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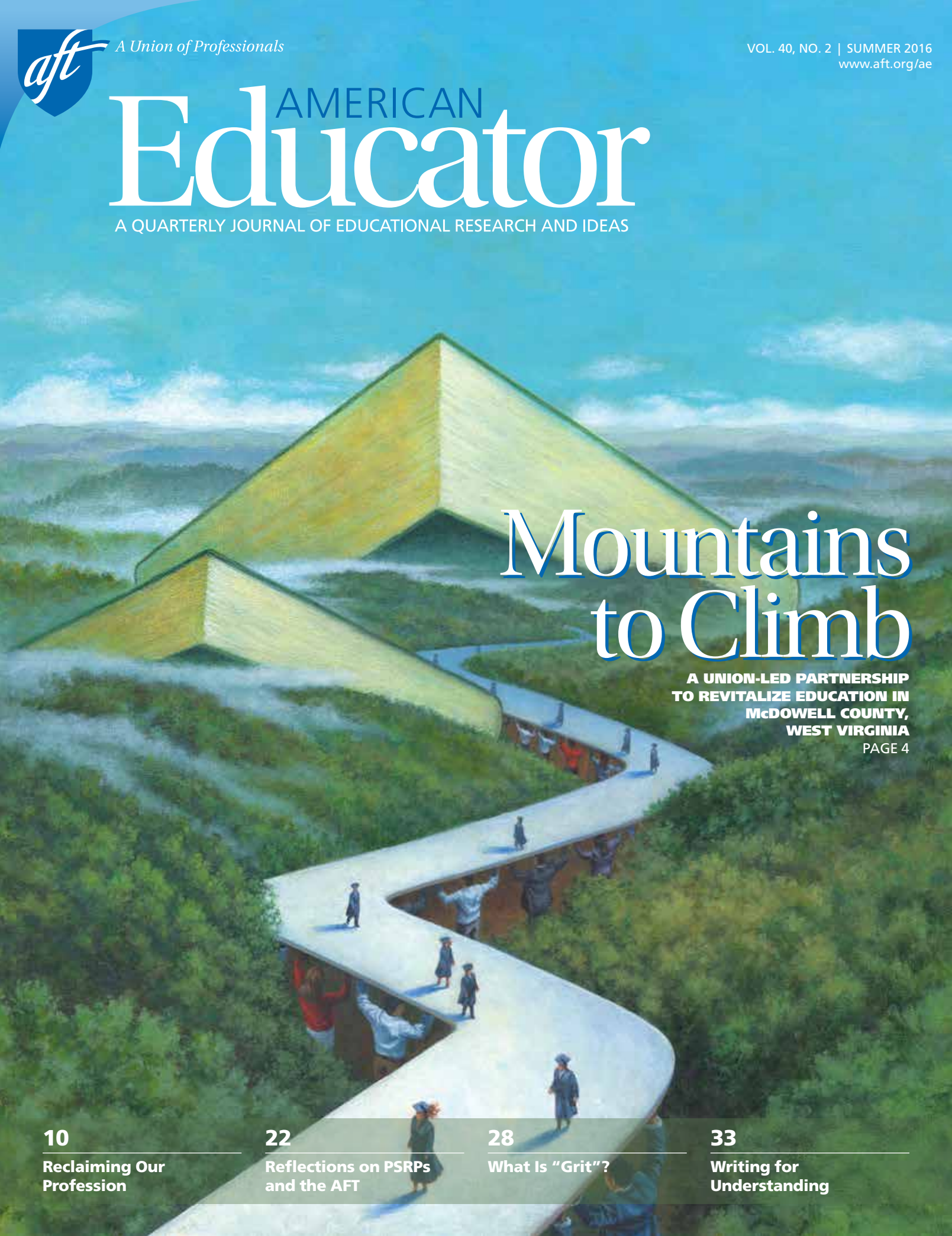

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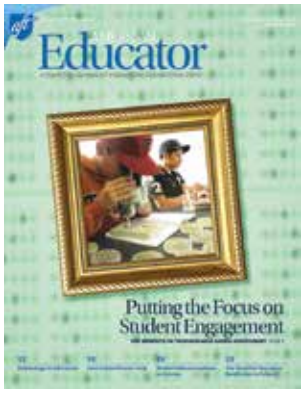

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These issues are available at **www.aft.org/ae**.

Honoring Our Past and Inspiring Our Future

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION of Teachers reached a significant milestone in May: the centennial of our founding. As I've pored over historical documents from our archives, it's clear that, from generation to generation, our union has been a vehicle to fight for positive change both in public schools and in society. As we enter our second century, we remain fiercely committed to creating educational opportunity, building professional voice and agency, and advancing economic, racial, and social justice for all.

The seeds of teacher unionism were sown in the late 19th century, with teachers like Henrietta Rodman, who helped found a teachers union in New York City and led the fight to allow women teachers to keep their jobs when they married or had children. In Chicago, Margaret Haley worked through her local union to challenge pervasive poverty, teachers' lack of resources and low pay, and a curriculum imposed by bureaucrats. Recognizing the strength they would have as affiliates of a national union in a larger labor movement, in 1916 both women's unions joined with six other local unions to form the American Federation of Teachers.

Then, as now, working people had many reasons to be angry. The AFT has worked to channel the aspirations underlying that anger into positive action. From the start, our leaders have known that power is necessary to bring about change, and that working people build power through their collective action at the ballot box and the bargaining table, and through their skills, knowledge, and ideas.

For 100 years, the AFT has worked to build power and use it for good. In the 1920s, the AFT lobbied Congress for children's rights, improved teacher salaries, and programs to combat adult illiteracy. We have continued that work. For example, in 2015, as Congress worked to reauthorize the primary federal education law, AFT members took more than 120,000 online actions and met face to face with legislators to help shape the law so it could have the potential to give educators the voice and resources they need to give children the education they deserve.

The AFT has grown to include other school employees, professors, government workers, nurses and healthcare professionals, and early childhood educators. While the AFT and the larger labor movement grew, so did America's middle-class and working families' standard of living. The labor movement helped ensure that working people, not simply special interests, had power in our democracy. Collective bargaining provided AFT affiliates leverage to advocate for quality, agency, and voice on the job—the embodiment of our motto: "A union of professionals."

The AFT has also used collective action to advance racial and social justice. As early as 1918, the AFT demanded equal pay for African-American teachers and lobbied for equal educational opportunities for African-American children. In 1953, the AFT filed an amicus brief in support of the plaintiffs in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case before the Supreme Court, the only educational organization and union to do so. Hundreds of AFT members traveled south in the 1960s to register new African-American voters and teach in AFT-run Freedom Schools. Today, the AFT is working to attract and retain teachers of color and to promote racial equity in education, the economy, and criminal justice. And we stand up against bigotry in all its forms.

The AFT's greatest strength has always been our members, professionals whose skills, knowledge, and ideas both strengthen, and are strengthened by, their union. The AFT's Share My Lesson is the fastest-growing free digital collection of resources for educators. The AFT Innovation Fund cultivates promising union-led ideas to strengthen public education. Our student debt clinics have helped members sharply reduce crushing college debt. And AFT members—from registered nurses and adjunct professors to paraprofessionals and parole officers—practice solution-driven unionism, using our expertise to improve the quality of our work.

MICHAEL CAMPBELL

Weingarten, right, with Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers (AFT Local 2), and Karen Lewis, president of the Chicago Teachers Union (AFT Local 1).

You don't hit 100 without some setbacks. Austerity has caused harmful cuts to public education and services throughout our history. Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and other governors intent on destroying any curb on their power have waged war on public sector unions. Many elected officials have sought to destabilize public schools and services in order to promote flawed privatization schemes.

It's all the more reason to honor the example of the AFT's founding mothers and fathers, to take our anger, build on our aspirations, and channel them into action—for our cause, our country, and our members, and for those we serve and those who will follow. From one generation to the next, we are honoring our past and inspiring our future.

Follow Randi Weingarten: **twitter.com/rweingarten**.

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OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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KEN McMILLAN

RETURN OF SCHOOL "WALK-INS"

Educators, parents, students, and community activists gathered in nearly 80 cities on May 4 to hold rallies and early morning "walk-ins" at neighborhood public schools. The events, which were coordinated by the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, a national coalition that includes the AFT, showed support for educational justice and equity, particularly for schools serving low-income and working-class communities and neighborhoods of color. The day of action included more than twice as many cities as a similar action held in February. A recap of the day and field reports are available at **www.reclaimourschools.org**.

A rally in support of Boston Public Schools.

AFT PHOTO

VERGARA OVERTURNED

A California appeals court on April 14 issued a unanimous reversal of a lower court decision in *Vergara v. California*. The appeals court dismissed the plaintiffs' claims that California's workplace protections for teachers deprive poor and minority students of a high-quality education. While similar suits have been filed in New York and Minnesota, the AFT applauded the California appellate court for rejecting what AFT President Randi Weingarten labeled an "either/or" argument pitting students against teachers. As Weingarten explained, such an argument ignores the fact that opportunity for all students "starts with recruiting, retaining, and supporting teachers, not blaming educators for societal problems or stripping away their voice." The full statement is available at **http://go.aft.org/AE216news1**.

"SUPPLEMENT, NOT SUPPLANT"

The Every Student Succeeds Act preserves existing rules that require all schools in a district to receive comparable state and district funding. But the Department of Education appears to be pushing changes by using a separate part of the law—the "supplement-not-supplant" provision, which mandates that federal education funding for needy students should be provided in addition to, not instead of, state and local dollars. Concerns about the department's draft arose in April when a committee of education stakeholders, including AFT Executive Vice President Mary Cathryn Ricker, reviewed it. Ricker and others argued that the proposal must be revised to preserve flexibility at the state and local levels, to guard against unintended consequences in schools, and to preserve the will of Congress. How this issue gets resolved could have big implications, as AFT President Randi Weingarten writes: **http://go.aft.org/AE216news2**.

SAN FRANCISCO COLLEGE PROTEST

Joined by students and supporters, 500 City College of San Francisco (CCSF) faculty members walked picket lines on April 27 in a one-day strike to protest the district administration's unfair labor practices and the plan to reduce course offerings over the next few years by 26 percent. District spending on CCSF instructors, counselors, and librarians has declined 9 percent over a four-year period, while the budget for administrators has risen 29 percent. The faculty strike was the first in the eight-decade history of CCSF. Read more at **http://go.aft.org/AE216news3**.

BEYOND THE "EGG CRATE"

The Albert Shanker Institute sponsored a conference on April 8 in Washington, D.C., that offered a compelling case for schools to break out of the organizational "egg crate," traditional school arrangements that isolate individual teachers in their classrooms. The meeting underscored the need to look at school systems in context, including the communities they serve, and to approach education reforms collaboratively. Featured presenters included Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford University, labor economist Kirabo Jackson of Northwestern University, Susan Moore Johnson of Harvard University, Phi Delta Kappa International CEO Joshua Starr, and Vivian Tseng of the William T. Grant Foundation. Literacy teacher and Meriden (Connecticut) Federation of Teachers President Erin Benham and AFT President Randi Weingarten highlighted the perspective of classroom teachers. Video and materials are available at **http://go.aft.org/AE216news4**.

