

EDUCATION MATTERS

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation

By Eli Rolfes and Kira Tookes

Member Survey Highlights




The urgency of advocating for educators in this moment cannot be understated. COVID-19 has stressed the education system and it is more important than ever for educators to be at the decision-making table. As teachers continue to adjust to the new education landscape, the makeup and delivery of services, instruction, platforms, and overall demands of the profession are changing. The way students and their families engage with the education system will never be the same, and educators must play a major role in shaping this new relationship.

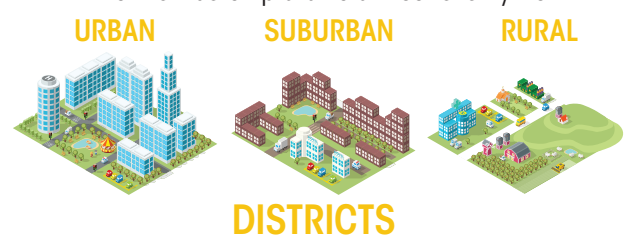
To help us better advocate for the needs of our members, AAE invited the entire national membership to participate in the **2020 National Membership Survey** to see where professional members stand on various policies and education issues. The survey included questions on many topics, from school choice and technology to diversity. We heard from members on how they and their schools are responding to COVID-19 as well as how their professional development needs have evolved to better serve their students and address their own knowledge gaps.


It is important to know who we are hearing from as we engage with these issues. AAE members represent decades

 **61%** of AAE members have fifteen or more years in the field

69% of AAE members possess a master's degree or higher 

AAE's membership draws almost evenly from



 **88%** of respondents work in public schools
10% come from public charter schools



GARY BECKNER 1946-2021
Founder and Chairman, AAE **SEE PAGE 8**

of highly qualified experience, with 61 percent of respondents having fifteen or more years in the field and 69 percent possessing a master's degree or higher.

AAE's membership draws almost evenly from urban, suburban, and rural districts. Eighty-eight percent of respondents work in public schools, with 10 percent coming from public charter schools.

AAE uses results from this survey to bring your unique perspectives to the national policy conversation. Educators' voices are vital in the dynamic education landscape, and it is equally essential that AAE members have the opportunity to be represented. In terms of the service AAE provides to its members, a few areas deserve deeper exploration. In 2021, look forward to more frequent opportunities to contribute your voice to AAE's advocacy work.

The survey sparked a deep conversation about teacher preparation reform:



48%

felt that their traditional college of education did not appropriately prepare them for the trials and tribulations of the classroom

72%

felt that certification exams such as the Praxis fail to reflect a teacher's readiness to teach



A standout from this data is that members want to see a change in how educators are recruited and evaluated, and, for those of us on the AAE Advocacy team, the 2020 National Membership Survey sparked a deep conversation about teacher preparation reform. COVID-19 has caused many educators to consider leaving the classroom, and we need to ensure that educator preparation programs are producing high-quality candidates to take their place. The field of education has a tendency to pass off challenges to the hardest workers rather than to address their systemic causes. We cannot simply expect educators to solve this problem; we need to ensure that

the pipeline is producing high-quality educators prepared to serve the nation's students. Educator training and certification is a highly collaborative process. State boards of education, state legislatures, district boards, school administrators, and teacher leaders all play roles in the recruitment and retention of teachers.



75%

of respondents support policy efforts to recruit teachers who are more reflective of the student population

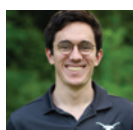
AAE members had a lot to say about this issue. Nearly half of the respondents (48 percent) felt that their traditional college of education did not appropriately prepare them for a real classroom. In the same vein, 72 percent felt that certification exams such as the Praxis fail to reflect a teacher's readiness to teach. Support for alternative certification programs was at 74 percent, making it clear that those in the field recognize that aspects of the existing system fail to translate into high-quality teaching. Members suggested revamping the preparation system in a variety of ways: longer and paid student-teaching internships, more advanced support for novice teachers, and cultural sensitivity training.

We want to invite you to continue this conversation as we engage with our policy and advocacy partners on reforming the educator pipeline. There is a common thread in how our partners and our members wish to see the teaching population change and grow. A definitive 75 percent of 2020 National Membership Survey respondents support policy efforts to recruit teachers who are more reflective of the student population and are willing to amend the educator preparation system to increase diversity in the teacher work force. Based on this input from AAE members, we are drafting a Diversity Letter* in collaboration with The New Teacher Project (TNTN), a leader in reimagining the classroom, and we continue to gather support for this important effort from other leaders in the education policy and advocacy space. ■

**You can read the letter at aaeadvocacy.org when it is published.*



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.



SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

By Lauren Golubski and
Amanda Alpert Knight

Prior to this year's National School Choice Week, AAE development manager Lauren Golubski spoke with our new director of charter school services to reflect on a number of pressing issues for the charter school community as well as best practices in response as it enters another semester of including COVID-19-affected instructional guidelines, closures, and widening learning loss.



Amanda Alpert Knight

Q Welcome aboard, we are so excited to have you join our staff! As the new director of charter school services at Association of American Educators, Amanda, we would love for our members to get to know you better! Can you share a little about your background?

I've had such a warm welcome from the staff and members of AAE. And I'm eager to get to know more members! To answer your question, I started my career in education more than twenty years ago as a Teach for America corps member. Admittedly, I expected my education career to be short-lived (two years of teaching) and then I planned on attending law school. However, twenty-two years later I am still in education and have never looked back. While I have worn many hats, including charter school authorizer and education consultant, serving as the CEO of a mid-sized charter school network was one of the most challenging and rewarding achievements in my career. All of my experiences in education brought me to this point, serving as the director of charter

school services of the Association of American Educators. I am proud to be part of this team and working with educators, charter school leaders, charter school associations, and partner organizations across the country. On the personal side, I am the proud mom of two sons, both in middle school. I have proudly served on the school board of their school district for the last six years.

Q As schools all over our country are responding to the pandemic, what would you say are the best practices you are noticing for charter schools?

There are so many different strategies and practices that are being implemented in schools, there is no silver bullet. As my colleagues and I work with charter school educators and all school educators across the country, one thing is very clear — communication and dialogue are critical as we continue to navigate education during this pandemic. The school districts, stand-alone charter schools, and charter school networks that have

been most successful are the ones that have created COVID task forces that have included and continue to include educators, parents, community members, and experts from the beginning. These groups meet and craft plans for phases of roll-out and solicit feedback from stakeholders and communicate regularly with their entire education community. Because charter schools tend to have strong parent and community engagement strategies already in place, I have seen charter schools at the cutting edge of this work, engaging their parent community and educator community faster and more effectively than some district counterparts.

Q Can you share what might be considered the largest misunderstood fact about charter schools?

Charter schools ARE public schools. As simple as that sounds, even members of the charter school community fail to understand that concept. Funding inequities however, do exist. Charter schools

generally do receive less funding per pupil than traditional district schools. Another point of confusion is that all charter schools are funded by corporate donors. This is not the case for many charter schools.

I am continually impressed by the quality of rigor and ingenuity coming out of the charter schools I have visited across the nation.

While some charter schools have been closed over the years for mismanagement of funds or low performance, the majority of charter schools are being led by innovative leaders and employ some of the best and brightest educators in the nation. I am continually impressed by the quality of rigor and ingenuity coming out of the charter schools I have visited across the nation. And again, these are public schools that have been given the autonomy to innovate.

Q What are some key concepts you would like the new secretary of education to keep in mind throughout his time in leadership?

As the new administration starts to navigate the education space in this country, I think it's important that they look at a student-centric agenda that includes key items from AAE's agenda:

- Commitment to high-quality schools, including charter schools
- Focus on diversity in the education work force
- Commitment to ending the digital divide

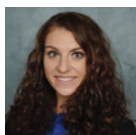
So much of the political agenda becomes focused on adults and it's so important that the next new administration takes a step back and frames their policies and practices on what's right for children. This will likely mean reaching across the aisle and joining forces on an agenda that should include a commitment to children and that does not use other issues to weaponize education.

The new secretary of education must also commit to a COVID recovery plan for schools that ensures that every child, in EVERY school, is able to receive the needed resources to recover from any learning loss as a result of the pandemic and ensures that school districts and schools have a "back-on-track" plan.

Q Each year, we acknowledge National School Choice Week from January 24-30; why do you believe this week has important significance?

I think the most important thing that we see and hear during National School Choice Week is the voice of educators, parents, and students who support and benefit from being able to choose the school that best serves them. During this week of celebration, hearing their stories reminds us, over and over again, why school choice matters, one student, one family, one educator at a time. ■

The new secretary of education must commit to a COVID recovery plan for schools that ensures that every child, in EVERY school, is able to receive the needed resources to recover from any learning loss.



