

# 2016 AAE National Membership Survey: Professional Educators Embrace Solutions

Competing in a new global economy is a top national priority. Citing declining student performance in core subjects, policymakers are calling for solutions that give our students an edge. At the Association of American Educators (AAE), we know that our growing network of professional educators will be instrumental in building the bridge between sweeping education reform proposals and genuine solutions that work in America's classrooms. With a strong professional voice, AAE members can be champions for positive change and student advancement.

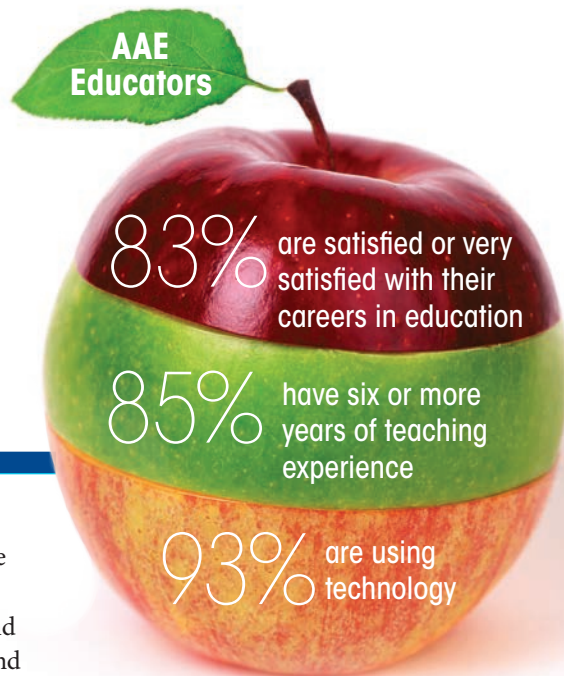
A driving force for professionalism in education, AAE is a growing movement of talented and esteemed teachers who are dedicated to the profession. In fact, 83 percent of survey respondents report being either satisfied or very satisfied with their chosen career path, 85 percent have been teaching for six years or more, and 93 percent are using technology in the classroom at least some of the time.

AAE's 2016 National Membership Survey examines some of the nation's most pressing policy priorities including school choice and technology, teacher preparation and leadership, testing and assessments, workforce policy, and the 2016 presidential election. Although some organizations claiming to represent teachers maintain opposition to reform policy in general, AAE members are eager to embrace solutions that demonstrate professionalism and putting students first.

## School Choice Policies

School choice means new and rewarding opportunities for educators. AAE has been vocal about supporting educators in all academic settings, and many members have embraced specific policies that increase options for students and teachers alike.

For example, a near unanimous 95 percent of survey respondents expressed support for course choice for students. This innovative policy allows students to craft an à la carte



Less than two-thirds of high schools across the country offer physics. Just half offer calculus. Using a policy known as course choice, students are able to craft an à la carte education uniquely tailored to their learning needs. Louisiana's course choice program enables K-12 students to take courses from colleges, public high schools, virtual schools, and various online providers. It enables students to access Advanced Placement and career and technical education courses, allowing them to earn high school and college credit, and industry-based certifications. Do you support course choice?

95% support/  
tend to support

5% tend not to support/  
don't support

education uniquely tailored to their learning needs via courses from colleges, public high schools, virtual schools, and various online providers.

Another 79 percent of teachers surveyed expressed support for public charter schools. These unique public schools are provided the flexibility to innovate but cannot select students and must satisfy the same requirements as district schools.

AAE members also expressed support (84 percent) for existing tax policies that allow parents to receive state income tax relief for education expenses. Similarly, another 71 percent expressed support for Nevada's Education Savings Account (ESA) program. The program allows parents to use some of the public funding earmarked for their child to pay for school-related services and tuitions.

Many AAE members are also parents who carefully examine and explore educational choice for themselves and/or their families. While 73 percent of respondents say they interview teachers and administra-

If you have school-aged children, how do you make decisions for your own children about where they attend school?

73% Interviewing administrators & teachers

33% Student test scores

30% GreatSchools.com and other similar websites

21% State-sponsored A-F school grading systems

tors when selecting a school for their children, 33 percent examine student test scores, 30 percent examine websites like GreatSchools.com, and 21 percent take advantage of state-sponsored A-F school grading systems. Interestingly, 38 percent of surveyed members are currently benefiting from school choice policies.

A tax policy in Alabama, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and South Carolina allows parents to receive state income tax relief for approved educational expenses, which can include school tuition, books, supplies, computers, tutors, and transportation. Do you agree with these individual tax credit policies?

84% agree/tend to agree

16% tend to disagree/disagree

## Virtual Education & Technology

Today's students have embraced technology like no other generation has. To keep up with the trends of the 21st century, certain policies have been enacted to incorporate and encourage online learning. AAE members are willing to embrace innovation but have expressed concern with scalability and access.

Sixty-nine percent of survey respondents expressed support for a blended learning environment where students spend part of their day with a teacher and part of their day receiving instruction through technology. Although the concept is exciting to many teachers, AAE members are evenly divided about requiring students to take an online class to graduate high school.

Another 56 percent of teachers either disagreed or tended to disagree with the suggestion that textbooks should be phased out for digital content in the future. "Technology is not always reliable and both are needed," cited one respondent. An AAE member further remarked, "This is a great idea for high school but we

Would you support a blended learning environment in your school where students spend part of their day with a teacher and part of their day receiving instruction digitally if it meant more planning time and higher quality instruction?

