellow. Born and raised in Los Angeles, California, Ashley is an educator in her hometown, working with students and families in low-income communities to develop and provide a culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and transformative education. She holds a Masters in Urban Education from Loyola Marymount University and a Bachelor of Arts in Government and Psychology degree from Harvard University.

Find Out What's New on the Professional Development Portal

AAE's new Professional Development Portal was designed to be a trusted source for the most timely content and best practices you need to expand your knowledge base and serve your students, help them thrive, and meet their learning goals. We seek to facilitate your learning and discovery on a variety of important topics.



Social Emotional Learning in the Classroom

One of our newest courses focuses on Social Emotional Learning (SEL). The course was authored by elementary educator, Ashiley Lee. The fact that student learning and success are tied closely with student social and emotional wellness is something that all educators intrinsically know. And we now see educators around the country searching for and developing frameworks, explicitly teaching skills, and integrating wellness into their instruction.

This course introduces the foundations of social and emotional learning and discusses how to implement SEL practices in our classrooms. The course also covers the definition, goals, and benefits of SEL and dives into the current and most common framework for SEL, the CASEL 5. The course also makes an important

connection between SEL and culturally responsive teaching to maximize the impact of SEL. And last, the course explores the various strategies for implementing SEL with your students in ways that work for you and your classroom.

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The goals of this course are to ensure that you will be able to:

- Explain SEL and its importance to others
- Apply the SEL framework to evaluate opportunities in your classroom for SEL incorporation
- Develop systems and practices to bring social and emotional learning to your students

As with any concept, a number of misconceptions about SEL may lead to a skewed understanding of its practice. To make sure all of the amazing educators taking this course can develop a strong foundation for SEL, the most common misconceptions about SEL and responses to them are also covered in the course, including that SEL only focuses on emotions and feelings, SEL is only for students with behavior issues, and students learn these skills on their own, so we don't need to teach them.

Keep in mind that SEL is not a silver bullet for all of the issues a student may face, but using SEL does have proven benefits for all individuals involved, which are covered at length in the Benefits of SEL lesson of this course. ■



SCHOLARSHIP & GRANT APPLICATIONS DUE OCTOBER 8, 2021

The AAE Foundation's National Teacher Scholarships and Classroom Grants competition is held twice a year, in the fall and spring.

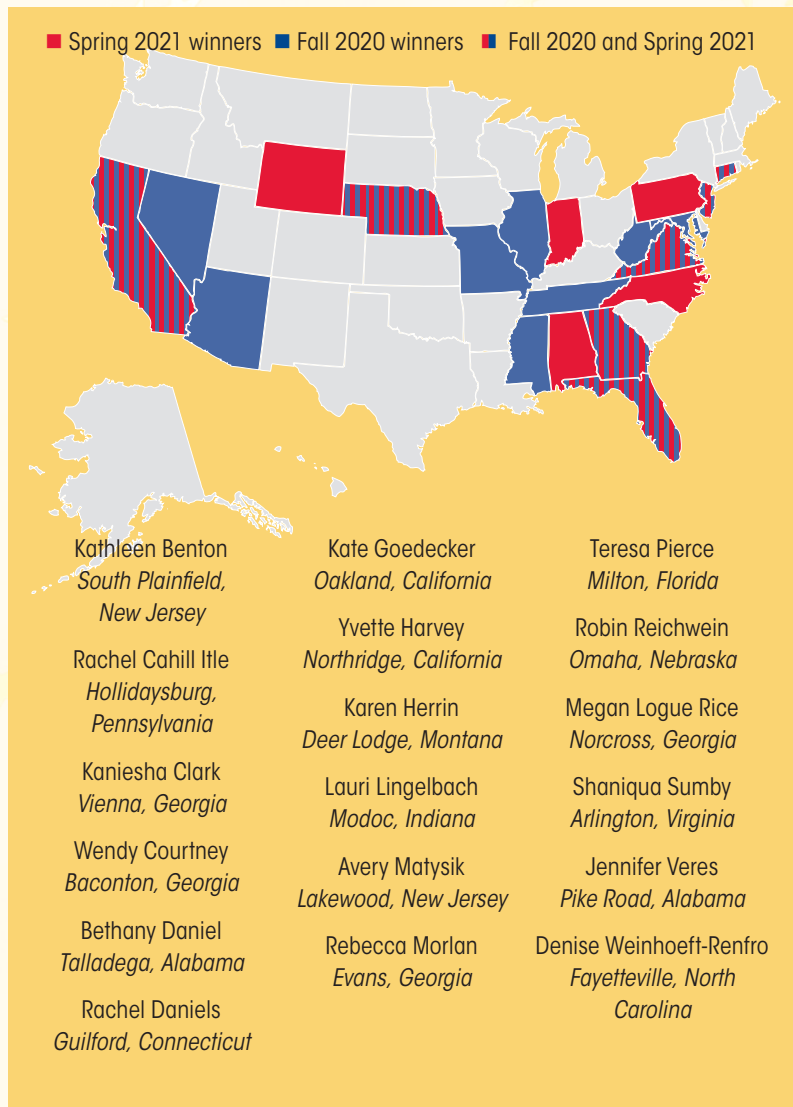
For more information, visit aaeteachers.org/awards.