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 degree in Education/Teaching of Individuals in Elementary Special Education from Eastern Michigan University and a Master of Science in Education degree from Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

MEET OUR NEW STAFF



Noelani Kahapea
Director of Policy and Strategic Partnerships, AAE



Chuck Zurcher
Regional Membership Director, AAE Nebraska



Grace Talberg
Human Resources & Accounting Manager, AAE



Committed to Increasing Teacher Diversity

America is a melting pot of cultures, backgrounds, beliefs, and identities. In December alone, Americans celebrate approximately fifteen special holidays. These celebrations are beautiful traditions, often rooted in faith and surrounded by family. This level of diversity has historically been a vital driver of the nation's success and growth over centuries, and should be a point of pride for all. The benefits of diversity in thought, experience, and conviction manifest in our language, art, food, and culture. Diversity even benefits the types of environments in which our students learn. The benefits of diversity are evident to many, and still, the benefits of diversity are not manifesting in the educator work force.

Persistent barriers to becoming an educator exist, some of which have proven to be ineffective at predicting teacher quality. Many of these barriers disproportionately impact aspiring educators of color. Some of these challenges persist due to economic factors; some also persist because of the conditions in which teachers of color are expected to work. However, the lack of diversity in schools is a symptom of other broader issues, including a lack of state investment in certifying, recruiting, and retaining our best educators, especially those who reflect our diverse student population.

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) and the Association of American Educators believe that increasing

teacher diversity by explicitly expanding the number of educators of color in classrooms elevates the teaching profession and improves students' lives and outcomes. Developing teacher diversity requires an increase in the **recruitment, training, hiring, and retention of an effective, compelling, and diverse teaching population** reflective of the student population.

The conversation around the need for teacher diversity began years ago, acknowledging the existence of a mostly white and female educator force that did not reflect the students they served. Over time, we have come to learn that the presence of effective educators of color helps not only to improve third- and eighth-grade reading levels for students of color but also work environments simply by the presence of educators of color on staff. Studies suggest that all students benefit from having teachers of color because of the knowledge, experiences, and role-modeling they bring to school cultures.

States must begin with an internal review of standards to address the growing concerns about our educator force's diversification. In a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, state departments of education must review, question, analyze, revise, and restructure the existing standards of excellence to ensure that the voices of groups most impacted by these standards are involved in the creation of new outcomes and the redefinition of achievement and success.

After an internal review of standards, an increase in the recruitment of educator candidates of color should begin with eliminating and bypassing barriers to entry. The Association of American Educators and The New Teacher Project present the following recommendations:

Revise certification processes

Cultivate, approve, and invest in high-quality pathways to certifying educator candidates. Independent and in partnership with districts and schools prioritizing hiring educators of color, states should play an active role in removing barriers to the current system by setting standards in collaboration with new and existing programs producing the most effective educators year-over-year.

Improve alternative certification

Invest in and improve easy-access alternative certification programs by implementing accountability standards for teacher performance and pass rates. After review, determine which programs are serving candidates and scale their impact. Additionally, implementing minimum time-served benefits like assistantship grants, student loan forgiveness, and discounts on continuing education and certification after two years, with a re-evaluation process as recommended in the state of New Jersey. States like Texas lead effective, streamlined pathways to entry for aspiring teacher candidates, and programs such as Teach For America offer additional benefits to teacher candidates following appropriate time served.

Review certification exams

Review certification exams and assessments in collaboration with state-identified Master Educators representing diverse backgrounds, tenure, and experience. This review will ensure alignment to specific content areas relevant to the needs of today. Highlight the information and skills aspiring educators need and assess them accordingly while holding teacher preparation programs accountable for student achievement. Include and prioritize culturally responsive pedagogy to support the growing need for effective teaching, learning, and communication with diverse populations.

Address the cost of becoming an educator

Introduce needs-based financial support to aspiring educator candidates to offset the financial barriers preventing high-quality educators from entering the work force, and ensure approved pathways are affordable and effective. Educator candidates must spend hundreds of dollars on certification and preparation costs alone. The Florida Department of Education has addressed this financial barrier to entry by decreasing testing costs for aspiring educators by nearly 70 percent in some instances.

In addition to eliminating barriers for aspiring educators, there are areas in which decision-makers can actively prioritize attracting and hiring teachers of color by making the education field at large more attractive. Through hiring policies, retention practices, and pathways to leadership, we urge states to consider the following:

Invest in colleges of education

States might incentivize education degrees with annual tax deductions, educator grants, loan forgiveness, and increased teacher salary for state certifications and years served in the state.

Support schools and districts implementing strategic recruitment efforts

Introduce financial support for districts to establish and enforce hiring measures designed to attract certified educators of color.

Support Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI) that are training teachers of color

Ensure adequate financial support for HBCUs and MSIs, leading to educators' recruitment. Connect teacher candidates to schools that are actively addressing the concern of diversity by attracting educators of color and educators who reflect the background of their students.



