

Promoting New Standards of Professionalism & Educational Enrichment

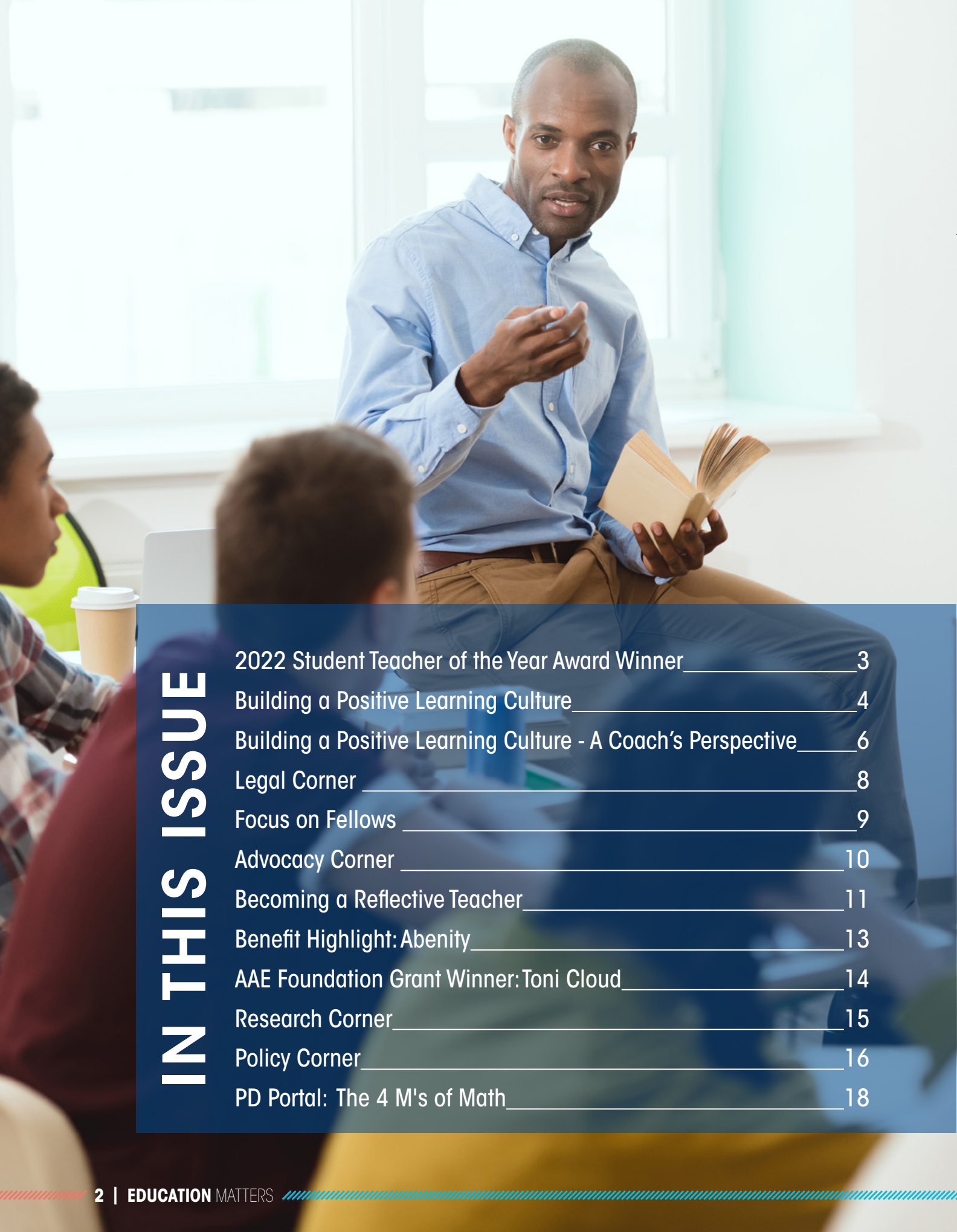
# EDUCATION MATTERS

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation



WELCOME  
**Back  
to  
School**





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# 2022 Student Teacher of the Year Award

Since 2021, the Association of American Educators has recognized excellence in student teaching through a generous gift from long-time educator and AAE member Darrell Holmquist and his wife Suzanne. The 2022 recipient of the Darrell and Suzanne Holmquist Student Teacher of the Year Award is Hannah Thomas. Ms. Thomas completed her student-teaching training as a deaf and hard-of-hearing educator at Becky-David Elementary School in St. Charles, Missouri in May 2022. The award includes \$250 toward setting up a classroom and a one-year professional membership in AAE. The competition was open to all education students who completed their student teaching in the 2021-2022 school year and are entering the classroom for the first time this fall.

Ms. Thomas' supervising teacher and nominator for the award, Ms. LaWanda Brewer, noted her drive and focus as key factors in her nomination saying, "Miss Thomas was self-guided and goal-driven throughout her semester with us. She demonstrated self-motivation from the very beginning and worked with her students to gain more independence in their academic work and greater use of technology for hearing and vision needs."