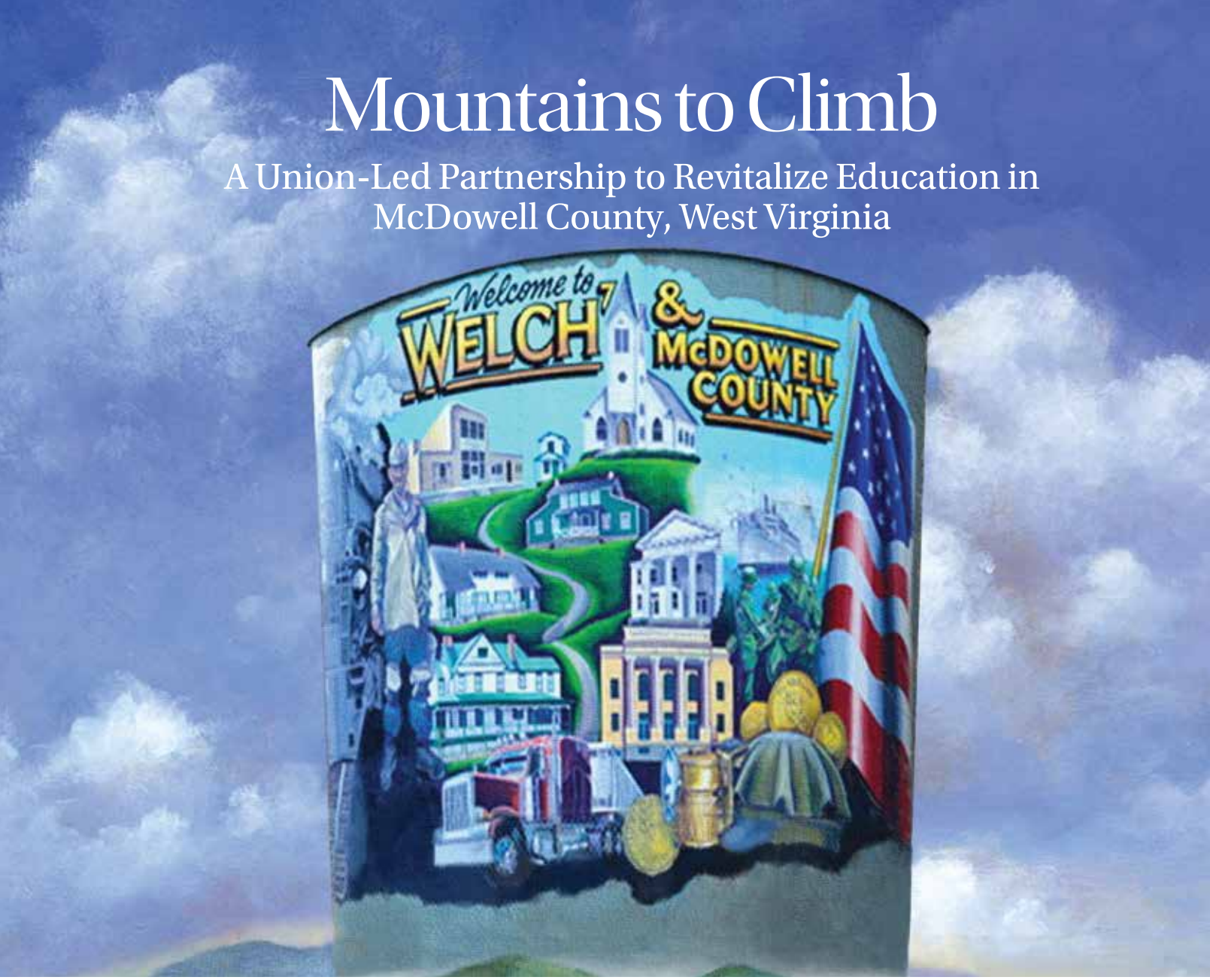
ACTION AT PEARSON

The AFT joined public employee and education unions and their pension funds to speak out this April at education publishing giant Pearson's annual general meeting in London. The groups called for a review of the company's business model, which pushes high-stakes testing in the United States and United Kingdom and school privatization in the developing world. AFT President Randi Weingarten presented a shareholder resolution, signed by more than 100 pension funds, labor unions, and individuals, highlighting the damaging effects of the high-stakes standardized tests that Pearson sells to school districts and its promotion of private and costly schools in the developing world. While the resolution ultimately was voted down, the stepped-up shareholder activism captured headlines on both sides of the Atlantic. This AFT short video captures the event: **https://youtu.be/QgLyZD47hIU**.

AFT PHOTO

Mountains to Climb

A Union-Led Partnership to Revitalize Education in McDowell County, West Virginia



By Jennifer Dubin

For Rebecca Hicks, the past two years have been the most promising of her young life. The high school senior participated in job shadowing activities with lawyers and business executives, met with lawmakers in her state capital, toured monuments and museums in our nation's capital, visited top colleges and universities, and flew on an airplane for the first time.

While such experiences are quite common for middle-class students, they had been unimaginable to Hicks, not for a lack of motivation (she earns straight As) or a limited curiosity about the world (she reads constantly), but because she hails from a place where the aspirations are many yet the opportunities are few: McDowell County, West Virginia.

Jennifer Dubin is the managing editor of American Educator. *Previously, she was a journalist with the* Chronicle of Higher Education. *To read more of her work, visit* American Educator*'s authors index at www.aft.org/ae/author-index.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEN McMILLAN

The Mountain State's southernmost county, which sits in the heart of Appalachia, has endured hard times. The once-booming coal industry that enabled many residents to provide for their families is no longer booming. A confluence of factors, such as competition from foreign markets and a shift to natural gas and other forms of energy, has contributed to the decline.

As the jobs disappeared, a mass exodus of residents ensued. In the 1960s, when "coal was king," roughly 125,000 people lived in McDowell; today the population hovers around 20,000.

Those who remain now face innumerable challenges, poverty chief among them. The current median household income in McDowell is $23,607, well below the state median income of $41,576 and less than half of the national median income of $53,657. Nearly 35 percent of the county's residents live in poverty. In McDowell County Schools, all students receive free breakfast and lunch because such a high percentage of students in each school qualify for them.

Hicks, who is 18, has experienced some of the challenges behind those statistics firsthand. By the time she was 13, both of

her parents had died. She lives with her maternal grandparents. Tall and poised, with long brown hair and glasses, she speaks candidly about her background. She says that she, her grandfather, a retired coal miner, and her grandmother, a homemaker, live on $17,000 a year.

Given her financial situation, Hicks knew better than to ask her grandparents to pay for the educational and travel opportunities she wanted to pursue. But through a public-private partnership led by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) called Reconnecting McDowell, she doesn't have to.

Getting to McDowell County has always been difficult. The mountains are as treacherous as they are majestic, and drivers must navigate steep and curvy two-lane roads. Ultimately, the lack of viable transportation has contributed to the sense of isolation in McDowell, which Hicks describes as "very closed off from the outside world." However, Reconnecting McDowell is changing that by bringing much-needed resources and services to the county and providing opportunities for Hicks and her peers to connect with the outside world.

Reconnecting McDowell has managed to connect the county to 125 partners (at the latest count), who have given more than $17 million in goods and services. These include digging water lines by the West Virginia AFL-CIO for new home developments, laying fiber optics for Internet access by Shentel Communications, donations of musical instruments from VH1 Save the Music, and donations of books for students from Voya Financial, Verizon, and First Book,* just to name a few.

Among Reconnecting McDowell's many projects, one called Broader Horizons is directly geared toward students like Hicks. A mentoring program funded by a three-year, $300,000 grant from AT&T, it pairs high school juniors with mentors and pays for academic enrichment trips to Charleston, West Virginia, and to Washington, D.C., a short plane ride away. Hicks calls the program life-changing. "It has given me the opportunity to see the world from a different perspective."

Another Reconnecting McDowell project specifically aimed at students and families is a community schools initiative.† Southside K–8 School is in the process of becoming the district's first full-service community school; a health clinic inside the school is set to open by November. And two other schools will begin the process of becoming community schools this coming school year.

Community schools partner with youth organizations, social service agencies, food banks, higher education institutions, health clinics, and businesses to meet the academic and nonacademic needs of students and their families so that teachers are free to teach and students are ready to learn. The movement to establish community schools has flourished for more than a decade now, with such schools located mostly in urban settings.

The community schools initiative figures prominently in Reconnecting McDowell's efforts to increase student learning, and rightly so. Research shows that community schools can reduce chronic absences due to poor health, decrease disciplinary issues and truancy rates, increase family engagement, expand learning opportunities, and create more stable lives for children at home.

It may seem strange to some that a teachers union would undertake this work. After all, revitalizing a struggling West Virginia county is well beyond the scope of collective bargaining agreements and improving curriculum and instruction.

According to AFT President Randi Weingarten, the union's engagement makes perfect sense. "The AFT stands at the intersection of two important social movements: creating educational opportunity and advancing economic dignity," said Weingarten at a press conference announcing the initiative four years ago.

> Reconnecting McDowell is bringing much-needed resources to the county and providing opportunities for youth to connect with the outside world.

"Our goal is to start reconnecting the children and families of McDowell to the opportunities they deserve so they can not only dream their dreams but achieve them." And "education is the centerpiece of this effort."

The Power of Partnerships

The idea for targeting resources to McDowell County came from Gayle Manchin, the former first lady of West Virginia. In the fall of 2011, Joe Manchin, now a U.S. senator, was the state's governor. At the time, his wife was the head of the state board of education. The board had taken over McDowell's public schools 10 years earlier because of low student achievement. Despite the move, McDowell's educational outcomes had not improved, which frustrated Gayle and the board.

In September 2011, Gayle met with Weingarten in West Virginia during the union's "Back to School" tour. Over dinner in the governor's mansion, she told Weingarten that she was impressed with the union leader's work around the country and wanted to partner with the AFT to make a difference in the lives of children in McDowell.

Weingarten told Manchin she was willing to work with her, and she encouraged Manchin to find partners willing to join the effort, according to Bob Brown, a project manager of Reconnecting McDowell, who attended the dinner.

Manchin agreed to sign up partners, and Weingarten asked Brown, a West Virginia native and longtime AFT union organizer, to write a report on the challenges confronting McDowell. What he found showed just how difficult life had become for many in the county. The teenage pregnancy rate was the highest in the

*For more on First Book, see "A Friend in First Book" in the Spring 2015 issue of *American Educator,* available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2015/willingham_sb.

†For more on community schools, see "Where It All Comes Together" and "Cultivating Community Schools" in the Fall 2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/fall2015/blank_villarreal and www.aft.org/ae/fall2015/dubin.

nation. So was the rate of deaths from prescription drug abuse, which had devastated families and left many addicted parents unable to care for their children. As a result, nearly half of McDowell's students lived with neither biological parent, and 72 percent lived in a home with no working adult.

Brown also found that academic achievement was the lowest in the state; the same was true for the high school graduation rate. To top it all off, the school district had significant trouble recruiting and retaining teachers.

After reviewing Brown's report and talking further with Manchin, Weingarten decided that the AFT should get involved. She promised that the union would engage the community to determine what kind of help it needed; it would not mandate change from the top down. To that end, the AFT held a series of town hall meetings in the county before embarking on the effort.

"The one thing everybody in McDowell told us was, 'Yes, we'll work with you on this, but don't you dare come in here and stay six months and then walk away,'" Brown recalls. Manchin and the AFT assured people in McDowell they were in it for the long haul.

By December 2011, Manchin had enlisted 40 partners from the business community, the labor movement, and local churches, among other organizations, and the AFT held a press conference formally announcing the Reconnecting McDowell initiative. Although, by that point, Joe Manchin had been elected to the U.S. Senate, Gayle pledged to continue her work on behalf of the county. She would chair Reconnecting McDowell's board of directors. At the press conference, the new governor, Earl Ray Tomblin, committed himself to the project and to picking up where his predecessor had left off.

To guide its work, the board created seven subcommittees focused on jobs and the economy; transportation and housing; early childhood education; K–12 instruction; health, social and emotional learning, and wraparound services; technology; and college and career readiness. A mix of state, county, and union officials, along with representatives from partner organizations, sit on each subcommittee. Each month, the subcommittees participate in call-ins with the AFT. Twice a year, Reconnecting McDowell partners attend meetings in West Virginia.

Among the project's early achievements was one that involved technology. As recently as four years ago, many residents were still using dial-up to go online. But a $9 million investment by Shentel Communications wired all 11,000 homes in McDowell for high-speed Internet access. Shentel also partnered with Reconnecting McDowell to offer steep discounts in Internet access (less than $20 each month) for homes in which McDowell County students live.

Another company, Frontier Communications, agreed to significantly increase the bandwidth in the county's 11 schools. Previously, the bandwidth was so depleted by the schools' security cameras that it would take teachers and students at least 15 minutes to pull up something online. Just rewiring the schools "was a huge accomplishment to get people into the 21st century," Brown says.