Inadequate coaching, development, and support for educators, and educators of color specifically, undermine any progress made in improving the teacher recruiting, training, and placement pipeline. Although many of these policies will need to be embraced and implemented at the local level to be effective, states, The Department of Education, education commissioners, and school boards might lead in these ways:

Adopt a statement—to local districts the state's commitment to addressing this issue and to evaluating other recommended education policy changes as to how it will exacerbate the lack of diversity in classrooms and educational leadership.

Support for schools and districts implementing retention efforts for educators of color—Introduce grants for districts to establish and implement retention policies designed to increase retention of educators of color.

Model educator mentorship—Introduce grants for educator mentorship, career guidance, and financial assistance programs available to all educators. Equip educators with strong state-level mentorship programs connecting them to a database of Master Educators who, using state grants, might mentor a small cohort

of educators as part of their pathways to leadership development. Education stakeholders in states like New Jersey have proposed educators of color mentorship programs that match a male educator of color to a district seeking his unique skills, experiences, and perspectives.

Reward districts for rigorous and inclusive teacher development—Increase teacher effectiveness, invest in districts embodying established commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion in their professional development. Through grants, incentivize additional professional development and teacher willingness to accept other instructional responsibilities within their district.

Reward educator performance—Through a continued commitment to diversifying a state's group of Master Educators, reward educator performance in academic achievement, community involvement, and cultural competence through state recognition, grants, and scholarships.

Although we understand that diversity across America can be improved in many ways, this mission's advancement will require every school, district, agency, university, and state to commit to innovative methods in attracting, recruiting, developing, and retaining highly qualified educators. A diverse teacher force will not only enhance the performance of students of color, enrich the lives of students and staff, but it will also more greatly resemble a future that allows all students to pursue their American dream. The Association of American Educators and The New Teacher Project stand ready to support these efforts and welcome ongoing discussion regarding diversifying our teacher force. ■



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.

Education Begins and Ends at Home — *Pandemic or No Pandemic*

As a parent, my motto has always been that education begins and ends at home, pandemic or no pandemic. Easier said than done, I know. However, if our children are to flourish this school year, the bar for parents must be set exponentially higher than many of us are accustomed to. I've been heartbroken at stories of students "camping" outside their schools or shopping centers to access strong enough Wi-Fi to study or attend class. Yet even my own children, who have good internet access, struggle to stay on task with all the distractions inherent in distance learning; as a mother and small-business owner, I, too, have wrestled with time management and procrastination as never before.

Back in the spring, when schools closed and our lives were abruptly changed by COVID-19 and quarantine, my three middle school-aged children believed summer vacation had come early. But as a mom, I found the switch to a fully remote schedule, even with access to high-quality technology and reliable internet, to be the beginning of one of the most challenging and unsettling times for my children. While I have always considered myself to be an involved parent and an advocate for my children, I know now that all changed dramatically with the reality of distance learning. My days are consumed with tending to a six-month-old, checking my middle schoolers' courses for missing assignments, constantly reminding them that they should be focused on schoolwork and not watching YouTube or TikTok videos, and trying to squeeze in some time to focus on my business. In short, unproductivity runs amok in my house!

In the fall, we chose a hybrid class schedule rather than just remote because attempting to learn while fully remote in the spring had proven to be a debacle for academic growth as well as physical and emotional well-being. Initially, we all hoped that going to school two days per week, meeting new kids, and being in a classroom setting would go a long way toward normalcy and learning. However, my husband and I quickly discovered that in adapting to two learning settings, we now have exponentially more work to do to prevent further learning loss — or, worse, learning failure. And I suspect many teachers are feeling the same way.

There are entirely too many education platforms to keep track of — my children work with eleven different types of software. Though accessing assignments and grades

has been made relatively easy through Schoology, there is considerable opportunity for students to hide work from their parents because there are too many places to go looking for it, unlike the old days when we simply checked homework logs.

The problem with distance learning is there's more than one problem.

My once competitive, optimistic, academically driven daughter has had a particularly difficult time transitioning from traditional school to distance learning in the hybrid model. My sons have frequently and nonchalantly claimed to be on top of things; it wasn't until midterm progress reports arrived and my children could see the Fs and Ds listed that they understood that while their teachers allowed more time to submit work, if that work wasn't turned in, those would be marked as zeroes.

To me, the problem with distance learning is there's more than one problem. Students aren't getting full weeks of learning. Parents continue to struggle to find their footing as moms and dads, teachers, homemakers, employees, employers, and everything in between. Teachers can't lend themselves fully or effectively to their students. We will undoubtedly incur academic capability gaps that will require years of supplemental instruction to mitigate.