**"Miss Thomas demonstrated self-motivation from the very beginning and worked with her students to gain more independence in their academic work and greater use of technology for hearing and vision needs."**

As Ms. Thomas begins her professional teaching career in Kansas with anticipation and enthusiasm, she reflects on the impact the award has already had and the importance of her work that lies ahead.

"This year so far has been an amazing whirlwind! I started my first position after graduate school at Blue Valley School District in Overland Park, Kansas. I have already learned so much and have finally completed



Hannah Thomas

my itinerant schedule. My students are great kids, and I'm excited to continue working with them through the school year.

I am very thankful for receiving the Darrell and Suzanne Holmquist Student Teacher of the Year award not only because of the start-up funds but because of the confidence boost it gave me. Teaching day after day is no easy feat, it takes constant hard work and flexibility. As a first-year teacher, I sometimes wonder if I am qualified or even old enough to be teaching! This award, however, made me feel more confident in my abilities to teach students who are deaf and hard of hearing. I am planning to use the funds to purchase activities and materials specific to my students' IEP goals. They will be helpful especially since I do not have very many materials of my own!" ■



**Christina Mazzanti** is the senior director of communications for the Association of American Educators. She is responsible for advancing AAE's mission, growth, and member service delivery through internal and external communications strategies.



# Building a Positive Learning Culture

In her book, *Mindset*, Dr. Carol Dweck tells the story of IBM in the early 1990s. Once a defining corporate name that meant “computer,” the company had struggled and faltered as the computing industry changed around them. For decades, IBM had supplied mainframe computers to nearly all major corporations and in the early 1980s it dominated the burgeoning PC market, but the company could not keep up with the rise of small nimble tech startups of Silicon Valley such as Microsoft and Dell. It began selling off parts of its business as a way to salvage itself; but by 1992, the company had gone from reporting \$5 billion in profit in the early 1980s to a loss of more than \$8 billion.

For many of us, we may identify with IBM workers in the early 90s. To say the past few years have been tumultuous for students and teachers would be an understatement. When schools closed due to the pandemic, educators quickly adapted to meet the needs of their students, even though the efficacy of teaching students through computer screens was limited. Relationships, often the bedrock of classrooms, became frayed. Then schools would open, only to close again or have limited numbers of students in the room with the rest attending remotely.

There was a lot of hope that last school year would have been the year everything returned to normal, however many educators found that the toll of the pandemic was long-lasting, reflected by students who struggled with social-emotional skills, adhering to school norms, and academics. The challenges that American educators faced were higher than ever before.

It is exactly in these circumstances that Dr. Dweck expected her work on growth mindset to be helpful. As

educators, we are most familiar with the impact growth mindset has on educational achievement. We encourage individual students to view their work as something they can master with enough practice and hard work, if only they are open to doing so. But individual mindsets are only a portion of Dr. Dweck’s work, and only some of that has to do with learning and acquiring skills. In *Mindset*, the benefits of believing change is possible and improvement is achievable is applied to everything from business to romance.

In Dr. Dweck’s work, a growth mindset is not just something that is limited to individuals as they face academic or other personal challenges, but it can also transform an organization. We can apply the same principles that we hope to instill in our individual students to the culture of a business or organization, including in our classrooms.

**By creating a culture of growth, we can create in our students the growth mindset that will help them succeed.**

It is in studying this as a cultural attitude that Dweck brings up the story of IBM. She talks about how IBM hired a new executive, Lou Gerstner, who believed in personal growth and because of this belief changed the way that IBM operated. Believing that all his workers had something to contribute, Gerstner opened lines of communication from the factory floor to the top

executives. He organized meetings that included those closest to the problem as a way to fix them, and he promoted teamwork, all while demanding his employees also improve productivity. By the time he left IBM in 2002, Gerstner had completely turned the company around.

As educators, we can find inspiration in this story; the past few years may have been difficult, but they are not something we cannot overcome, and we may even benefit from. Just as Gerstner did with an enormous corporation, we can build a culture that helps our students, ourselves, and ultimately, our school community to grow. By creating a culture of growth, we can create in our students the growth mindset that will help them succeed.

Setting the right tone through culture is extremely powerful, and comes as no surprise to any educator. Dweck's research shows that an organization's culture will override the natural tendencies of an individual. This is something that many educators can attest to as well. I can remember several students who may have misbehaved in one classroom, while in another they were among the top achievers. In those cases, it is not the student that changed, but the classroom and the environment the teacher created.

Cultivating a growth mindset toward school work is certainly powerful and has the potential to greatly improve our students' academic performance. Any classroom culture that does not incorporate a growth mindset toward academics would suffer, but it is also a potent social-emotional skill, some might argue, the key social emotional skill. Growth mindset asks us what do we do when we get in an argument with our friend on the playground? How do we react if we drop our bookbag and are late to lunch?

When we create a growth culture in our classroom, we can directly address many of the issues that have plagued the past few years. We can give our students the tools they are lacking to help them progress academically and to help them to mature into their fullest potential. To do this, we need to be sure of the culture we are creating, which means sweating the small stuff.