CONGRATULATIONS

to the Spring 2021 AAEF Teacher Scholarship & Classroom Grant Winners

Every day of every school year, educators perform large and small acts of heroism, courage, and ingenuity. Over the years, they have also learned how to stretch each dollar and find clever ways to make their lessons come to life to kindle more curiosity in their students. The Association of American Educators Foundation (AAEF) salutes these efforts, and we too look for ways to help educators nationwide make their visions a reality.

Twice a year, AAEF awards thousands of dollars in teacher scholarships and classroom grants. This program is open to all educators, and has provided new inspiration in countless areas of study including new curriculum to explore energy grids, to STEAM-focused makerspace materials, expanding literacy centers, to special training for improving remote music instruction skills, even a school garden. The benefits of these scholarships and grants last long after the receipt of the initial funds. We congratulate all the winners of the spring 2021 AAEF Scholarship and Grant program. ■



Why COVID-19 Looks Different This Back-to-School


There was a point last school year when educators were letting out a collective breath. Although not yet available for school-age children, the vaccines had finally been approved for the public at large, and their adoption correlated with a drop in cases of COVID-19 and community spread. For a while, it seemed that the 2021-2022 school year would be normal.

Then came the delta variant and with it a surge in COVID-19 cases that, in some areas, is surpassing previous numbers. Educators were again left wondering what this would mean for their schools and classrooms. While for many educators this may seem to just be a repeat of last school year, this time we are not going in blind. Research studies conducted during the past year and a half have given us a better picture of what to expect.

Children and COVID-19

We do not want to understate the risk COVID-19 poses to children. In the 2020-2021 school year, 416 children died from a COVID-19 infection. This is more than twice the rate that could be expected from the flu in a normal year, and this happened *despite* all the precautions put in place. In fact, there were so many precautions against the spread of infectious disease last year, only one child died from influenza. Additionally, COVID-19 comes with the added risk of a protracted illness. Many patients who contract COVID-19 will continue to show symptoms weeks or months after the initial infection.

COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting our most vulnerable students as well. Poverty and race both play a factor in COVID-19 outcomes. Of pediatric deaths, 36 percent were among Hispanic children, despite



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Hispanics only making up 18 percent of the population. Black students were also disproportionately more likely to suffer severe effects from COVID-19.

While initial studies indicated that students did not contract COVID-19 at the same rate as adults, recent data has called that into question, especially when looking at infections due to the spread of the delta variant. Some data seems to suggest that the delta variant affects children more than previous variants. As of now, we just don't have enough data about the delta variant to start drawing any conclusions about its spread in children.

COVID-19 Spread in Schools

One would expect, given the infectious nature of COVID-19, to see widespread infections in schools. This was not the case last year. Research indicates that when a child contracted COVID-19, it was more likely to happen at home than it was in school. In fact, when schools had mitigation factors in place, transmission at schools was *lower* than broader community spread. When there were outbreaks in schools, they tended to be relatively small, averaging only about ten students.

Since schools have not been vectors of disease, it is understandable that communities would want to relax their mitigation efforts. While there still needs to be formal research done in this area, researchers drawing on environmental and historical evidence warn this could be a mistake. Easing mitigation efforts has been associated with significant spread of COVID-19 in camps and schools this past summer. In one case, a camp in Georgia had 260 of its 597 campers and staff test positive for COVID-19.