With all the federal stimulus spending, I have yet to hear about giving school districts funding for additional teachers so that all students have immediate access to educators during normal school hours and, more importantly, so that actual live teaching, rather than independent learning is occurring. Pursuing autodidact learning standards for students to appease budgets is unfair and counterintuitive, given our children's learning needs. We must demand a higher bar.



Melissa C. Smith is a Pennsylvania mother of five and co-founder of a financial wellness startup whose mission is to change the economic narrative and landscape of communities of color. She is a member of the Association of American Educators and an AAE Foundation advocacy fellow.

This article originally appeared in The 74 Million on December 6, 2020
<http://bit.ly/3p9Qvyl>



Gary Beckner
Founder and Chairman, AAE

We have all experienced the terrible price of COVID-19 and of the related measures to minimize its damage. Even with continued vigilance and greater knowledge of the disease, we lost many precious lives, including many educators. As we entered the new year our team experienced a loss firsthand that is still difficult to fully comprehend.

Gary Beckner, the Founder and Chairman of the Association of American Educators and the Association of American Educators Foundation, passed away due to complications from COVID-19 on January 26, 2021 at age 75. He is survived by his wife, Pieterke, their three sons, and many cherished grandchildren.



Gary and Pieterke founded AAE in 1994 to restore and preserve professionalism in education. They worked hard, innovated, persisted, and kept the faith. Our team at AAE takes great pride in serving you, America's educators, and in keeping the focus in education on

students. Gary viewed the team as family and made sure they were fed, appreciated, and motivated. A team member remarked lovingly after his passing that he simply left the meeting before us to hold our table for dinner, as he often did in life.



Gary was always generous with his time, wisdom, and friendship. I learned a great deal from him. He put his trust in me often and I take tremendous pride at how comfortable he was to retire after leading for 25 years. He deserved to enjoy many more years. He was the first person I thought of when I had good news about AAE to



report. And the first person I reached out to when I wanted to be sure I was making the right decision as a boss. I'm going to miss him very much.



I know there are families across the country experiencing similar losses, as well as the lasting damage of lockdowns, school closures, and tremendous stress. We are determined to continue Gary's legacy, advocating for schools to reopen safely, for educators to receive the compensation and support they deserve, to make teaching personally fulfilling, and to always put the students first.

As a tribute to Gary's inspiration, vision, and mission that supported hundreds of thousands of educators since 1994, whose professionalism he championed, and whose passion for the hardest job he lovingly referred to as a calling and not a career, we offer these reflections of his life of service that will remain the standard for generations of educators to come.

Colin Sharkey
*Executive Director of AAE
and AAE Foundation*



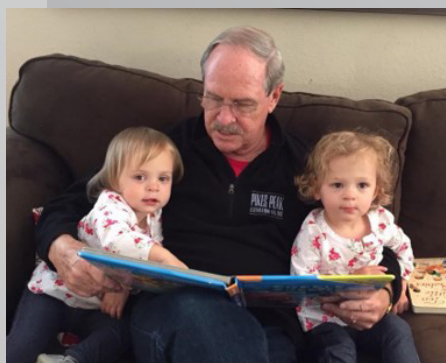
I met Gary Beckner in 2009 when I was first introduced to the Association of American Educators and I was so impressed with Gary's passion for education, teachers, and the mission of AAE that I joined immediately. A few years later, I was thrilled to join the AAE boards. They have come to feel like family to me, which is precisely how Gary wanted it.

Here's what I loved about Gary:

- He loved God first and foremost.
- He adored his Piete and his kids. His grandkids were his pride and joy. He also loved the AAE family like his own.
- He loved good people, good conversation, and good food, often simultaneously.
- He loved his life's work and strongly believed in elevating the teaching profession.
- He looked out for others and wanted to make sure they were well-taken care of.
- He was generous beyond belief with his time, his means, and his wisdom.
- He loved to laugh and loved telling good stories.

Gary left the world a little better than he found it and showed others how they could too.

*DeLaina Tonks, PhD
Chairman of the Board, AAE*



I first met Gary when his out-of-the-box thinking and heart full of love for kids

approached me about becoming a board member of a new organization for teachers. His fresh approach to the idea of teachers with values and a desire to work with other educators for the benefit of America's students gave birth to the AAE.