Dweck warns that every action and every word that a parent or teacher says can influence a child to either believe in their own hard work or to believe that achievement is beyond them. She tells the story of a young boy, Bruce, who visits a kindergarten class with his mother. He notices a broken toy and asks about it. The teacher

responds that sometimes toys break by accident and it's okay. By saying this, the teacher told the boy that her classroom was a safe spot, a place where the boy could make mistakes without fear of judgment.

Growth culture starts when students walk through our doors from the very first day of the school year. Here we send the message that learning is something students can enjoy and that it is something we enjoy. We can and should create a culture where students learn to love learning.

It continues with how we interact with them. Praise is important, but not any praise. We should praise what we want to see more of, especially if it is hard for the student. We can praise students who study hard and praise the student who forgives a classmate instead of starting a fight, while being careful that our praise is never hollow, insincere, or accompanied by low standards. Standards are everything in a growth culture. We know our students can meet our expectations, both behaviorally and academically, so we do not provide excuses; but Dweck warns against making high expectations the be-all and end-all.

Holding high expectations can be cruel when we don't provide a means to reach them. Dweck always pairs high expectations with providing constructive feedback and lessons on improvement. This is the same for behavior as it is for math. It is also something we may not be used to. We are used to having students who know how to behave, even if they don't always. Taking a step back and assuming our students do not know the basics of moving through a school or classroom is a departure from our past or pre-pandemic experiences, yet it is a challenge we must meet and it is a challenge that enables us to wield the most influential tool in creating our classroom culture — ourselves.

Nothing is more powerful to a student than the example set by the adults around them. They may be unsure of how to handle difficulty when the work is hard or a peer criticizes them, but we can provide a counter-example when they see us encounter something difficult and meet it with grace and joy. Last year was rough, but this year can fill us with the hope that we can grow through it. ■



**Melissa Pratt** is AAE's director of professional learning. 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.



# Building a Positive Learning Culture

## A COACH'S PERSPECTIVE: How Coaches Build More Than Winning Teams

By Garry Sigle



As the fall sports season is upon us, student athletes all across the country are transitioning from offseason training to daily practice sessions with their coaches and teammates. It is an exciting time for coaches, athletes, parents, and the community. As a junior high and high school athlete who had the good fortune to continue my distance running career at the collegiate level, I am well aware of the excitement a new season brings. In addition, I spent thirty-three years coaching cross country and track and field at the high school level in Kansas. A new season also brings challenges for all involved and requires a plan from the coaching staff in order to maximize the abilities of each athlete on the team and create success year after year.

Every coach wants their team to be successful. I believe there are many important aspects coaches bring to the program that will allow their team to be as successful on a consistent basis. I'm going to highlight three of those aspects which I believe are vital. They include being positive, having high expectations, and showing every student athlete on the team they are valuable and an asset to the program. Let's take each of these individually.

### Being Positive

In my final semester while an undergraduate at Fort Hays State University in Kansas, I took a class (Interpersonal Communication) that influenced my entire teaching and coaching career. There is a particular day in one class that I will never forget. On that day the instructor divided the class into four groups. Each



group chose a leader and the four leaders followed the instructor into the hallway. Once in the hallway the instructor gave each of the four of us a box of tinker toys. He then appointed me and another student as 'positive people' and the other two would be 'negative people'. We were instructed to go back to our groups and say only positive (or negative) things to our group.

With those instructions I went back to my group and handed them the box of tinker toys. They looked at me and one of them started to take off the lid and my response was "great job! You're doing awesome." They continued to look toward me, discussing among themselves what they should do and began assembling pieces, for which I continued providing positive reinforcement

upon each action. We had twenty minutes for the activity. After twenty minutes of continual positive comments, my group built an airplane that rolled across the floor. The other positive group had built a skyscraper. The negative groups? They had nothing. Their pieces were strewn across the floor. They were arguing with each other and had absolutely nothing built.

What did this lesson teach me? It taught me that if I wanted my classroom or teams to be successful I needed to be positive each and every day. That didn't mean I couldn't provide corrections when needed. It just meant an overall positive environment was necessary for success.

## If I wanted my classroom or teams to be successful I needed to be positive each and every day.

### Having High Expectations

I believe student athletes will always achieve to the level which they are expected to achieve. Setting expectations and goals can be an important aspect of every program. Setting goals is one thing, but speaking about high expectations and doing things within the program that indicate high expectations are more important. The school in which I taught was a class 3A school in Kansas with graduating classes of around 60-65. When I set up our track and field schedule I always included at least one local 6A meet (graduating classes of around 400). I did this for a couple of reasons. First, it made it easy for parents to attend the meet since lots of parents worked in the community where the meet was going to be held. Second and most important, we had athletes who could compete at this level. I will admit it was a bit intimidating in the early years for our athletes to have the confidence to compete. However, as we continued to attend the meet each year, more and more athletes found success at this meet. I felt it was extremely important for my athletes to know I believed in their ability to compete at a high level.