69% support/tend to support

31% tend not to support/don't support

need to ease into a requirement for younger students."

This overall decrease in support may reflect common implementation challenges facing American classrooms. Many states and districts have called for increased investment in equipment, training, and access to high speed connections for long-term success.

Many states have enacted laws that require students to take at least one virtual course to graduate with a standard or advanced diploma. Do you support this policy?

support/tend to support

48%

52% tend not to support/don't support

## Teacher Preparation & Leadership

Research shows that having a quality teacher in front of a group of students is the single biggest factor in determining success. For years, AAE members have been vocal about the need for attracting and retaining excellent teaching talent.

Over three quarters of survey respondents (77 percent) agreed with a recent NCTQ report that ranks schools of education and recommends requiring rigorous teacher prep program admission tests, an admission GPA of 3.0 or higher, and the passage of subject-matter tests as a condition of admission into teacher programs. Despite a consensus by policymakers to raise the bar for incoming teachers, AAE members are nearly evenly split in calling for an actual bar-like examination of teachers entering the profession.

Another 68 percent expressed support for attracting new teachers and teachers with experience in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) subjects via alternative certification programs, allowing degreed professionals an easier path to the classroom.

The majority of American teachers are white females, despite increasing diversity in the classroom. To meet the needs of our changing student demographics, 73 percent of AAE survey respondents expressed some support for efforts to recruit well-qualified teachers who are more representative (color and/or gender) of the student population.

Would you be supportive of a hybrid teaching role? This position would include teaching in the classroom part time combined with other roles or responsibilities in your school or district.



Teachers are also interested in developing in their careers. Seventy-six percent expressed at least some interest in a hybrid teaching role that would combine teaching in the classroom part time with additional leadership roles in their school or district.

## Testing and Assessments

New assessments and testing requirements have been a topic of discussion in communities nationwide. AAE members have expressed concern with overtesting but remain committed to measuring success. As one member remarked, "Assessments allow everyone to know their strengths and weaknesses. How else can we compare apples to apples?"

According to the data, 78 percent of members surveyed expressed some support for requiring students to pass proficiency tests to graduate from high school.

With regard to testing requirements, 86 percent of AAE members expressed support for the U.S. Department of Education's proposal of capping standardized testing at 2 percent of classroom time.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) remain a hotly debated subject. Seventy-four percent of AAE members feel either well prepared or somewhat prepared to use the standards in their classrooms. However, 68 percent of teachers surveyed expressed some concern with the standards being developmentally appropriate. Only 8 percent of respondents believe the standards are fully appropriate for their current grade levels.

Do you support a student requirement to pass proficiency tests to graduate from high school?



U.S. Department of Education officials have proposed capping standardized testing at 2% of classroom time. Do you support this proposal?





## Workforce Policy

With a *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* Supreme Court Case in deliberation and states like West Virginia enacting a Right-to-Work law, there is a real possibility that the current obligation of agency fee payments to labor unions in many states will end. A system protecting freedom of association for all teachers could produce additional changes to how the teaching workforce is compensated and organized.

Teachers are willing to adopt policies that account for unique circumstances. In fact, 67 percent of AAE members expressed support for negotiating their own contract

so that they could negotiate a salary and benefits package that best suits their lifestyles. Another 67 percent expressed interest in a “Worker Choice” policy that would allow a teacher to opt out of the collective bargaining agreement in the district and negotiate their own salary and benefits package.

With regard to declining budgets and the changing demographics of the teaching profession, AAE members are interested in policies that can serve a changing workforce. An overwhelming 78 percent of teachers expressed support for offering competitive salaries and benefits packages with different types of individuals in mind, including an à la carte benefits

“Worker Choice” would allow a teacher to opt out of the collective bargaining agreement in the district and negotiate their own salary and benefits package. Do you agree with this policy?

67% agree/tend to agree

33% tend to disagree/disagree

plan where prospective hires could pick and choose salaries and benefits based on need. Another 82 percent of teachers recognized the need for a choice between a traditional pension plan and the opportunity to invest in a portable 401(k) for new teachers.

## The 2016 Presidential Election

A majority (58 percent) of members surveyed believe that public education is currently getting too little attention in the 2016 presidential election. When asked how presidential candidates should share their ideas on education policy, AAE teachers cited televised debates (71 percent) and policy documents (68 percent) as top strategies for getting their messages across.

AAE members overwhelmingly suggested two areas of focus for the

presidential candidates. Sixty percent strongly support providing teachers more time, tools, and support for teachers to succeed, including planning, collaboration, and development. Another 70 percent of teachers strongly supported increasing compensation to attract and reward teachers as professionals.

As the profession changes in 2016, teachers are embracing solutions. AAE is listening, and we look forward to sharing your thoughts with policymakers on all levels. ■



The Association of American Educators (AAE) is the largest national, non-union, professional educators' organization, advancing the profession by offering a modern approach to teacher representation and educational advocacy. AAE has members in all 50 states and welcomes professionals from all education entities. Membership is \$16.50 per month which includes \$2 million professional liability insurance, legal services, professional development resources as well as a host of other benefits. Visit [aaeteachers.org](http://aaeteachers.org) for further information.