Gary and his wife walked into my classroom on our scheduled appointment day without batting an eye at my flashy red wheelchair and droopy right eye. For years as a public-school teacher, I had struggled with my forced membership in a union. As he explained his vision, I knew that here stood someone whose innovative ideas and belief in the unlimited possibilities that empowered teachers could unleash in their students held promising answers for educators like me. My only question? Where do I sign up?

Gary Beckner has blazed a trail for all of us to follow. Since my first day as an AAE Board Member, I've been a "trailer", striving to follow his legacy. Are you?

*Patricia (Pann) Baltz
Educator and AAE member since 1994*



The Association of American Educators Foundation has established a fund in Gary's honor.

The Gary Beckner Fund will continue his legacy through scholarships and grants to educators, schools, music programs, and students nationwide. The fund has already raised nearly \$8,000 and will continue for many years, impacting thousands of lives.





I had such an amazing time visiting our AAE California office and learning from Gary. As always, he went the extra mile to make everyone feel comfortable and a part of the team. A great mentor that will truly be missed.

Dana Williams,
State Director, AAE



My friend, Gary Beckner. I've been able to say that since I first met him when he came to my school in the early 2000's to participate in a teacher forum. His friendly demeanor immediately made me feel comfortable and I knew he cared about me as a classroom teacher. We continued to stay in touch and, in June, 2011, I went to work for KANAEE. It was a pleasure to work for him and with him. Gary was visionary and always wanted what was best for kids....and that's an amazing legacy to leave.

Garry Sigle
*Executive Director, Kansas Association
of American Educators*



*If you would like to share your memories of Gary and/or condolences to the Beckner family,
please send them to dcoffice@aaeteachers.org.*

#LOVETEACHING WEEK

February 14th-21st

www.weloveteaching.org

By Gary Abud, Jr.

Yes, Even in a Pandemic, Teachers Still #LoveTeaching

We used to talk about teacher shortages, but now just about everybody has become a teacher in some way.

As a result, something that's become crystal clear to many during the pandemic is just how hard the work of teaching is. Many have realized that educating their own children at home is a tough task, and that's led to the conclusion that classroom teaching must be a herculean effort. Perhaps Shonda Rhimes put it best when she tweeted on March 16, 2020 that she had "been home-schooling a 6-year-old and 8-year-old for one hour and 11 minutes. Teachers deserve to make a billion dollars a year. Or a week."

If you're an educator you already knew that teaching is a labor of love—and that's been especially true this year. Experiences such as those a global pandemic has brought can transform our lives in extraordinary ways, and they certainly have this year. Yet through all the challenges that Zoom meetings, remote teaching, and online learning presented, one thing remained steadfast: teachers still love to teach. And that's why the #LoveTeaching Week movement began several years ago. The week spotlights teachers' love of the work they do for the students they teach—even despite all the things that make teaching difficult.

This year, teachers have revolutionized their classrooms to online spaces.

This year, more than ever before, we educators we will need to remind ourselves of our "why," the joys that we find in our work with students, and seek out the treasures of teaching that sustain us even in the darkest hours. And so, each February educators

everywhere are invited to join in the conversation on social media between February 14-21 using the hashtag #LoveTeaching to share with others in the celebration. "Teachers have moved mountains this year for the students they care so deeply for," says Rachael Wilcox, 2020 Missouri Teacher of the Year Finalist. Wilcox, who teaches first grade, is a lead organizer of #LoveTeaching Week, and she points out that "this year teachers have revolutionized their classrooms to online spaces, taught students in the classroom and online at the same time, and supported in-person learning while managing the safety of every child."

This is cause for a celebration, according to Wilcox, who maintains that teachers accomplished all this "while never losing sight of what matters the most, our students." In 2021, you can look for the #LoveTeaching Week campaign to encourage teachers to consider that by looking to our past we might actually find our way forward. You can find out more about the campaign and download resources to take part individually or with your school community at WeLoveTeaching.org

Whether you're a parent, healthcare worker, grocery store employee, or teacher you probably don't need to be reminded what a challenging time the past year has been. But just like everyone else who is doing their best to keep calm and carry on, let's remember that even in a pandemic, teachers do still #LoveTeaching. ■



Gary Abud, Jr. is an educational consultant and award-winning educator. Gary is the author of the children's book *Science With Scarlett*. He is also a double cornea transplant recipient who, since having his sight restored, was moved to use his teaching gifts to make learning fun for others. He lives with his family near Detroit. Gary is an Association of American Educators Foundation board member and the 2014 Michigan Teacher of the Year.

Legal Services 2021 Forecast and Advice



With 2021 underway and school back in session for most districts, many educators still have a multitude of concerns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic which continues its surge. Educators nationwide still have a multitude of concerns and questions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. AAE Senior Director of Legal Services Sharon Nelson spoke on the many issues the AAE legal team has recently addressed.