### Every Athlete is Important

I believe this to be vital to the success of any program. Every athlete on the team deserves to know they matter and that they are instrumental to the overall success of the program. In the sport of cross country, as it is in all sports, only a certain number of team members are



going to make the varsity squad. In cross country that number is seven. At the end of the year, when attending state qualifying meets, I was able to put ten athletes on the roster, of which seven ran varsity. Nearly every year it was extremely competitive to make not only the seven spots but the top ten. There were many years I had many more boys and girls on my cross country roster than ten, which made it competitive as to who was going to fill those top spots. What I always wanted the team to know was that every athlete was a valuable member of the team. What I wanted them to know was if I could get every athlete pushing the athlete in front of them from the bottom up to the number one runner, our team was going to be better. That created the desire for the eleventh runner to push the tenth runner, and so on, with each one trying to make the varsity team. Then, at the state meet when our team was fortunate to be on the podium as one of the top three teams, I wanted every runner on the team to be up there to receive the trophy. Each one of them helped to achieve team success, not just the seven who made up the varsity squad.

There are many ways to develop a winning program. Many coaches are successful year after year because they are knowledgeable, committed, determined, and just put in plain old hard work with regularity. Caring about our student athletes and helping them to be fantastic citizens, great students, and successful athletes is the cornerstone of every teacher and coach. I believe if we encourage them by being positive, having high expectations, and making each one of them feel they are an important part of the team, it will go a long way in creating the environment for a successful program and ultimately, in building a successful foundation in life. ■



**Garry Sigle** serves as an AAE regional director, as well as the executive director of AAE's state chapter in Kansas, KANAEE. Prior to AAE, Garry was an educator and coach at Riley County High School in Riley, Kansas for thirty-three years. In addition to his drafting and woodworking teaching duties, Garry was Head Girls'

and Boys' Cross Country and Track and Field Coach. His teams won a total of 12 state championships.



# Back to School — How Do We Reclaim Normal?

We have all said our goodbyes to summer and it is that time of year again. Back-to-school season is upon us. Somehow, it feels different this year. It is almost as if we should have streamers, hats, and party favors. The pandemic changed education as we know it. Some of those changes are here to stay, some were temporary. With the newest guidelines, it seems as though we may recapture some semblance of normal.

For those of you just reentering the classroom for five days a week, normal means orienting yourself back into a physical space. Other educators have chosen to remain in virtual positions. Whatever your back-to-school looks like, here are some things to keep in mind as you return to work:

- 1. The work will be intensive.** As educators, you know there are many types of students with many types of learning needs. Over the course of the last several years, students have suffered. Some do better in classroom settings, others did fine in virtual learning environments. All of them, however, at one point or another felt the emotional impact of the pandemic, whether that meant quarantine from other students, test-to-stay scenarios, heightened hygiene, social distancing, or the loss of family or friends. Many were so affected by these experiences, they fell behind academically. They will continue to need your help this year to reintegrate more fully into a classroom setting or meet their grade level standards.
- 2. The work will be rewarding.** There is no doubt that many of you have always found your work rewarding; after all, you are shaping future leaders. This year as you see students struggle to reclaim their normal and help them through that process, you will see progress in real time. Your efforts will be evident.
- 3. The work is invaluable.** By now, we have all heard of the teacher shortage, a very real scenario. That makes what you do all the more valuable. Other than family, there is no one who spends more time with students than a teacher.
- 4. The work changes everything.** A quote from Nelson Mandela says it best, “[e]ducation is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Teachers have, can, and will continue to help change the world.

Through the first days of back-to-school and throughout the year, please know that you are not alone. AAE is here to support you and AAE Legal Services can help address problems you may experience with administration, colleagues, students, or parents. In addition to guidance and support, your extended legal benefits, if applicable, will help if there is a threat to your license, unfair discipline, threatened demotion, or termination. Your \$2,000,000 liability policy gives you peace of mind and helps defend you against claims that may arise from your work in the classroom or in your school setting responsibilities.

So go out, reclaim normal, and change the world. We appreciate you and all that you do. Welcome back! ■



**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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## FOCUS ON FELLOWS

# Teacher Appreciation: Every Day of the Year

### Dear Teachers,

One week in the year is not enough time to show how much you are appreciated for the countless hours you spend working, the tears sometimes shed, or the smiles formed in your classrooms. As someone who recently stepped out of the classroom and into a school-wide position, my appreciation for you has grown exponentially.

Managing a classroom, keeping up with grading and lesson planning, and communication with families is exhausting. When you and a student are struggling to connect, it can be draining. I get it. I remember that feeling. Maybe that is why we carve out a time at the end of the year to especially show our appreciation, because we all know that time of year can be exceptionally challenging.

However, the beginning of the school year provides another great opportunity to tell you that you are seen. You are loved. Your work matters. You are appreciated!

At back-to-school, we are miles away from the testing season. Students feel refreshed from summer and are eager to meet their new teachers, but they may not realize how much they will gain from the structure and love you provide them. At the end of the day they are kids. They need you, even when they act quite the opposite. Sometimes, you are the most important person in their life and you may never know that. As someone who sees and has conversations with students about their teachers often, I know this to be true.