The creation of a juvenile drug court in April 2012 was another Reconnecting McDowell achievement. Previously, juveniles charged with drug possession were treated as adults. Now, youth with drug problems are provided medical attention and counseling services, without being removed from the school system. According to Brown, every effort is made to focus on treatment, not punishment, and to keep students in school.

As recently as four years ago, many residents were still using dial-up. A $9 million investment wired all 11,000 homes in McDowell for high-speed Internet access.

And thanks to a partnership with First Book, a national nonprofit dedicated to donating books, overcoming illiteracy, and increasing educational opportunities, children in the county now have greater access to books. Reconnecting McDowell has opened seven family literacy centers in the county's social service agencies, which are stocked with free books for students to take home.

While such efforts are in their infancy, many believe they have helped the county begin to move in the right direction. Two years ago, the state board of education was so encouraged by the partnerships forged through Reconnecting McDowell and its focus on community schools that it returned the public schools to the locally elected school board. More recently, for the first time in

years, an audit by an educational accrediting agency found improvements districtwide and rated the county's schools "fully compliant" on measures of academic progress.*

Compared with just a few years ago, the four-year high school graduation rate for the district has increased, from 74 percent in 2010–2011 to 80 percent in 2014–2015, the year for which most recent figures are available. And the dropout rate has decreased, from 4.5 percent in 2010–2011 to 2 percent in 2014–2015.

Brown acknowledges that these improvements, while modest, are still significant. "We've seen a downward spiral going on for 25 years," he says. "To stop the bleeding and turn the corner, it's quite a huge accomplishment."

One area that Reconnecting McDowell hopes to include among its achievements is improving teacher recruitment and retention. To that end, it has bought two long-vacant properties (known as the Best Furniture and Katzen buildings) in downtown Welch, McDowell's county seat, where empty storefronts are the norm, not the exception. The buildings, which once housed a furniture store and a supply company, will be demolished this year to make way for a teacher village set to open by September 2017.

Renaissance Village will be a five-story building of about 30 apartments, most of them one-bedroom units. The building will include stores open to the neighborhood, such as a street-level coffee shop. Brown explains that the housing will attract educators to the hard-to-staff school system. "You can go around the country and find some young, idealistic teacher education grads who would like to give three or four or five years to a place like McDowell because they want to make a difference," he says. "But they're not going to go down there and teach if there's nowhere to live," or if they have to drive an hour and a half to get to work or have to live in an isolated trailer on top of a mountain, he adds. "That's why we're trying to build this."

The purpose of the village is actually twofold, says Reba Honaker, Welch's mayor. "It can help with bringing new businesses into town," she says. "When they see we've got an influx of new teachers or new residents, that will encourage them to open."

For years, Honaker, who once taught in the county's schools and owned a floral shop in Welch, has seen her city suffer since the coal industry's decline. The teacher village has given her reason to believe the community can get past the stigma "that there's nothing here, that everybody's gone," she says. "We still have some good kids."

As if to remind residents of McDowell's potential, computer-generated renderings of the teacher village hang on the wall of the entrance to City Hall, where Honaker works. The pictures show a modern building with sleek lines, unlike any in the county. In Welch, major construction for new housing hasn't occurred in decades. But to residents of McDowell, the future building represents more than just much-needed housing for teachers, Honaker says. "It will give everybody hope."

Finding Solutions through Community Schools

Nelson Spencer understands the challenges of recruiting and retaining teachers. For four years, he has served as the schools superintendent in McDowell. In that time, he has seen many teachers who do not live in the county accept jobs to teach there for a couple of years and then leave as soon as they find work closer to home.

Each year, the district's roughly 200 teaching positions include about 50 vacancies. At the beginning of this school year, the district was able to fill all but 15 of them—but with teachers not certified in the subject area they are assigned to teach. Another challenge is that most of McDowell's teachers are novices; nearly 50 percent have less than three years of experience teaching in the county.

The turnover also extends to administrators. Spencer says that before he took the helm, the district had six superintendents in 10 years. The churn, he says, leads to a vicious cycle of training new teachers and administrators each year. The instability also affects the district's 3,400 students, who can find it difficult to build relationships with teachers who don't stay in the schools for long.

The nearest doctor is often an hour's drive away, which means students commonly miss school for medical appointments.

Spencer is optimistic that Reconnecting McDowell's focus on education, the economy, and transportation will attract teachers to McDowell. For him, the intersection of all three areas is more than apparent. Better transportation "would be key not only for the school system but for the economy," he says. To that end, "we want a highway system through McDowell."

The school system, he says, will continue to play an integral role in Reconnecting McDowell. "It's not like you're going to separate what the schools are doing from some outside entity," says Spencer, who actively participates in the administration of the initiative. He sits on the board of directors, and four of his staff members chair subcommittees.

One particular challenge that Spencer and his staff continue to face is student attendance; districtwide, the average daily attendance rate hovers around 90 percent. Several factors, including health issues, prevent families from being able to send their children to school. For many in McDowell, the nearest doctor is often an hour's drive away, which means that students commonly miss a full day of school for medical appointments. To reduce such absences, the district plans to transform some schools into community schools.

In the fall, Welch Elementary School and River View High School will start the process of becoming community schools. Meanwhile, Southside K–8 School has already begun its community school transformation.

*The full report is available at http://oepa.state.wv.us/documents/60-McDowellCountySchools.pdf.

Southside is located in War, a town best described as a compact little cluster of businesses, churches, and homes at the bottom of a mountain. The mountainsides themselves are far too steep to build on, so buildings line the roads along the mountain hollows.

A little more than a year ago, Southside won a $300,000 state grant for dropout prevention, which it has used for the purpose of becoming a full-service community school. Greg Cruey, the president of AFT McDowell and a middle school math teacher at Southside, wrote the grant. Besides paying for afterschool programs, office equipment for a school-based health center that's in the works, and additional resources, the grant funded a position for the first full-time community school coordinator in the state. Sarah Muncy, the parent of a Southside student, has held that position for about a year.

Thanks to a $100,000 grant, Southside K–8 School can now renovate one end of its building to house a health clinic.

Cruey has taught at the school for five of his 12 years in the county. "The challenges that students face are primarily economic," he says. "Our kids come to school unready to learn." As an example, he mentions three siblings—a fifth-grader, a fourth-grader, and a first-grader—who live with their grandparents because their mother left them and their father is incarcerated. "Those kids come to school wondering what happens when dad gets out of jail in a couple of months and where they'll live next and whether or not there'll be food in the fridge," he says. "And it's hard to think about phonics and arithmetic under those conditions."

By connecting students and families with much-needed supports, Southside can help ensure students come to school ready to learn. One of those supports is a health clinic that the school plans to open this fall. Thanks to a $100,000 grant from the Sisters of St. Joseph, Southside can now afford to renovate one end of its building to house the clinic, which will serve not only its students but the larger community.

The school, however, isn't waiting until the clinic opens to connect students with services. In the last year, it has partnered with the Smile program, a mobile nonprofit dental group that visits schools throughout the county to provide students with free dental care.

Flo McGuire, Southside's principal, first heard about the community school model thanks to Reconnecting McDowell, and the idea greatly appealed to her and her staff. So more than a year ago, the school formed a community school steering committee that, McGuire says, has received "a great deal of guidance, resources, and staff development" from the AFT.

McGuire has led the school since 2011. A native of War, she is a 1997 graduate of the town's now defunct Big Creek High School, which was located behind Southside until it was recently torn down. Big Creek's gym, a structure built in 1957 that stood yards away from Big Creek's main building, is still standing, in fairly good condition. It is this building that the steering committee hopes to turn into a community center.

A $100,000 grant from one of the school's 19 community partners allowed Southside to purchase weightlifting equipment that students can now use in the old Big Creek gym. The school is currently in the process of partnering with a nonprofit group to run the gym as a community center full time and operate programs for residents.

Children in War, like anywhere else, "are going to find something productive to do, or they're going to find something unproductive," McGuire says. "Because of our socioeconomic status, because of just a lack of things to do in our town, positive opportunities are not there." But a community center can offer students options.

McGuire remembers a time not long ago when Big Creek was the hub of the community. "Everything that happened, happened at the high school," she says. "The idea of the community school is to bring that hub back here to Southside and bring the people back in."

To some extent, the school is already doing just that with a variety of educational offerings for adults, such as classes in positive parenting, hunter education, and cooking healthy meals, as well as GED courses. Muncy, the community school coordinator, is currently working on partnerships with colleges in the state to offer general education courses at Southside so area residents can pursue higher education closer to home.

Besides finding community partners for the school, Muncy works directly with students, which she considers the most rewarding part of her job. After a fifth-grader recently confided in her that his shoes were too tight, she drove to a sporting goods store an hour away in Bluefield, West Virginia, to buy him a pair that fit. She paid for the shoes with money that a community partner had donated so the school could purchase clothing for students who need it.

Muncy remembers that when she handed him the box, he opened it, then jumped back in surprise. Seeing the smile on his face delighted her. "It was amazing," she says.

Like McGuire, Muncy graduated from Big Creek High School. In fact, she was one of McGuire's students when McGuire taught English as a young teacher there. Although McGuire briefly left War for college at Concord University in neighboring Mercer County, she never dreamed of living anyplace else. "I wanted to come back and help," she says. "There's so much potential here and so many good people."

Broadening Students' Horizons

One Saturday afternoon in March, that potential fills a conference room at the Greenbrier, a five-star resort in West Virginia. Twenty-eight students from Broader Horizons, the mentoring program run by Reconnecting McDowell, have gathered here for a reunion.

The group includes high school juniors currently in the program, as well as college freshmen and high school seniors who are Broader Horizons alumni. The students, whose teachers, guidance counselors, and principals referred them to the program, are here for a one-night stay at the Greenbrier so they can catch up with their mentors and each other. As part of Broader Horizons, their expenses are paid.

At round tables throughout the room, mentors sit with groups of students to discuss study skills, preparing for the ACT, and what life is like in college. Mentors include Reconnecting McDowell's staff: Bob Brown, the project manager mentioned earlier; Kris Mallory, a project coordinator; Debbie Elmore, a community liaison; and the Rev. Leah Daughtry, the lead project manager of Reconnecting McDowell and the CEO of the 2016 Democratic National Convention. In addition to serving as the liaison to current and potential national partners, Daughtry conceived of and designed the Broader Horizons program and successfully convinced AT&T to sponsor it.

At Daughtry's table sit graduates of McDowell's two high schools, River View and Mount View. "So, guys, how is college?" Daughtry says and smiles. Many of them attend Bluefield State College, Concord University, or West Virginia University, among other in-state institutions and a few not too far from West Virginia.

The students tell her they've matured a lot during their first year out of high school. Besides making time for schoolwork and part-time jobs (nearly all of them work), several students say they understand the importance of saving money and of changing the oil in their cars. Brandon elicits several laughs by saying you can never get too many alarm clocks. He explains that, at the beginning of the school year, he may have overslept on occasion, but he has learned the importance of being punctual and managing his time.

As Daughtry asks them to share big life lessons they've learned, Rayven shifts Jaxn, her 8-month-old baby, on her lap. The young mother is so dedicated to her education—she began at Bluefield State only a week after giving birth—that the mentors allowed her to bring her child, along with her boyfriend, for the weekend.

Daughtry asks her how she manages the baby and college. "It's not easy," Rayven says, adding that she usually waits to do her homework until Jaxn falls asleep at night.

A few minutes later, Daughtry asks them to finish this sentence: "I'm proud of myself for …"

"I'm proud of myself for doing something nobody thought I could—having a baby and still going to college," Rayven says.

Visits to places as storied as the Greenbrier, an iconic resort in the Allegheny Mountains, have enabled students like Christian Nealen to see "the other side of life."

"I'm proud of myself for doing everything I told everybody I'd do," Emily says.

"There's never a day I'm not tired," adds Micah, who attends Forsyth Technical Community College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He then explains just how busy he is. From 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., Monday through Friday, he attends classes. From 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., he studies and does homework. After 5 p.m., he goes to his job and doesn't get home until midnight. The next day, he wakes at 6 a.m. and does the same thing all over again. Sticking to his schedule takes incredible discipline, he says.