According to Sharon, about 90 percent of recent questions stem from COVID-related issues, which is not surprising. She says the legal team is seeing a higher volume of teachers taking short-term disability leave or exercising early retirement. Other frequently asked questions regard Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) leave, Americans with Disability Act (ADA) leave, and constitutional issues and grievances. Sharon notes many school districts are planning to go hybrid, meaning some school day instruction will be fully virtual while others are in-person. “Some teachers are concerned with a hybrid model, while some think it’s a good idea.” She also says educators have expressed concern regarding the idea of a mandatory vaccine.

With the education landscape changing every day due to the new reality, being a member of the Association of American Educators is more important than ever. “The

importance of advocacy and support is highlighted with chaotic legal issues regarding school closings. Right now, having support and protection are important because teachers fear sickness and death in the classroom,” Sharon says. “It’s often difficult to receive protection under federal law.” Sharon says that many AAE members have been assisted in triggering FFCRA rights in the last few months, and they have worked with many school staff members regarding personal rights in connection with cleaning products.

Sharon advises that any educators who are not members of a membership organization such as AAE should consider joining now. She says the pandemic has highlighted organizations like AAE because many teachers have taken the brunt of frustration and worry that have swelled up during the pandemic. “It may not feel like it now, but this will end,” she says. ■



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.

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.

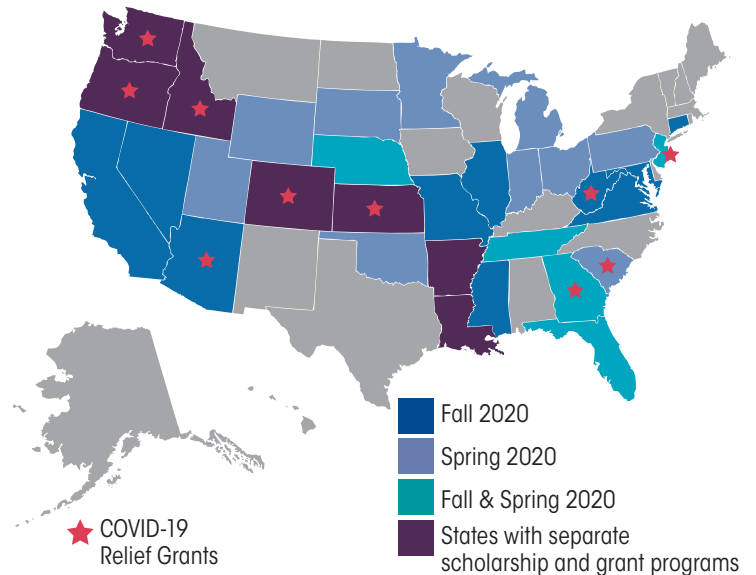


Learn more at
blessingsinabackpack.org.

Salute to AAEF 2020 Scholarship & Grant and COVID-19 Relief Winners

2020 was ramping up to be a remarkable year in so many ways, even before the pandemic gripped the nation and the world. We were already off to an amazing start for our spring scholarship and grant cycle, with an impressive number of applicants expressing a need for technical and digital supports or platforms to enhance live instruction as well as refining and improving recorded lessons. Teacher scholarship professional development proposals also reflected the growing interest in digital mastery and new technologies training.

Shortly after pandemic-related school closures began rolling out nationwide in mid-March (only weeks after completing our national AAEF spring scholarship and grant cycle), it was clear the nation's schools and educators were experiencing the stresses of implementing emergency distance learning. The calls for support were heard, and in April 2020, the AAE Foundation responded by awarding the first of what would be twenty-four weeks of COVID-19 Relief grants. This special cycle of grants with proposals being reviewed on a rolling basis allowed funding to be directed to educators swiftly and efficiently. Recipients used the funds for costs related to the implementation of distance learning during school closures, such as professional development costs associated with obtaining new skills, materials including recording equipment and software, programs, or projects in compli-



ance with newly issued CDC safety and health guidelines. Grants were also awarded for materials, programs, or projects that integrate new ideas, knowledge, or resources into the classroom once schools reopen.