Every student needs a person to stand in their corner and advocate for them, and every teacher should be reminded of the impact they have on students. We have so many diverse students we are able to support and represent. It is your endless effort that gives these students a sense of belonging and support they need to be successful.

Whether it is the go-getters or lost souls, students of color or LGBTQ+ students, English language learners or exceptional students, all of them gravitate toward



teachers who they know are there for them. Our diverse group of students deserve all the support you provide, and you deserve the appreciation we have for you.

Without you, the needs of the students would not be met and their futures put at risk. We need you. We need the diverse experiences and identities you bring to the table. We need your ability to connect and support our students. We need to support all our students, and you do that, every single day. As it has been said again and again, we appreciate you for that.

Although Teacher Appreciation Week 2022 has come and gone, do not forget the impact you have on those amazing students you serve. As we return to school this fall, find the bright moments, and revisit those when the shower of appreciation feels dry. The work we do is never easy, and sometimes we lose sight of the impact we make. From someone who observes teachers every day, I see the connections and love you bring to the work. From the bottom of my heart, we appreciate you for the support you provide to all our students. They are lucky to have you. ■



**Austin Ambrose** is dean of students and middle school teacher at Forge International School in Middleton, Idaho. He previously taught elementary school at a school in Nampa, Idaho. In his current position, Austin is responsible for building strong school culture and providing emotional/behavioral support for students. Austin is a 2021/2022 Association of American Educators Foundation Advocacy Fellow.

# Your Profession. Your Voice.

The 2022 AAE Foundation Advocacy Fellows are AAE members representing an array of beliefs, convictions, backgrounds, and experiences. Still, the one thing that unites them is their professional commitment to our students. This year's advocacy fellowship program centers around the call to action "Your Profession, Your Voice," and our commitment remains the same as we begin this new school year.

AAE Foundation's annual advocacy fellowship is an invitation for education practitioners to display their expertise in myriad ways on a select set of topics. Our objective is to empower professional educators and position them as thought leaders within the profession. Through dedicated training, 1-1 support, and

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engagement with other educators across the country, our educator fellows are illuminating the needs of students and the profession. They continuously advocate for a student-centered, personally fulfilling, and a well-respected teaching profession.

This year, AAE Foundation has narrowed its focus to a few key issues:

1. A Student-Centered Approach to and Innovation within the Profession
2. Educator Voice as a Key Lever to Appropriate and Sustainable Change
3. Diversifying the Teaching Profession by Alleviating Excess Barriers to Entry
4. School Choice and the Rights of Families to Choose Where Their Children Learn
5. Improvements to the Teaching Pipeline Including Addressing Teacher Pay and Shortages

While our advocacy priorities remain unchanged, our impact on education will continue to expand only with your help. Whether you apply to join our 2022-2023 Advocacy Fellowship or simply want to engage on a single issue, we constantly seek opportunities to uplift the voices of professional educators. Each month, AAE Foundation invites you to join the conversation on education advocacy through our live training provided on Facebook. We teach you to advocate locally by sharing educational materials with your colleagues, making your voice heard through surveys and interviews, and inviting us into your school to share the importance of uplifting the professional educator's voice.

To learn more about how you can get involved, receive training, schedule an interview, complete a survey or become a fellow, please email our Director of Advocacy, Kira Tookes, at [kira@aaeteachers.org](mailto:kira@aaeteachers.org). We look forward to serving you and making your voice heard! ■



**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.



# Becoming a Reflective Teacher

**G**reat teachers never stop growing. They grow a lot during those first years in the classroom and in the many years that follow. In fact, educators in every role from administrators to paraprofessionals are constantly looking for ways to make themselves better. Consider the following strategies to help you grow:



## Keep a Journal

Write down what is happening in your classroom, both what you are doing and how the students respond. Be thoughtful about your teaching methods and attentive to how they affect your class. Keep track of things that would have made your lessons easier and integrate them the following year.



## Form Strong and Positive Relationships With Your Colleagues

Other teachers are some of your best resources, especially when they are more experienced than you. Spend time with the other teachers in your building and go to them when you need advice or have questions. When planning lessons, involve other teachers in other subject areas or in the same hall to create a richer, more vibrant experience for students and to incorporate interdisciplinary planning.

At the same time, be cautious of being pulled into negative or gossipy relationships. Some teachers are resistant to doing things in new ways, changes intended to better the profession, or any change at all. Spending much time listening to these teachers can negatively impact how you approach your profession.

## Make Full Use of Your Mentor/Coach

Many districts provide new teachers with a mentor teacher or coach to help them along their path. Do not be afraid to go to your mentor teacher with any problems you have. He/she is there to help you. If you are not given a mentor, find a colleague you work with in a similar grade or subject who you can go to with your questions.

## Practice Areas On Which You Need to Work

Many aspects of teaching, like asking questions, prompting discussions, and bringing a distracted student back on task are best improved through practice. This can be done in a formal setting such as a lesson study, videotaping lessons for feedback, or it can be done informally by sitting down with a colleague and working on one particular skill. In both situations, continuous attention to and practice in the areas that need improvement will make you a better teacher. Also, don't try to work on everything at once. Choose one skill that you want to improve and focus on that skill exclusively.