Daughtry sympathizes with him and offers encouragement. "You have to always remind yourself of what good thing happened that day," she says. "Don't get hung up on what went wrong. Focus on what you've overcome."

It's likely that Christian Nealen has heard those words from Daughtry before. The senior at River View High School has experienced his share of tragedy. In the last two years, his stepfather, a coal truck driver, committed suicide, and soon after, his best friend suddenly died. Suffering from depression, he began to skip school and his grades started to drop. But after two months, his mentors in Broader Horizons helped him get back on track.

Nealen, who will attend Concord University in the fall, corresponds with Daughtry on Facebook, checks in with Bob Brown by phone, and often talks to Debbie Elmore in person, since she's based in McDowell and visits Broader Horizons students at his school. "I realized that I can't let all the desolation in my life just ruin me and keep me down," Nealen says.

(Continued on page 43)

Reclaiming Our Profession

The AFT's Task Force on Professionalism

ILLUSTRATION BY NEIL WEBB, THEISPOT.COM

By Mary Cathryn Ricker

IN OCTOBER 2014, the AFT formed a task force on professionalism, which AFT President Randi Weingarten asked me to lead. Representing all five divisions of our union, the task force was formed to combat the regular assault on the professions the AFT represents. Our efforts will culminate in a resolution to be presented to the AFT's executive council, leading into the AFT biennial convention in July. If the resolution passes, task force members will help move forward the work called for in the resolution.

The most common attack on our members' professions centers on attempts to automate human work. In education, this often includes preferences for prefabricated programming and shrink-wrapped curriculum, which undermine the knowledge and expertise of educators and leave them with little to no control to construct the kind of rich curriculum, full of art and music, world languages, and physical education, that our students need. In every AFT division, such attacks can lead to privatizing our work and devaluing the expertise we bring to public service, higher education, and healthcare.

In forming this task force, we pulled together a group of our members from across all five AFT divisions to determine how our union could counter these attacks and define what it means to be a professional. To jumpstart our work, we conducted listening sessions with hundreds of AFT members, who told us that being treated as a professional means they feel respected and responsible for their work and have some autonomy to carry it out. They also noted that it includes having access to appropriate and relevant professional development and a respected voice on the job.

I was proud to learn of some empowering examples of how our affiliates are responding to the attacks on our professions—by running campaigns highlighting their work as professionals, enhancing their building steward programs, and advocating for new contract language.

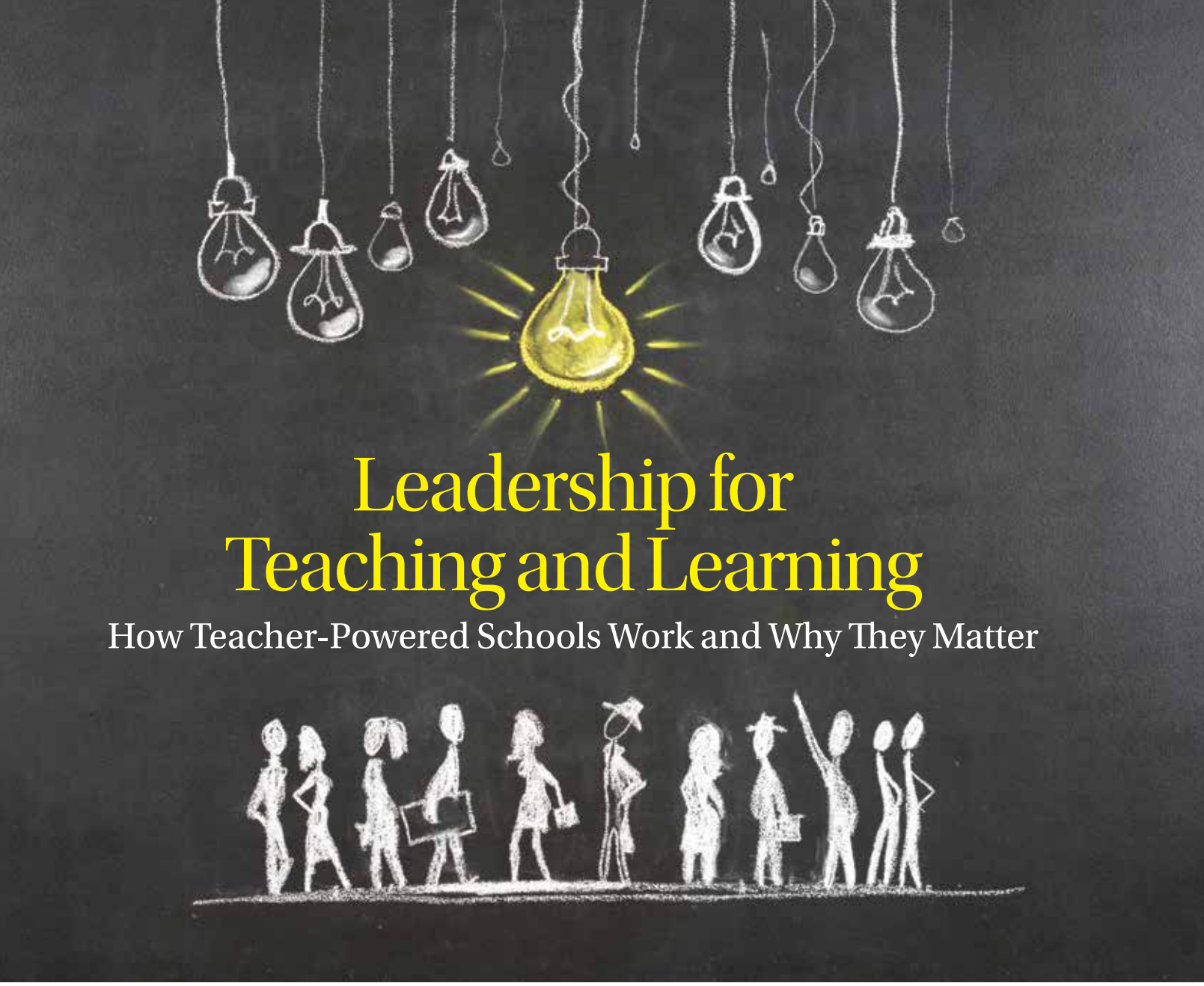
We recognized very quickly that the work of the task force has much in common with the battles for economic justice currently being fought throughout our country: the fight for fair wages, dignity in the workplace, and professional recognition. As educators, we must confront such challenges head on.

One AFT initiative that empowers educators to do this is the Teacher Leaders Program (see the box on page 17). To me, this program exemplifies advocacy in action because it trains leaders and members to cultivate their own voices so they can offer solutions to educational problems instead of waiting for others with less knowledge of education to solve them.

The two articles that follow also tap into themes the task force seeks to highlight: the importance of collective autonomy, site-based decision making, and professional expertise. Barnett Berry and Kim Farris-Berg discuss the power behind teacher-led schools, while Bryan Mascio examines the weaving together of theory and practice so that educators can make the best decisions possible for their individual students.

As teachers, paraprofessionals and school-related personnel, healthcare professionals, higher education faculty, and public employees, our jobs depend on knowledge and relationships. The more our work is automated and deprofessionalized, the more that knowledge and relationship building are diminished—which diminishes us all.

Mary Cathryn Ricker is the executive vice president of the American Federation of Teachers.



Leadership for Teaching and Learning

How Teacher-Powered Schools Work and Why They Matter

By Barnett Berry and Kim Farris-Berg

Since 1996, teaching quality has dominated school reform conversations. That year, the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future called for a comprehensive approach to teacher development.[1] The commission advanced five major recommendations to overhaul the profession, which, taken together, reflected the need to design schools that could escalate the spread of teaching expertise.

But over the past 20 years, federal and state reforms have drawn on heavy-handed attempts to close the achievement gap through top-down management of teachers.* Such approaches have often included high-stakes accountability systems that mandate what to teach and how to teach it and that evaluate teachers on the basis of annual standardized test scores.[2] In short, policymakers have focused on fixing teachers more than on maximizing their expertise and leadership potential.

No wonder classroom teachers across the nation are frustrated. In a 2013 poll by Scholastic, nearly all participating teachers responded that they teach in order to "make a difference in the world," yet more than 80 percent reported that the number one challenge they face is the "constantly changing demands on teachers and students," surely reflecting the onslaught of teacher-fixing initiatives.[3]

One of teachers' greatest sources of frustration is their lack of authority to determine how to meet those demands in ways that

Barnett Berry is the founder and CEO of the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ). A former high school teacher, RAND Corporation social scientist, and South Carolina Department of Education official, he is the author of numerous publications, including Teacherpreneurs: Innovative Teachers Who Lead but Don't Leave, *coauthored with Ann Byrd and Alan Wieder. Kim Farris-Berg is a research consultant for CTQ and the lead author of* Trusting Teachers with School Success: What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots, *from which parts of this article are drawn.*

*For more on the intersection between top-down policy and teacher professionalism, see "Escaping the Shadow" in the Summer 2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/summer2015/mehta.

will benefit students. A 2015 report from the U.S. Department of Education found that between the 2003–2004 and 2011–2012 school years, the proportion of teachers who believed they had low autonomy increased from 18 percent to 26 percent. The perceptions of low autonomy were particularly pronounced among teachers who work in cities and with low-income populations.[4]

In a 2015 survey conducted jointly by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the Badass Teachers Association, 73 percent of the 30,000 teachers surveyed reported that they "often" experience stress at work. These respondents, the survey found, are unlikely to have the authority to make decisions on their own or to be able to count on their managers for support, and they are likely to leave work physically and emotionally exhausted.[5] Similarly, a 2014 Gallup poll revealed that only 31 percent of U.S. teachers are actively "engaged" in their jobs, scoring "dead last" among 14 occupational groups in agreeing with the statement that their opinions count at work.[6]

But there is a growing movement to transform the profession with teachers serving as the *agents* of change—rather than being the *targets* of it. Simultaneously, growing numbers of policymakers are becoming aware that deeper learning outcomes for all students will only be achieved with their teachers leading the transformation of schooling.[7]

A convergence of research also supports the benefits to students when teachers can make significant schoolwide decisions. In this article, we present teacher-powered schools as one notable school governance model that supports student learning and enhances the leadership, engagement, and professionalism of educators.

The History of Teacher-Powered Schools

Early efforts to advance professional communities of educators and site-based management of schools suggested that teachers ought to have more substantial roles—but stopped short of proposing that teachers design and run schools. In the 1980s, Ted Kolderie, founder of Public School Incentives, and Ruth Anne Olson, a consultant to the organization, developed the idea of teacher ownership of professional practices, much like those that doctors, attorneys, and architects have created.

Public School Incentives published two major reports advancing this idea,[8] and Olson spent a few years gauging interest among teachers and school districts. At the time, she found very little. However, in 1986, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (published by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy) foresaw that schools with teacher autonomy would be in operation by the 21st century and would become increasingly common over time.[9]

A handful of public schools where teachers informally shared collective autonomy appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. Momentum picked up after the Minnesota legislature passed the nation's first charter school law in 1991, which required that teachers make up a majority of each charter school's board. A group of entrepreneurial individuals from the Le Sueur and Henderson, Minnesota, area developed and proposed Minnesota New Country School, a charter school with a self-directed, project-based learning model for students in grades 6–12.

At the suggestion of Kolderie and attorney Dan Mott, they also formed a workers' cooperative called EdVisions. Members of the cooperative—teachers—would have both responsibility and accountability for running the school. In winter 1993, the Le Sueur-Henderson school board voted to authorize the school, enabling the charter school's board to contract with EdVisions to run it. Today, Minnesota has 16 schools where teachers have collective autonomy, mostly in the charter sector though not part of large charter school chains.

In 1994, partially in response to the Massachusetts legislature passing a charter school law the year before, the Boston Teachers

Resources for Designing Teacher-Powered Schools

Learn from pioneering teams via the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative (**www.teacherpowered.org**), a partnership between the Center for Teaching Quality and Education Evolving:

- "Steps to Creating a Teacher-Powered School" (**www.teacherpowered.org/guide**) is an online do-it-yourself guide to transforming your school into a teacher-led school (or reconfiguring an existing one). It covers the big steps—and major decisions—involved in getting your school off the ground. Hundreds of hyperlinked resources identify questions to discuss, relevant research to explore, and sample governance documents to review.
- An inventory of teacher-powered schools (**www.teacherpowered.org/inventory**) offers information about more than 90 schools implementing the model.
- And a virtual community (**www.teacherpowered.org/community**) welcomes you to ask questions, share resources, and find mentors.