The map represents the scope of impact through the Association of American Educators Foundation grants and scholarships program in 2020. ■

FALL

Pradip Misra, AZ	Susan DeLoach, CA	Taylor Thomas, WV	Candace Cain, NE
Polina Mann, CT	Crystal Byrd, MO	Anna Owenby, MS	Taryn Bell, GA
Katie Harris, TN	Michelle Manuel, FL	Tanisha Grayson, NJ	Margaret Tahtabrounian, NJ
Hakeem Greenhill, GA	Danielle Madsen, FL	Ben Vallejo, CA	
Elsie Bohorquez, CA	Ashley Jenkins, GA	Allison Kirby, MD	
Cindy Alvear, IL	Stacey Lynn Gelhart, NV	Anna Williams, FL	
JoAnn Rivas, VA		Shelli Hemerson, CA	

SPRING

Allison Pattion, TN	Samantha Vargas, NJ	Angel Stinnett, FL	Sarah Sheldon, OK
Catherine Talbert, OH	Randall Kammerman, UT	Maureen Barrett, NJ	Kimberly Browning, FL
Jennifer Van Gundy, OH	Paul Larrea, PA	Douglas Adomatis, SC	Molly Martin, OH
Carter Bell, IN	Todd De Jong, MI	Win Anderson, MN	Mikayla Fowler, OH
Dayna Derichs, NE	Maryssa Block, FL	Stephanie Kaufman, SD	
Jacqueline Fawaz, GA	Cheryl Travis, WY	Tiffany Bell, IL	

COVID-19 RELIEF GRANTS

Stuart Murray, ID
Shakeeka Redfearn, SC
Ryan Noel, KS
Debra Craig, CO
David Dillard, CO
Levi Shute, SD
Deborah Godwin, CO
Beatriz Castillo-Gonzalez, NJ
Kathleen Moe, AR
Stephanie Felton, WV
Melissa Mahoney, KS
Sherry Rawls, GA
Loi Lutes, WA
Clare Kozushko, OR
Leah Ward, KS

Read Better with Social Studies

Improving literacy skills has been THE focus of elementary educators for at least twenty years. The theory has been that if you can teach students how to read, then they will be able to learn anything else they need to learn through reading. Therefore, students ‘learn to read’ and then ‘read to learn.’

Because of this emphasis on literacy, reading class has been taking up more and more time in the school day, resulting in crowding out subjects such as art, music, and even social studies. A new study from Adam Tyner at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute is pushing back on the trend, saying if you want students to learn to read, you need to spend more time in the content areas, especially social studies.

What the Research Says:

The study looked at the results of how educators spent instructional time affects students’ reading abilities. In the study, students’ reading ability was measured and then educators were asked to adhere to a new schedule, spending more time on reading, on social studies, or on another subject. Several subject areas were tested. Then students’ reading ability was tested again. The study found a strong correlation between increased time in social studies instruction and increased reading ability. In fact, it was the only subject area tested that showed such a marked improvement. Not even additional time in reading was correlated with an improvement in reading skills.

While it is important to remember that this study only shows correlation and can’t point directly to a cause for the improvement, the finding does seem to align with previous research. Other studies suggest that background knowledge is necessary to understand a passage that is being read. A good illustration of this

would be a complicated economic white paper. It’s very possible that if you or I were to read this paper, we would be able to recognize all the words, but without a solid grounding in economics, we would be unable to completely understand what we were reading. Worse, we may think we understood the paper but have drawn the wrong conclusion due to not picking up on the nuances of the discipline!

How to Use This Information:

This study provides yet another argument against the long-standing adage that claims students “learn to read and then read to learn.” Learning content knowledge and improving reading ability go hand in hand. Following several decades when content areas such as social studies, art, and music have been relegated to being viewed as nonessentials, educators may want to reevaluate this trend.

Combining this study with previous research on the importance of background knowledge, educators can conclude that social studies provides knowledge of the world that is essential to understanding most written texts. Self-contained classes in the elementary grades may wish to reevaluate the balance of reading to other subjects in their class. In secondary classes where subjects are isolated, it may be time for teachers to break down some of those walls, as this study provides more support for the interconnectedness of the subject areas. ■



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.

Have you checked out our NEW Professional Development Portal?

The AAE Professional Development Portal provides the training you want on your schedule. Visit today for on-demand training and for all our recorded webinars.

pd.aeteachers.org

The screenshot shows the AAE Professional Development Portal interface. At the top, it says "american educators" and "Log In Sign Up". Below that, it says "Featured Courses" and "These and other great resources are available exclusively to AAE members." There are three course cards displayed:

- AAE 101**: A Free Online Course by Melissa Pratt, priced at FREE.
- Making the Most Out of Remote Learning**: A Distance Learning Support Webinar by Melissa Pratt, priced at \$50.
- Six Proven Methods for Teaching Civics**: A 30 Days of Civics Webinar by Melissa Pratt, priced at \$50.

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