**Continuous attention to and practice in the areas that need improvement will make you a better teacher.**

## Connect With Other Educators Via a Professional Learning Community

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are groups of teachers who communicate and help each other improve their craft. More than just hanging out in the teachers' lounge, PLCs are purposeful and goal driven. They are the single most effective form of professional development for teachers and the best thing that you can do to improve your craft. Social media sites are great places to start forming a PLC.

If you are lucky, you will have an in-school PLC. PLCs should have time built into the school day for purposeful team meetings to plan, discuss problems, read books,

examine strategies, etc. They are not the same as faculty meetings or top-down professional development.

## Immerse Yourself in Your Content Area

The more you know about your subject area, the better you will be at teaching it. As much as possible, give yourself a professional level of expertise in a subject. Even if you are teaching at the elementary level, a professional level of expertise in a content area will help you know which skills truly do need to be stressed. Most content areas have dedicated professional associations. These associations are great places to start for information.

## Become Involved in Your School and District

Look for ways that you can become involved outside of the classroom. Participate in school initiatives and projects for the school and for the district, or start one that you are passionate about. You may also consider becoming an advocate for an educational issue you care about. The Association of American Educators offers advocacy training at many skill levels and durations to help members bring about much-needed changes in their school communities.

## Know Your Students

As important as knowing your subject area, knowing your students is just as important. This includes knowing your students' skills, knowledge, abilities, interests, and special needs, as well as their backgrounds and family lives. The more you know about your students, the better you'll be at knowing how to reach them. Learn as much about them as possible. ■





# The Benefits of Membership: **SAVING MONEY!**



Even with the IRS raising the Educator Expense Deduction this year from \$250 to \$300, educators are always looking for more ways to stretch every dollar. You may know about the savings program Abenity that is available as one of your AAE membership benefits. It is a fantastic source of savings for you and your family on everything from tires and cars, to movie tickets, diapers, and groceries. However, have you considered how many abenity.com discounts could go toward stretching your classroom budget? Here are just a few of the ones we've found.

## Paper Supplies

- OfficeMax and Office Depot: 15% to 30% off in-store purchase on 100+ products as well as printing, binding, and finishing services
- Amazon: paper and office supply deals throughout the site for abenity members

## Computers and Technology

- Dell
- HP
- Lenovo
- Adobe Systems, Inc.
- Drone Nerds
- Microsoft
- Tech Gear
- Samsung
- Sidetrack
- ThinkEDU

## Museums and Tours

- 4,000 museums, attractions, zoos, aquariums, and cultural landmarks worldwide

## Discount Centers

- Cleaning supplies, tissues, disinfectant wipes, snacks, art supplies, electronics, calculators, and more
- BJ's Wholesale Club
- COSTCO

## Arts & Craft Supplies and Storage Systems

- Michael's
- Oriental Trading Company

## Sports Equipment

- Target

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Need assistance? Contact [editor@aaeteachers.org](mailto:editor@aaeteachers.org).

# AAEF Grant Winner Makes Programming a Reality for Her Students

Every spring and fall, hundreds of educators from across the country translate ideas for their classrooms, enrichment resources for their curricula, activities for their students, and professional development goals into AAE Foundation (AAEF) Classroom Grant and Teacher Scholarship proposals and submit them for funding award consideration. Award determination is competitive and recipients are often able to use the newly acquired resources for many years to come. Here is STEM educator Toni Cloud's story of the huge impact tiny Micro:bits made for her students.



"I am a first year teacher at Mary Walker Middle High School in Springdale, WA. I applied to this grant to expand the STEM-related resources and options at the middle school and high school. Micro:bits are a great tool for recording data and performing programs that are applicable for sciences, mathematics, technology, and engineering at the middle and high school levels.

Micro:bits are small single session computer drives that can be inserted into a number of devices such as rovers and drones. This is a great tool for students who are collecting data or creating programs that only need to do a finite amount of things so that students are not overloaded with excess coding. This tool can also be used as an introduction to programming as it uses three different programming languages.

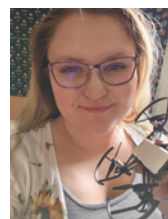


In addition to beginner programming projects, Micro:bits are applicable in a multitude of uses, such as collecting data including temperature, humidity, and wind speeds. Such projects can lead to students creating pathways and programs to direct and control small rover carts and drones which will be available for the advanced students who have completed the preparation courses. The grant funding also covered supporting supplies that will allow students to perform a variety of projects, as well as other resources students can use to explore and play with new ideas.

Preparing this course for my students was fairly straightforward. I was inspired by a training course I took in the winter that broke down the uses and access sites for programming and application of the Micro:bit at the middle and high school levels. All of these tools were accessible for purchase through Amazon making

it convenient to find the necessary materials. Students can also prepare for this course well before receiving the materials and programming them. Just as I was shown, I plan to use the Micro:bit site that gives students and staff access to projects, help questions, and a place to program. This programming area allows students to program in Block coding, Python, and JavaScript providing understanding of differentiation and a visual tool for testing their work. This site also allows students to save their programming for later use on projects.