Union and Boston Public Schools negotiated a formal memorandum of understanding that today gives authority to the governing boards of Boston's 30 pilot schools to try unconventional models of teaching and learning with at-risk students. In some of these schools, the governing boards have decided to delegate their authority to teachers, who collaboratively make the decisions influencing their schools' success. This agreement between the union and the school district gave rise to pilot schools like the Boston Teachers Union School and the democratically run Mission Hill K–8 School, which teacher, author, and public advocate Deborah Meier founded with colleagues.

When the Los Angeles Unified School District and United Teachers Los Angeles replicated Boston's pilot school arrangement in 2007, a number of school governing councils embraced collective autonomy for teachers.

Policymakers have focused on fixing teachers more than on enhancing their expertise and leadership potential.

In the years between the initiation of Boston's and Los Angeles's pilot school programs, more teachers unions and school districts across the nation arranged ways for teachers to call the shots. Today, more than half of the schools with collective teacher autonomy are district schools.

In 2008, researchers Edward J. Dirkswager and Kim Farris-Berg (one of the authors of this article) worked with Kolderie and his colleagues to observe the growing number of public schools where teachers had collective autonomy. The two sought to learn how teacher teams were getting—and then using—this autonomy. Ultimately, they wrote a book about their positive findings: *Trusting Teachers with School Success: What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots* (2012). At about the same time, Barnett Berry (also an author of this article), with Ann Byrd and Alan Wieder, wrote *Teacherpreneurs: Innovative Teachers Who Lead but Don't Leave*, highlighting the promising work of Lori Nazareno and her colleagues who designed and run the Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy in Denver Public Schools.

The two books generated increased awareness of what were then known as "teacher-led schools" but also made clear that there was not yet a movement. The existing schools saw themselves as islands, unaware of teams elsewhere with similar values and modes of operation.

To connect these teams and encourage them to learn from one another, expose more teachers to the opportunity, track progress, and provide start-up and continuous improvement resources, the Center for Teaching Quality (founded by Berry) and Education Evolving (cofounded by Kolderie and Joe Graba) jointly created the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative in 2014. Each year, the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative hosts well-attended national and regional conferences so educators can share their innovations. At present, it is a fairly informal network. As the movement grows, we envision development of formal supports and more informal networking, including increased support for teacher and administrator unions as well as school districts that are looking to open the door to teacher-powered schools.

We coined the term "teacher-powered" to refer to schools collaboratively designed and run by teachers (although the term could also apply to teachers' collective autonomy in departments within a school or in programs within a district). The initiative advances the teacher-powered movement as it has been shaped by pioneering teachers and engages those pioneers in creating resources for teachers to come.

The Importance of Teacher Collaboration to School Success

Over the last several decades, researchers have consistently found a strong link between a lack of teacher autonomy and high rates of attrition from the teaching profession. In particular, Richard Ingersoll, drawing on 20 years of data, has shown that a primary reason teachers move from high-poverty schools to wealthier ones—as well as leave the profession altogether—is a lack of professional autonomy and faculty decision-making influence.[10]

While Ingersoll's research has not addressed the links between teacher autonomy and student and school success, other studies point the way. This research presents clear evidence of how teacher collaboration leads to gains in student learning.* And providing collective autonomy to teams of teachers is one way to enable educators to put this research into practice.

For example, Matt Ronfeldt and colleagues found that teachers working in schools with better-quality collaboration—as determined by teachers' perceptions of its extent and helpfulness—improve student outcomes in math and reading. Their study, grounded in multiple measures (including test score data and 9,000 teacher observations), revealed that teachers who worked in schools with better-quality collaboration tended to be more effective at improving achievement gains regardless of their individual ability to collaborate.[11]

In an in-depth study of the ABC Unified School District in California, Saul Rubinstein found that stronger teacher collaboration is correlated to student achievement.[12] When Rubinstein and colleagues analyzed collaboration in the district, they found that those schools with the strongest partnerships also had the highest levels (what they referred to as "density") of teacher-to-teacher communication—meaning that more teachers discussed student performance data, curriculum articulation, instructional practice, and teacher mentoring than in schools with weaker partnerships. Notably, they found that teachers in the schools with stronger partnerships had nearly two times the "communication density" as schools with weaker partnerships.[13] And drawing on longitudinal data, Matthew Kraft and colleagues concluded that student outcomes improve

*For more on collaboration, see the Winter 2013–2014 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/winter2013-2014.

when "teachers feel supported by their colleagues, work together to improve their instructional practice, [and] trust one another."[14]

Just as important, Dylan Wiliam discovered that teachers improve instruction the most when they have opportunities to apply what they learn. Also, they are most influenced by those who have pedagogical "credibility as a coach." His research showed that teachers improve their teaching when instructional feedback is provided in ways that prompt *thinking* instead of triggering emotional responses, and when careful attention is given to follow-up action and support to improve teaching practices.[15]

Ben Jensen and his research team concluded that top-performing nations drive school improvement and student achievement by creating highly structured professional development systems. In these countries, teachers have opportunities to lead their own learning.[16]

We coined the term "teacher-powered" to refer to schools collaboratively designed and run by teachers.

For example, in Japan, schools have multiple cycles of lesson study each year that are "organized and owned" by teachers themselves. As Motoko Akiba and Bryan Wilkinson noted,[17] teams of teachers in Japan spend two to three months for each cycle of lesson study, completing two cycles per year on average. While this form of professional development has allowed Japanese teachers to think deeply about content and student learning, and has given them the opportunity to learn from each other, most American teachers have not been prepared to reflect on their instruction and provide feedback on their colleagues' teaching, and are not supported in such work.*

Research shows that American educators have had more success with peer review. Like lesson study, peer review requires that educators observe their peers and provide constructive feedback. Jensen's research reflects what scholars have found regarding the positive impact of peer review processes in the United States,[18] which can lead to higher teacher retention and more sustained school improvement. John Papay and Susan Moore Johnson concluded in 2012 that when fully implemented, peer assistance and review (PAR) programs† retained more novice teachers and dismissed more underperforming ones than did comparison districts.[19] In an in-depth study of PAR programs in two California districts (San Juan and Poway), Daniel Humphrey and colleagues discovered that "peer review offers a possible solution to the lack of capacity of the current system to both provide adequate teacher support and conduct thorough performance evaluations."[20]

Tony Bryk and colleagues found that social trust among teachers, parents, and school leaders improves much of the routine work of schools and is a key resource for long-term gains in student learning. Developing trust requires "mutual dependencies" among teachers who demonstrate, through collective action, their obligations to each other (as well as other reform partners).[21] And this kind of trust helps teachers, who are often isolated from each other in their individual classrooms, "cope with difficult situations."[22‡]

Similarly, in a study of more than 1,000 teachers in 130 New York City elementary schools, Carrie Leana found that "students showed higher gains in math achievement when their teachers reported frequent conversations with their peers that centered on math, and when there was a feeling of trust or closeness among teachers." And students whose teachers were more effective and had stronger ties with their peers showed the highest gains in math achievement.[23]

These studies and more reach the same conclusion. As Kara Finnigan and Alan Daly have found, "teaching and learning are not primarily individual accomplishments but rather social endeavors that are best achieved and improved through trusting relationships and teamwork, instead of competition and a focus on individual prowess."[24]

It's almost as if researchers have now proven what educators and parents have always known. Communities have responded favorably to schools where teachers have collective autonomy to make significant decisions, welcoming the changes for students and families. A 2013 national survey conducted by Widmeyer Communications investigated the public's opinions regarding "teacher-powered schools" where "teams of teachers collaboratively decide on the curricula, the allocation of resources, and the form of leadership," and also "choose their colleagues, handle evaluation, determine the schedule, and set school-level policy," all hallmarks of a true profession. More than 85 percent of respondents believe such arrangements are "a good idea."[25]

The public recognizes that school reform, as we know it, isn't working and that disruptions to teaching and learning are not paying off.[26] The achievement gaps between different groups of students have not closed substantially. And while more students are graduating from high school, too few have the skills necessary for success in college and career.[27] Parents share educators' frustrations with the overemphasis on standardized testing.[28] And with so many teachers leaving the profession, school administrators are struggling to find qualified replacements.[29]

Teacher-Powered Schools: Collective Autonomy as a Means to Change

Teacher-powered schools offer a powerful antidote to more than two decades of top-down school reforms. The Center for Teaching Quality and Education Evolving have created the Teacher-

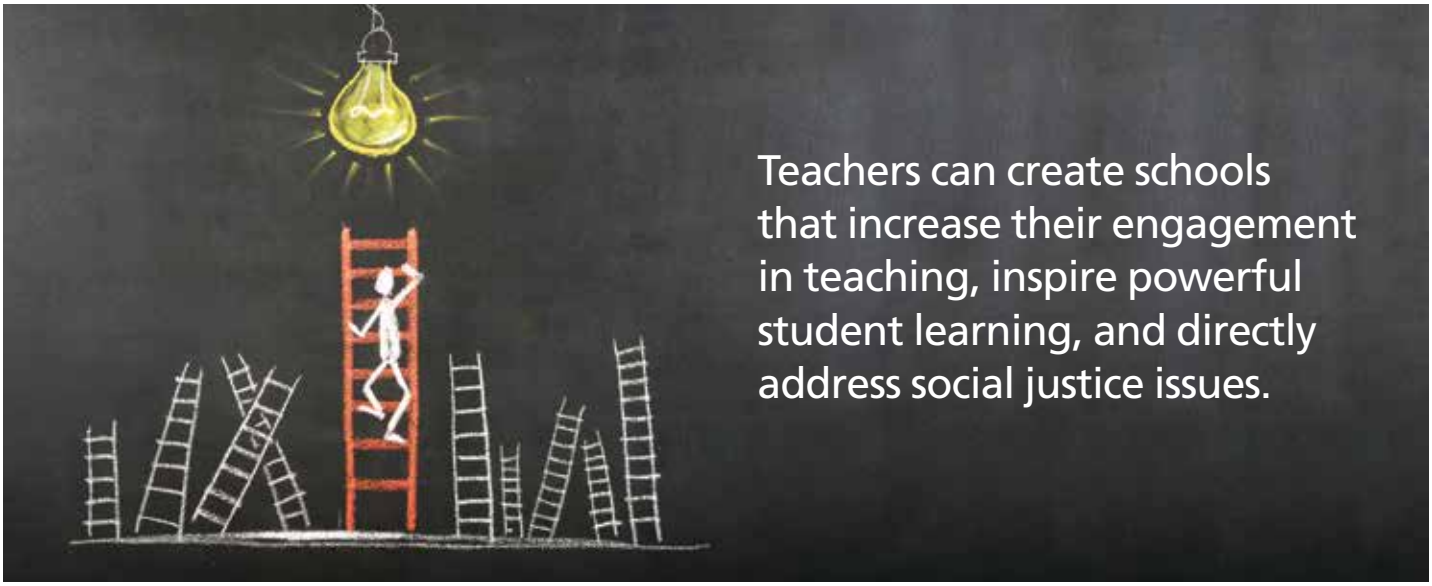
*For more on lesson study, see "Growing Together" in the Fall 2009 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/fall2009/dubin.

†For more on peer assistance and review, see "Taking the Lead" in the Fall 2008 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/fall2008/goldstein.

‡For more on how the social aspects of schools shape teaching and learning, see Kara Finnigan and Alan Daly's blog entry at www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/all-world%E2%80%99s-stage-how-churn-undermines-change.

Powered Schools Initiative to raise awareness of the opportunity for teachers to take on leadership roles and to nurture the efforts of teacher teams. More than 90 teacher-powered public schools are located in 18 states across the country, and the initiative is aware of another 30 under development. They serve students of all grade levels in urban, suburban, and rural environments, and include both district and charter schools. A growing number have been launched and supported by teacher unions, including some that are exploring taking on the role of professional guilds.