The Role of Masking

One of the most potent controversies in recent weeks has been whether schools should mandate masking for all students. Those against masking point to a study that indicates the presence of a mask mandate is not correlated with higher COVID-19 transmission in

schools. However, the study's authors themselves have cautioned against using the research to conclude that masks serve no purpose or using it to override broader CDC guidelines. The paper outlines the reasons to be cautious; among them, the inability to control for student behavior or the effect of other mitigation measures. Most importantly, the authors point out their findings *are not* in line with other research that shows the effectiveness of masking and the report's authors remain skeptical of the results and believe more research is needed.



A Layered Approach

Even with the uncertainty of COVID-19, the evidence remains clear. When schools employ a layered approach to disease prevention, students and staff can attend in-person school safely, even when there is broader community spread. ■



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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LEGISLATIVE LONGVIEW

What Lies Ahead in Education Policy and AAE Priorities

We are more than halfway through the first session of the 117th Congress, and federal education policy changes are on the horizon. In the coming months, Congress will be working on budget and infrastructure legislation, which are expected to include provisions that affect schools and existing education programs.

At the end of August, the Senate passed a one trillion dollar bipartisan infrastructure bill. The bill, as approved by the Senate, would provide infrastructure funding that would impact schools, educators, and students including:

- \$5 billion to transition to school buses that run on clean energy. Half of this funding will go to zero-emission buses, with the other half to buses that run on alternative fuels.
- \$65 billion to expand internet access in underserved areas.
- \$15 billion to replace lead pipes, including those in school buildings.

Before being signed into law, the House and Senate will need to agree upon language, as the House passed its own \$715 billion infrastructure bill earlier this year. The House bill allocated \$45 billion to lead pipe replacement but did not include funds for broadband internet.

In addition to the provisions included in the infrastructure bill, Congress is also likely to consider changes to education programs as part of the budget process. The following proposals were included in President Biden's budget proposal and will likely be considered for inclusion in the 2022 budget bill:

Universal Preschool

Provides universal pre-k for 3- and 4-year-olds, targeting high-needs areas first.

Increased Funding for Title I Schools

Increases Title I funding to \$20 billion and would incentivize states to address inequalities in school funding systems. It would also support increased student access to rigorous coursework, such as Advanced Placement classes.

Student Resources

Sets aside \$1 billion to increase the number of counselors, nurses, and mental health professionals, prioritizing high-poverty schools. It would also increase Full Service Community Schools funding to \$442 million, and increase access to career and technical education programs.



Special Education

Increases funding for special education programs by \$2.7 billion.

Increased Investment in Teacher Preparation Programs

Asks for increased funding for Grow Your Own programs, year-long, paid teacher residency programs, special education and bilingual education programs, mentorship programs and teacher preparation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

Government Subsidies for Child Care

Low- and middle-income families would not spend more than 7 percent of their income on child care.

Diverse Schools

Requests \$100 million for a new voluntary grant program to help develop and implement strategies to diversify student bodies.

Although these proposals are unlikely to be adopted as they are, Congress often uses the President's proposal as a blueprint to create their own budget bill. As the process continues, provisions will be added, removed, and changed as the House and Senate attempt to come to an agreement.

While the infrastructure bill and the budget process are likely to receive much attention during the coming months, AAE is also tracking movement on the following policy proposals:

Increase of the Educator Expense Deduction

We know that every day, teachers go above and beyond for their students, oftentimes spending hundreds of dollars of their own money on school supplies for their classrooms. Under current law, each year educators can deduct up to \$250 of out-of-pocket classroom expenses on their taxes. This is woefully short of the almost \$500 average that most teachers spend each year. In light of this, AAE is urging Congress to support educators by increasing this deduction to \$1,000 and expanding the list of eligible expenses to include home internet.

The HELPER Act

Earlier this year, AAE announced our support of H.R. 3172, the HELPER Act of 2021. This bipartisan bill would create a home loan program similar to the VA home loan program that is currently managed by the Department of Veteran Affairs. The program would allow educators to access a low-interest home loan insured by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) without requiring a down payment or monthly mortgage insurance costs. The program builds upon the FHA's Good Neighbor Next Door Program and would be available to K-12 educators and other community servants, including law enforcement officers, fire fighters, EMTs, and paramedics. ■



Noelani Kahapea serves as the director of policy and strategic partnerships for the Association of American Educators. Prior to joining AAE, Noelani served as the Senior Policy Staff on education and labor policy for the Republican Study Committee in the House of Representatives.



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