For all of the opportunities and discoveries students can make with this programming tool, I believe the \$500 startup funding has been well worthwhile. This is something that is easily applied to a wide variety of levels, projects, and differentiation needs. I found that with this project-based course there is a lot of room to build and grow for staff, students, and others who are looking to explore the world of programming. For my school and throughout the district, this is going to be incredibly beneficial as it will allow us to offer a nine-week programming course at the middle school level, give students an exploratory approach for collecting data at the high school level, and offer fun projects and certifications for Friday School which is a free day in our school district. This is a great start to something that we are building to give our students more variety in their learning experience as well as future prospects after graduation that my students wouldn't have otherwise." ■



**Toni Cloud** is now in her second year as a mathematics teacher at Mary Walker High School in Springdale, Washington. She graduated from Eastern Washington University with an education degree. In addition to her role as a mathematics teacher, she also supervises the Anime Club, is a softball coach, and continues to introduce STEM-related clubs and programs at the school.



# The Importance of Seat Assignments

The beginning of the school year brings with it a host of choices and decisions to make. How will you schedule your school day? Where will you display student work? What tools will you use to communicate with a parent? One of the longest lasting choices is a seating chart.

When setting up a seating chart, there is a lot to think about. Do you have any students in your class with special needs? Are there students who just seem to clash with each other? Does a student's behavior determine sitting in a certain place? And, who would you like to see working together in groups?

A recent study brings a new factor to consider: how seat assignments affect friendships especially in elementary school.

## What the Research Says

The research study from Florida Atlantic University followed several classrooms of students in grades three through five. In their research, they examined the seating arrangements of the classrooms and then interviewed the students, specifically asking them to name who they were friends with in the class. Using the seating charts, the researchers then calculated the proximity of each student's friends in an attempt to see if there was a correlation.

The researchers found that the elementary students were more likely to be friends with the same-gender students seated around them and those they were in groups with. However, in smaller classes, proximity did not matter as much. Surprisingly, when group and seating charts were changed, so did the students' friendships. Students became closer friends with those now seated near them, even if they had only been acquaintances before.

While the researchers note that this study is the first one to demonstrate the power of the seating chart on elementary friendships, prior studies have shown that older students are more likely to have relationships with students around them in randomly generated seat assignments.



## How to Use This Information

The past few years have frayed the social structures that students use to build relationships. Elementary aged students have few avenues for socializing outside of the home and those few that they do have (sports, clubs, church, etc.) were disrupted over the past few years. We've seen the result of this disruption in the mental health of our students.

This research suggests that as educators, we may have yet another tool to help during this recovery period. Along with asking which students may help keep the class talker focused, we should also be asking ourselves: Are there any beneficial friendships that I want to help foster? ■

**Read More:** Classroom Seat Proximity Predicts Friendship Formation <https://bit.ly/3ef4bHT>

**What seat assignment techniques have you used this year?** Tell us at [editor@aaeteachers.org](mailto:editor@aaeteachers.org).

# For Many, Barriers to Exercising Educator Association Rights Still Exist



The Association of American Educators is proud to be the nation’s largest nonunion professional educators association, with tens of thousands of members in all fifty states. While joining AAE is straightforward, prior to joining many of you decided to opt out of a public-sector union. And up until four years ago, some of you still had to pay agency fees, also known as fair share fees, even as a nonmember.

Then, in 2018, the Supreme Court reaffirmed in *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)* that public employees have a First Amendment right to refrain from association membership, and cannot be required to join a union or pay dues as a condition of employment.

Although *Janus v. AFSCME* was a big step forward for educators’ association rights, many educators are still facing barriers to exercising those rights. Unfortunately, more than 80 percent of states still allow unions to impose restrictions requiring educators who leave their

union to continue to pay hundreds of dollars in dues to an organization they’ve decided not to support.

One way some public-sector unions make it difficult for educators to opt out of membership is by enforcing opt-out windows, which limit when an educator can end dues payments to certain times of the year. In some cases, these opt out windows are as short as two weeks at the beginning of the school year, when educators are busy setting up their classrooms and preparing for students.

In other cases just calculating the opt-out window is absurdly complicated because it is based on your hire date, or the date you signed the form joining the union. For example, in California, the opt-out window listed on the California Teachers Association membership form is “not less than thirty (30) days and not more than sixty (60) days before the annual anniversary date of this agreement; my employment with the Employer ends; or as otherwise required by law.” Not only is this confusing and difficult to calculate, most educators won’t



More than 80% of states still allow unions to impose restrictions requiring educators who leave their union to continue to pay hundreds of dollars in dues to an organization they’ve decided not to support.



remember when they signed this form, which is usually buried underneath pages of onboarding paperwork.

In some states there is even an inconsistency between the opt-out windows at the local and state levels. For example, in Georgia, the opt-out window listed on the Georgia Association of Educators is between September 1 and September 30. But, if you join through certain locals, such as Gwinnett County Association of Educators or Steward County Education Association, the opt-out window is between August 1 and August 31. Educators belonging to the local union are usually required to belong to the state and national affiliates, in addition to the local. So which opt-out window are these educators supposed to follow?