Teacher-powered schools offer compelling evidence that teachers can and do create schools that increase their engagement in teaching, inspire powerful student learning, and directly address social justice issues.[30] Many of the teacher teams that started teacher-powered schools took advantage of existing openings to seize authority, while others asked for and negotiated authority (even though it wasn't being offered outright). These teachers are explorers and pioneers in their field. They have awakened to and taken advantage of new opportunities, despite the risks, and they are willing to accept accountability for the results of their decisions. Like all pioneers, they are doing arduous work to prepare the path and infrastructure for those who have thus far been reluctant to pursue similar possibilities.



In teacher-powered schools, teams of teachers have secured autonomy to collaboratively design and lead many aspects of teaching and learning. Keeping students at the center of their decisions, they make choices about a wide array of factors, including the design of the instructional program and professional development, colleague selection, budgeting, and whether to give (and how much to count) district assessments. In many teacher-powered schools, teachers also evaluate their colleagues through peer review processes, as is often the case in other professions. While some teams running teacher-powered schools opt to have a principal or lead teacher, these administrators are chosen by the team—and view themselves as "servant leaders" who share decision-making responsibilities.[31]

In developing its online inventory of schools, the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative conducts a formal interview process to document whether the team of teachers at the school exercises full or partial decision-making authority in certain areas.[32] It then designates a school as "teacher-powered" if teachers have this authority in any area.

Through its interviews with teachers in these schools, the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative has identified at least 10 arrangements through which teachers have gone about securing autonomy to design and run teacher-powered schools, a testament to the fact that each group of teachers must determine what will work best. Some groups secure formal autonomy through site-based management arrangements with their school district, and others take advantage of state laws such as Maine's, which allows innovation schools, and other states', which authorize charter schools. Other arrangements are initiated by union locals, in partnership with school districts. AFT locals in Cincinnati (Ohio), Saint Paul and Minneapolis (Minnesota), and Rochester (New York), as well as the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, have contract language that supports teacher autonomy, such as allowing them to design and run schools.

A Look at Two Boston Schools

One AFT local with members in teacher-powered schools is the Boston Teachers Union (BTU). In Boston, teacher teams in these schools have informal autonomy, meaning their autonomy depends on the goodwill of their superintendent and their school's governing board, which has formal autonomy to make school-level decisions via a pilot school agreement. The governing board, and ultimately the superintendent, holds teachers accountable for meeting goals, but teachers can choose *how* to meet the goals in the areas in which they have autonomy. Just as important, the governing boards at these schools are partially composed of teachers.

At Mission Hill K–8 School,[§] for example, the board is made up of 21 people; approximately 30 percent are teachers, 30 percent

[§] To learn more about Mission Hill K–8 School, watch "A Year at Mission Hill," a 10-part video series available at www.missionhillschool.org/a-year-at-mission-hill.

are students, 30 percent are community members, and 10 percent are parents. Teachers in these arrangements generally feel confident that their autonomy is secure, although there have been cases where autonomy has been pulled back during leadership transitions. This sometimes causes teams to seek a more formal autonomy arrangement, so they can continue the practices they have fostered in their teacher-powered schools.

At both Mission Hill and the BTU School, the boards honor the choices of the teacher teams while providing crucial arm's-length oversight. For instance, the teacher teams establish the school vision and the instructional approach. They also allocate and manage any funds that remain after complying with the negotiated salary schedule and state and federal mandates. What's more, they select their colleagues and leaders, and have partial authority to evaluate them. They even determine other school-level policy, such as homework and disciplinary approaches (adhering to state law, of course) as well as allocating staff members and setting school and staff schedules.

Securing teachers' collective autonomy is important, but even more important is what choices they make together.

Finally, teacher teams annually decide upon their working conditions when they create their "election-to-work agreement," which specifies teachers' responsibilities and commitments to their school for the coming school year. Each team holds a serious discussion about what it will take to ensure the success of its school, such as additional work hours or attendance at meetings.

In the end, election-to-work agreements vary from one school to another and from the negotiated work agreement for traditional schools. Local affiliate leaders are careful to negotiate individual teachers' ability to opt out of the arrangement and return to their district's hiring pool. For teacher-powered schools to succeed, it's important for educators to want—not be required—to work in such schools.

Securing teachers' collective autonomy is an important part of starting a teacher-powered school, but even more important is what teacher teams do with the opportunity—what choices they make together. Research shows that teacher teams tend to make decisions that emulate those made in high-performing organizations, including accepting ownership (autonomy *and* accountability), sharing purpose, innovating, collaborating, engaging in effective leadership practices, assessing performance, and functioning as learners (as opposed to experts who believe they already know all the answers).[33] It's also true that teams are able to put evidence of what will improve teaching and learning into practice, often without much bureaucratic hassle.

To foster a culture of mutual dependency, as suggested by Tony Bryk's research, teams put in substantial effort to build and maintain a strong shared purpose (consisting of mission, vision, values, and goals) and then delegate specific decision-making authority to various individuals and committees on the team. These individuals and committees are expected to act according to the team's shared purpose and any decision-making rules or processes it has established. If the individuals and committees do not meet expectations, the team can revoke their decision-making authority.

In this context, teacher-powered teams engage in better quality collaboration, focused on more holistic measures of learning rather than just standardized test scores. These teacher-powered teams exemplify Matt Ronfeldt's findings that better quality collaboration among teachers jointly assessing student work improves academic achievement. At the BTU School, for example, the Literacy Leadership Committee and Math Leadership Committee take on the responsibility of examining schoolwide data to determine strengths and areas for growth. The committees also create the professional development needed for improvement, a practice that Ben Jensen found to drive school improvement in top-performing nations.

As third-grade teacher Taryn Snyder explains, "Last year, the Math Leadership Committee designed and led professional development around vertically aligning problem-solving strategies for word problems from kindergarten through eighth grade, ensuring a smooth transition in terms of scholars' mathematical strategies and language from grade to grade. We've done similar professional development focusing on particular math strands as well, for example, tracing the Operations and Algebraic Thinking and the Fractions standards from kindergarten through eighth grade. This gives all faculty members insight into how their math instruction creates a foundation for the more rigorous standards of the next several grades."

At Mission Hill, the team of teachers has established a peer review system that encourages instructional risks in a context of ongoing coaching and support from colleagues, as framed by Carrie Leana's and Dylan Wiliam's research. Each teacher works with a peer review team (including an administrator, a teacher selected by the whole team, and a teacher selected by the individual). In deep consultation with these peer reviewers, the teacher outlines exactly how she will seek to improve her work with her students and help the full team accomplish its learning goals. On several occasions during the year, this peer review team observes her, not only to determine the best ways to coach and mentor her but also to learn from her.

Mission Hill first- and second-grade teacher Jenerra Williams, who is also a lead teacher, says, "The purpose of our system is for teachers to identify places in their practice where they want to improve. Their peers have conversations with them, come in to observe, look at student work, and give feedback. We feel that evaluation should be driven by an authentic need that the teacher has, and they should be evaluated by people who are closest to the children and the teaching of the school—which is other teachers."

As teachers' professional experiences become more authentic, they can better focus their school design choices on students'

needs. Teachers at Mission Hill choose three thematic units for each school year, with each theme giving students the opportunity to learn multiple school subjects. The teachers ask individual students to choose from a set of activities selected to go with each theme. When physical science is the theme of focus for the morning, for example, students can choose from spin art, making pancakes, building and testing boats or bridges, or observing bee flight from a hive in Williams's classroom.

Mission Hill teachers have decided that students will stay with the same teacher for two years, which improves their ability to monitor student progress as well as provide necessary accommodations for varying skill levels (and student mobility). The goal is that after four years and 12 themes, Mission Hill students will have learned what they need to meet all the state and district standards for the four corresponding grade levels. Teachers set individual learning goals with each student and monitor progress with portfolio assessments and public demonstrations of learning.

Teachers can go public with their desire to design and run schools, and continue developing their skills in leading school reform, by using online resources created by the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative. At the same time, principals can shift their efforts from serving as instructional leaders to developing teacher leaders and providing opportunities for them to organize schools in ways that maximize the spread of effective practices.

Additionally, union leaders can lead the negotiation of autonomy agreements for teacher-powered schools and can assist members in learning how to collaboratively transform curricula, assessments, schedules, and budgets. District administrators can work with teachers unions to form agreements that encourage teacher-powered schools, and they can rethink the use of professional development dollars to support teachers in learning how to improve schools from within the system, in partnership with parents and community leaders. And the U.S. Department of Education, with a redesigned approach to school improvement, can provide incentives for teachers and unions to create and support a fund for the creation of teacher-powered schools.

The era of top-down school reform has reached a turning point and is being replaced with a focus on finding new and more-effective models of student learning. Who better than teachers—through schools powered by their teaching expertise and knowledge of students—to show us the way forward? □

Endnotes

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(Continued on page 44)

AFT Teacher Leaders Program

Since the 2011–2012 school year, the AFT Teacher Leaders Program has brought together and coached cohorts of teachers to take active leadership roles in their individual schools, school districts, local unions, and local communities. As teacher leaders, these educators have served as catalysts to build the profession and strengthen not just the union but also its connection to the community, in order to generate support for and better understanding of public schools.

Participating teachers have developed skills in several important leadership areas. Those include building a collaborative culture; accessing, using, and presenting relevant research that connects with policy and practice; becoming advocates for teachers, students, and their families, and for public education; and understanding policy issues and making recommendations to and through their unions.

Through this program, teacher leaders have learned how to strengthen relationships with their colleagues and establish relationships with policymakers and community leaders. They have also developed an informed teacher voice, enabling them to participate in both the local and national dialogue on education, as well as to spread the word about the positive and powerful role of public schools and teacher unions.

Local presidents interested in participating need to submit an application. Once accepted into the program, the local president must select a member of the local to become a program facilitator, and both the president and the facilitator must attend a two-day orientation at the AFT national headquarters. Each facilitator is trained to lead a cohort of approximately 15 classroom teachers, called "teacher leaders," who meet from September to May, one Saturday each month for a full day. To become a teacher leader, classroom teachers must submit an application to their local union.

Once a local union has selected its cohort of teacher leaders, the AFT provides plenty of resources. These include technical assistance and curricular materials focusing on education policy, stipends for participating teachers and facilitators, ongoing support, and access to a nationwide online community of teacher leaders from all locals currently engaged in this work.

More than 550 classroom teachers and a total of 17 locals have participated since the program's inception.

–AFT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT

For more on the AFT Teacher Leaders Program, read the brochure at **www.aft.org/position/teacher-leadership** or contact Marjorie Brown in the AFT educational issues department at **mbrown@aft.org**.

True Teaching Expertise

The Weaving Together of Theory and Practice

By Bryan Mascio

How do we strengthen the teaching profession? This question weighs on many educators, researchers, politicians, and parents. Everyone seems to have his or her own solutions to offer. The public discourse around teaching often feels very negative; it doesn't clearly define teaching expertise, but it does reflect a very clear belief that many of us teachers just don't have it. I'm not sure where this narrative of incompetence comes from, but I do know that we can't fight it by simply saying, "No, we're not."

Bryan Mascio taught for 12 years in New Hampshire, where he primarily worked with public school students who had been unsuccessful in traditional school settings. He is currently a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he researches the cognitive aspects of teaching and works with schools to support teacher and student relationships. Parts of this article appeared in Mascio's blog entry "Who Are (and Should Be) the Teaching Experts?" for the Albert Shanker Institute on November 19, 2015, available at www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/who-are-and-should-be-teaching-experts.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LIZA FLORES

Many educators agree that to improve the profession, classroom teachers must be consulted and involved. To that end, we need to show those outside the classroom what teaching expertise looks like and where it resides: with actual classroom teachers.

When I hear respected public figures call for a focus on the "nuts and bolts" of teaching—in contrast to an emphasis on educational philosophy and theories of development—I fear what the repercussions might be. This recommendation is a common message, promoted both by those in academic research and by fast-tracked teacher preparation programs. It implicitly sees academics and researchers as the primary generators and holders of expertise, and asks them to guide teachers and offer them insights. By mistaking—and at times even privileging—certain kinds of expertise, this view may inadvertently lay a path toward regarding teachers as technicians rather than the true professionals they are.

Uniting Research and Practice

In medicine, the fields of biochemistry, microbiology, genetics, and bioengineering, to name a few, contribute invaluable research

used by doctors and hospitals to improve patient care. Researchers in these sciences are respected for their expertise and typically have far greater content knowledge than the average physician, but neither society nor the medical field confuses the role of medical researcher with that of doctor.

Research results in knowledge of average effects, common side effects, and how diseases typically present. Doctors use that knowledge and combine it with an understanding of clinical practice, the complex systems involved with human health, and details of their individual patient's past and present health to create a clinical expertise. This is what makes them medical experts.

Doctors don't ignore the research; they are keenly aware of what symptoms suggest pneumonia, for instance, and which antibiotics are most effective to treat it. But doctors also know that other illnesses could cause many similar symptoms; certain facts about an individual may make other illnesses more likely, so knowing an individual's medical history is just as important. And if you are allergic to an antibiotic, it doesn't matter how "effective" it is. Doctors don't treat the *average*, the *common*, or the *typical* patient—they treat *you*, and that's exactly what you want and expect them to do.

In education, psychologists, neuroscientists, economists, and sociologists are among the important contributors to our knowledge of teaching and learning, and their research has been invaluable to those of us in the classroom. It has provided numerous insights, including an understanding of how children grow and develop, how brains behave differently under different conditions, and the many facets of working memory.* It has also shown how intelligence, once thought to be genetically determined and immutable, can be increased by interventions, such as high-quality preschool† and rigorous and supportive teaching.‡

However, like medical-related research, these studies give us statistical averages of how a typical student learns, average responses to highly controlled laboratory tests, and the likely effect of a particular intervention within a limited sample of students. And yet, like medical research, educational research requires interpretation to move from statistical averages to helping individual students.

Teaching expertise makes good use of research by integrating it with practitioner insights, the complex systems involved in human development, and a deep understanding of our individual students' needs and context. At a time when we are espousing commitment to every child, this kind of expertise is exactly what's needed.

Back in the late 1990s, when I was first taking classes to become a teacher, a professor at the University of New Hampshire said something that has become a core part of my teaching philosophy. He told us that when a student gets something wrong, our first job is not to give him the correct answer; it is to understand why he thought his answer was correct.§ This is not to say that the student doesn't need to eventually get the right answer; it means that *teaching* him is far more complex than just relaying information.

This professor explained that, for the most part, students don't give random or purposefully incorrect answers (we also talked about the times when they do—a whole different topic). An incorrect answer represents current understanding, and that's the starting point from which a student must be taught.

The example he commonly gave is that when a student gets "1+1" wrong, it makes a big difference whether she answered "11" versus "4." If the student said 1+1=11, then we know what mistake she is making; she believes that addition is literally putting the two numbers together. I can confirm this with my student by asking her what "3+5" is and seeing if she answers "35." If this is the case, having her simply drill her math facts won't actually solve this problem. It would simply be treating the symptom rather than the underlying cause. What I need to do is follow up with a very fundamental lesson about the nature of addition—it will probably involve manipulatives and counting. In contrast, if the student said that 1+1=4, then she clearly doesn't have that same misunderstanding. I don't know what that misunderstanding is—I would need to ask her more questions to figure that out—but the lesson I would then follow up with is bound to be different.

Like medical research, educational research requires interpretation to move from statistical averages to helping individual students.

Ultimately, what I was being equipped to do was expertly analyze my student in order to determine the proper response. This is, at its core, the same as a doctor diagnosing a patient before determining the proper treatment.

This critical approach is not only important when a student is struggling; it also allows us to offer support when he is thinking outside the box. When I taught biology, I clearly remember one tenth-grade student, Daryl, who had been struggling in all of his classes. After a unit on parts of the cell, I had given students more than a week to create their own models of either plant or animal cells.

*For more on working memory and the science behind how students learn, see Daniel T. Willingham's articles for *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/author-index#quicktabs-authors=4.

†For more on the value of early childhood education, see "The Economics of Inequality" in the Spring 2011 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2011/heckman.

‡For more on how IQ is not genetically determined or immutable, see "Schooling Makes You Smarter" in the Spring 2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2013/nisbett.

§For more on the importance of knowing common student misconceptions, see "Understanding Misconceptions" in the Spring 2016 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2016/sadler-and-sonnert.

I hoped that this assignment would appeal to Daryl, who was skilled at and enjoyed working with his hands. Different students presented cells they had made out of clay and papier-mâché and even candies. When it was Daryl's turn to present, he rummaged around in his backpack and pulled out a model car he had built. Nothing on the car indicated that anything represented parts of a cell. The students laughed, he shrugged, and it would have been very easy to assume that he hadn't really done the project.

When I asked Daryl how this represented a cell, his response of rolling the car across his desk was unconvincing. Rather than reprimand him, I asked him some additional questions: "What represents the mitochondria?" "Why?" "How is that different than the chloroplasts?" "Can you tell me more about that?" "Would it be different if … ?"

If they are empowered to contribute to it, teachers can be much more than consumers of research.

With each of my questions, Daryl compared aspects of the combustion engine to a plant cell. Admittedly, my ignorance of mechanics meant that I had to ask even more questions, but revealing his depth of knowledge about mechanics as well as his understanding of cells was well worth it.

Daryl's answers would never have matched those on a prescribed curriculum, and I would have never been able to ascertain his learning without a complex understanding of how thinking develops, as well as a deep understanding of Daryl and a strong relationship with him. Revealing his understanding not only was beneficial for Daryl's grade, but also validated for him that what he learned and contributed to the class was in fact valuable.

Strengthening Teacher Preparation

The ability to truly determine what a student does and does not understand, and then plot a path forward, is central to teaching expertise. As educators, we should be working toward the goal of every classroom teacher having this kind of expertise. That doesn't mean teachers must be experts before they set foot in the classroom—no profession achieves that in its preparation. It does mean that we need to create preparation that leads toward expertise and ensure that new-teacher programs help develop it.

Just as important, we must reject the implicit assumption that teaching expertise is somehow less valuable than research conducted by professionals outside the classroom. As educators, we must use the knowledge from researchers just as doctors apply new medicines and procedures created by companies and institutions: they make decisions based on their own expertise and discretion.

This brings us to the issue of teacher preparation.* In recent years, on-the-job training and fast-tracked preparation have been erroneously heralded as superior to university-based teacher preparation programs.

Yes, theory-based courses at universities may too commonly be taught in ways that do not help teachers once they enter the classroom and often fail to adequately prepare them with practical strategies to, for example, manage student behavior. But it is shortsighted to do away with such programs entirely in exchange for technical training. Such a move once again misunderstands the nature of teaching expertise; it only prepares teachers to *do* what other experts have determined. The best college teacher-preparation programs connect content knowledge with pedagogical skills and the foundational knowledge that empowers classroom teachers to make the complex decisions that good teaching requires.

Granted, I would never want to go to a doctor who doesn't know how to wrap a bandage or give an injection. But I would even less want to go to one who has primarily been trained in the nuts and bolts of medicine but relies on WebMD to make decisions.

When I was working with Daryl, I relied on my knowledge of adolescent development, motivation theory, pedagogical content knowledge for science, and cell biology itself. True teaching expertise is about applying different types of knowledge to the situation and student in front of you.

Is it possible to provide all future teachers with preparation that joins theoretical knowledge and practical skills? Yes. Around the world, others are doing exactly that. Successful education

*For more on teacher preparation, see the AFT's 2012 report *Raising the Bar*, available at www.aft.org/sites/default/files/news/raisingthebar2013.pdf. For more on the history of teacher education, see "Bridging the 'Widest Street in the World'" in the Summer 2011 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/summer2011/mirel.

systems such as Finland, Singapore, and Australia require that their teachers master and unite these realms. For example, the Melbourne Graduate School of Education in Australia, regarded as an international leader in teacher preparation, prepares its graduates for clinical teaching, interweaving theory and practice.[†] This program places its students in real classrooms from day one, but makes no compromises in learning fundamental and theoretical knowledge. Student teachers explicitly identify the connection between what happens in their fieldwork with what they are learning at the university. The result is graduates who approach teaching and learning the way doctors approach health and medicine—as true and clinical experts.

Ensuring that teacher preparation programs combine theory and practice is no quick fix, but it is far better and far more comprehensive than what many fast-tracked programs currently offer. Such programs initially attract ambitious and high-achieving individuals, the very same population that is ultimately dissatisfied with a job that requires so little training and relies on only a handful of techniques.

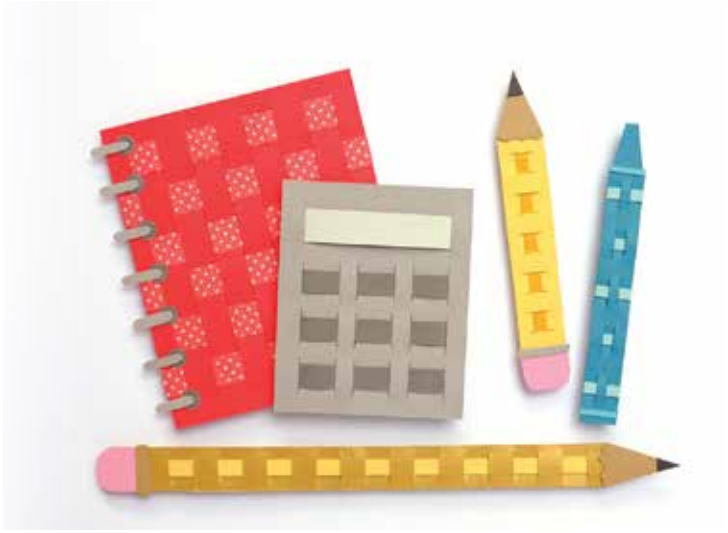
In contrast, by insisting that teachers complete university-based trainings focused on theory and practice, we can rightfully elevate the profession beyond the technical and mechanical. More importantly, teachers who have this clinical expertise will both be able to understand their students' needs and become genuine leaders in their field.

We need not only look abroad to see the value in this approach. I currently work alongside teachers in New Hampshire who are using their teaching expertise to create meaningful student assessments. They have been part of an initiative (the Performance Assessment of Competency Education, or PACE) that is creating common performance assessments designed to assess and support deeper learning by being integrated into their day-to-day classroom practices.[‡] For example, some of their students are building solar ovens instead of taking bubble tests in order to demonstrate their mastery of science content and skills. These research-based assessments were developed by teachers, piloted by teachers, and assessed by teachers.

Creating such assessments requires tremendous theoretical knowledge of science concepts, knowledge of cognitive development, and knowledge about designing assessments that are psychometrically valid and reliable. But it also requires clinical expertise on what works in a classroom to nurture individual student learning. Approaching assessment in this way does not work if pedagogical expertise and subject-matter expertise are viewed as separate and apart; true teaching expertise encompasses both.

Expert teachers can also help change the relationship between research and practice. If they are empowered to contribute to it, teachers can be much more than consumers of research. The best educators analyze their students' understanding, draw on their various types of knowledge to determine a path forward, and carefully examine the results. If many teachers do this in a coordinated and collaborative way, and involve researchers from local colleges and universities, then we can revolutionize both educational research and teaching. After all, research hospitals have become models of cutting-edge medical practice by having doctors partner with researchers in their work.

In 2012, when I made the difficult decision to leave my classroom to begin a doctoral program in education, it was with the intention of becoming part of this change. Being a classroom teacher was the most intellectually challenging and rewarding job I will ever have, and my feeling of loss is only balanced by a hope that I can contribute in a new way. My goal is to work in teacher preparation so that I can help equip future teachers to draw on theory and research in teaching their students. I also hope to support teachers doing research in those schools where teaching interns are placed. Ultimately, I hope my work will help build valuable research knowledge and also encourage pre-service teachers to view rigorous analysis as central to the profession.