## Confusing and arbitrary opt out periods make it very difficult for educators who would like to exercise their First Amendment right to leave the union.

These confusing and arbitrary opt out periods make it very difficult for educators who would like to exercise their First Amendment right to leave the union. Furthermore, unless an educator makes the decision to opt out and figures out how to do so before the opt-out window ends, that educator must continue to pay hundreds of dollars in membership dues to an organization they are actively trying to leave; an organization which may be advocating for policies the member strongly opposes.

Making it even more frustrating, most unions do not post their opt-out dates, let alone notify their members that the only period during which they are allowed to make membership changes is approaching. Also, once an educator joins a teachers union, their membership automatically renews every year until they retire or leave the profession.

Since these dates aren't posted, unless a teacher has a copy of their membership form and knows to check it for an opt-out window, it is almost impossible to find unless they actually try to opt out of the union and are rejected with instructions to resubmit their request during the "correct" time. These practices are disrespectful to the highly educated professionals we entrust to educate our children.

Encouragingly, some states are working to make it easier for educators to exercise their association rights at any time. In 2021, Indiana passed a law enabling an educator to leave the union at any time, eliminating

opt-out windows in the entire state. Florida state law also requires opt-out requests to be processed within thirty days of receipt.

Unfortunately, hundreds of thousands of educators are still subject to opt-out windows. The Association of American Educators believes the decision to join a union, a professional association, or no association at all, should be active, informed, and, above all, voluntary, which is why we allow our members to leave at any time, if they so choose. We believe firmly in educators maintaining this control over their membership and it serves us well to be so responsive to our members.

We aspire for all educators, whether they are a member of AAE or not, to have the option of exercising their First Amendment right to make decisions about association membership at any time, a right guaranteed by *Janus*.

If you're interested in sharing your opt-out experience, or advocating to make it easier for educators to exercise their First Amendment association rights, please reach out to [Noelani@aaeteachers.org](mailto:Noelani@aaeteachers.org). ■



**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.

## AAE FOUNDATION GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS DEADLINE

# OCTOBER 1, 2022

Scoring committee members are needed too!



### QUESTIONS:

📞 1-877-385-6264

✉ [awards@aaeteachers.org](mailto:awards@aaeteachers.org)

## PD PORTAL

# The 4 M's of Math



The AAE Professional Development Portal (PD Portal) continues to grow and serve our members with more and more exclusive webinars, publications, resource guides, and partner content that meet educators' needs by providing best practices, the latest research, and valuable information such as educator wellness and mental health. This content is free as a benefit of AAE membership and is accessed with a member code. Much of this content is available to all educators for a fee and some content has been made available for free to all portal visitors. The site is at [pd.aaeteachers.org](http://pd.aaeteachers.org).

This month, we're highlighting one webinar that many may have overlooked. *The 4 M's of Math: Measurement, Morphology, Metacognition, and Mastery* covers a host of underlying topics. Not a math teacher? There are some key takeaways that are relevant for a number of content areas as well as general education educators and SPED educators. This webinar is presented by Susan E. Miller, M.A., LDT-C Certified Dyslexia Therapist, Wilson®

Dyslexia Therapist, and Director, Robinowitz Education Center.

**In this one-hour webinar, viewers learn how to apply the science of reading to math instruction.**

In this one-hour webinar, condensed from a one-day seminar, viewers learn how to apply the science of reading to math instruction. Presenter Susan Miller explores ways to bridge reading instruction into math class by providing targeted fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension instruction that involves the language of math with strategies and resources one can incorporate into math lessons which are especially effective for dyslexic students and students with dyscalculia. "The lack of fluency in reading impacts the acquisition and achievement of math," noted Ms. Miller.



**TRUE OR FALSE?**

Most children have already developed considerable knowledge about mathematics BEFORE kindergarten.

**TRUE OR FALSE?**

Research supports instruction that is student centered or teacher directed.

**TRUE OR FALSE?**

A substantial part of the variability in student math achievement is due to the teacher.

**TRUE OR FALSE?**

Calculators help improve calculation skills, problem solving, and conceptual development.

**TRUE OR FALSE?**

Studies have shown changing students' beliefs from a focus on *ability* to a focus on *effort* increases their engagement, which improves math outcomes.

Viewers will also be tested on their knowledge of the 2008 National Mathematics Panel Report. Topics include learning processes, instructional practices, professional development, and instructional materials.

Math fluency is not only gained through work books and practice sheets. "Math is reading, too," explains Ms. Miller. From the *Sir Cumference* book series to *Math and Magic in Wonderland*, a terrific reading list for various reading levels is included in the webinar, in addition to other online resources.

For more information about this webinar, upcoming webinars, and courses, or to suggest a topic for a webinar or course, contact AAE Director of Professional Learning Melissa Pratt at [melissa@aaeteachers.org](mailto:melissa@aaeteachers.org). ■

Visit [pd.aaeteachers.org](http://pd.aaeteachers.org)  
to sign up for The 4 M's of Math



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# AAE Out and About