The vast number of people who call for reexamining teachers' knowledge and revamping teacher preparation are reacting to real concerns. It is understandable that those who believe the issue is too many low-achieving and ill-informed educators want teachers to gain more advanced knowledge or at least follow the direction of experts who already possess it. And it is understandable that those who believe that teacher preparation focuses too much on philosophy and theory want to just give teachers the nuts and bolts of managing classrooms and writing lesson plans. But reacting to an issue is different than thinking through a real solution.

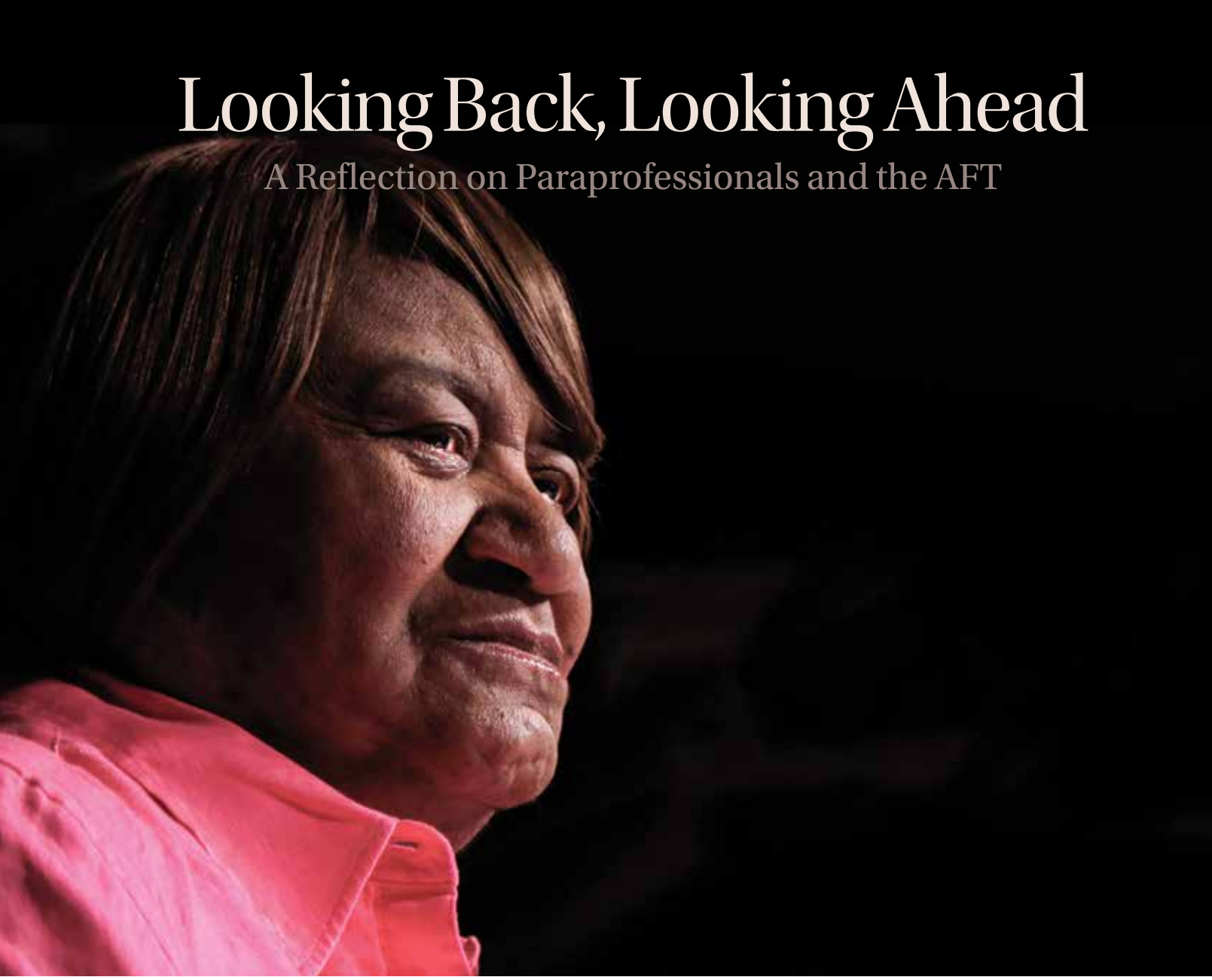
This false dichotomy of theoretical knowledge versus practical skills leaves us with only bad choices. Other professions have rejected it, and we should too. We should not be asking educators to become either theorists or technicians. The future of all of our students—but especially our most vulnerable students—hinges on their access to true teaching expertise. So how do we strengthen the teaching profession? By preparing teachers with clinical expertise that weaves together theory and practice and empowers them to make the best professional decisions possible for their individual students. ☐

[†]For more on the Melbourne Graduate School of Education's clinical teaching program, visit http://education.unimelb.edu.au/about_us/clinical_teaching.

[‡]For more on performance-based assessment, see "Putting the Focus on Student Engagement" in the Spring 2016 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2016/barlowe-and-cook.

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

A Reflection on Paraprofessionals and the AFT



By Lorretta Johnson

Almost 50 years have passed since the day that first sparked my union activism, but I remember it clearly. It was 1966, and I was a teacher's assistant—a paraprofessional—at Grove Park Elementary School in Baltimore, Maryland.

Previously, I had been a volunteer in the school's library. Because my own children were attending the school, I wanted to help out. I enjoyed the work, so the principal recommended that I become a paraprofessional. The job seemed like a good fit, and I decided to pursue it since it would allow me to be home in time to pick up my children from school.

Lorretta Johnson is the secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Teachers. From 2008 to 2011, she was the AFT's executive vice president. Previously, she was an AFT vice president for 30 years and the president of the Baltimore Teachers Union's paraprofessional chapter for 35 years. A former president of AFT-Maryland, she chaired the AFT Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel program and policy council from 1979 to 2011.

I was assigned to Liberty Elementary School, which enrolled many low-income students. I started out splitting my time between kindergarten and first-grade classrooms.

The paraprofessionals in our school worked well with teachers and the principal, so I didn't really see a need for a union at first.

That changed thanks to something as mundane as the weather. Right after I started at Liberty, there was a blizzard. School district officials notified our school around 11 a.m. that schools were closing. Since the paraprofessionals were already supervising the students at that point because it was lunchtime, our school's administrators sent the teachers home, and we paraprofessionals were left to dismiss the kids.

Because of the weather, parents were late picking up their children, and we ended up staying at school throughout the afternoon. The last student didn't leave until 4 p.m., which meant that my colleagues and I didn't leave until after that—and then we had to fight the blizzard to get home. Some people had to take a bus; I was driving, which was miserable, and I had two or three colleagues with me who needed to be dropped off. I made it home close to 8 p.m.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-TREASURER

Our principal promised we would be paid for the extra time. He did try to make that happen, but the truth is we were never paid. School district officials justified their decision by saying that since schools were officially closed at 11 a.m. that day, we couldn't get paid for work beyond that time.

For me, that was a slap in the face to working people who were doing their job to keep children safe and in school. The district's position made me so angry that I turned to the union. When I tell that story now, I like to say that school officials in Baltimore didn't know what they set loose at the time, but I think they learned over the next 50 years.

Affiliating with the Baltimore Teachers Union

After the blizzard, my colleagues and I started talking with representatives from the Baltimore Teachers Union (BTU), an AFT affiliate. The union's representatives made it clear they wanted us paraprofessionals to join and to have full voting rights, whereas we didn't feel as welcome with the National Education Association (NEA) affiliate, which only seemed to want paraprofessional members with high school diplomas.

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (the federal education law) created a new category of paraprofessionals called children's aides. Aides were not required to have a high school diploma and didn't have to take a test to become a paraprofessional. The NEA saw itself as a professional organization and didn't want the federally funded children's aides without diplomas to be part of its membership.

Well, my colleagues and I didn't want to be separated like that. We wanted everyone—paraprofessionals (including children's aides) and all school-related personnel (including parent liaison workers, bus drivers, school secretaries, and custodial staff members)—to be together in one unit. We also, of course, wanted the right to vote for officers. So we signed cards and joined the BTU. I began to serve as the spokesperson for the paraprofessionals and school-related personnel (PSRPs) at Liberty. I was already our advocate, but my role became more official when we all joined the union.

One of the first things I did after we joined the BTU was to help mend the split between federal children's aides and nonfederal teachers' assistants. At union meetings, the teachers' assistants would sit on one side of the room and the children's aides would sit on the other. It was my job to convince everyone that we all shared the same struggles. I also reminded them that no group was better than the other and that we needed to speak as one voice.

We negotiated our first contract in September 1970. We got a nickel raise and a 10-step grievance procedure, which was more important to me than the raise because, for the first time, paraprofessionals had a voice at work. We couldn't just be terminated by a principal and that was the end of it. Now we had the right to due process, to challenge the action, and to have our voices heard.

A few years later, we had a change in our union constitution, which set up two chapters: one for teachers and one for paraprofessionals. The teachers voted for their president, and we paraprofessionals voted for ours. That's how I ended up as copresident of the BTU, a position I held for 35 years, before becoming president of AFT-Maryland for 17 years.

In 1975, the teachers union was punished because of a strike and could no longer represent teachers. Both the NEA and the BTU lost representation rights. So I was left at the bargaining table to be the negotiator for the paraprofessionals. AFT organizers Ann Lepsi, Chuck Richards, and Bob Bates mentored me, and I was grateful for their help.

I remember the first bargaining session I attended. The labor commissioner at that time was the chief negotiator for the school board. He looked at my proposals and called them ludicrous. So I slammed my book shut and walked out on him. A union official said to me, "You just walked out of a negotiation! How are you going to get back in?"

Thanks to one-on-one time or small-group work with a paraprofessional, students can receive the ongoing support they need.

I said, "Well, first I'm going to find out what that word 'ludicrous' means. And then I'll find a way to get back in."

I called the mayor and said, "Your people are disrespecting me, but I am the chief negotiator for the union, whether they want to deal with a paraprofessional or not." The city labor commissioner called me back within an hour, and we returned to the bargaining table.

This experience taught me to demand respect. When you sit across that table, management must see you as an equal, not some employee it can take advantage of. And if management doesn't see you as an equal, you don't have a chance of getting anything.

The toughest contract I negotiated for paraprofessionals was in 1974, when paraprofessionals were placed on a salary schedule and training became a built-in expectation, just as it was for teachers. Traditionally, paraprofessionals had been treated like city workers and had only narrow step categories like "entry level" and "experienced." I believed that paraprofessionals needed training. Teachers would only want us if we could help them; our coming into the classroom with no training meant the classroom teacher had to train us. As a result, a lot of teachers would say, "Well, I don't want a para. That's just more work for me." So we began to push the system to train paras *before they got to teachers' classrooms*. The salary scale set up certain marks—if you got so many credits, you moved up—the same way the salary scale for teachers worked.

The toughest contract I helped negotiate for teachers was in 2010. It created four career pathways—standard, professional, model, and lead—and did away with separate salary schedules for

Left, Lorretta Johnson at the start of her career. Above, Johnson with Albert Shanker, then AFT president.

My first experience negotiating a contract taught me to demand respect. When you sit across that table, management must see you as an equal.

different degrees (e.g., bachelor's degree, master's degree, master's degree plus 30 years, PhD). Now teachers in Baltimore are paid according to salary intervals based on "achievement units" or credits earned toward professional development. The idea is that educators should always be continuing to improve and learn.

We didn't do a good job of selling the teachers' contract the first time around, and it was rejected by the members. But we went back to the drawing board with the district; we listened to teachers and changed some things and then did a better job of explaining why the contract would work for them. The next time around, it passed overwhelmingly.

The career pathways and achievement units were significant accomplishments of the contract for 2010–2013, and the subsequent (and current) contract for 2013–2016 reaffirmed them.

Today, teachers in Baltimore with five years of service can earn $59,000 to $60,000 a year, and those who choose to go through the career pathway as model and lead teachers can earn as much as $90,000 to $100,000 a year. So teachers no longer need to wait 30 years to earn the maximum salary.

Supporting Students and Teachers

In the early 1960s, a professor in Michigan coined the term "paraprofessional," which means "alongside a professional." We welcomed the word. It was degrading how we were often called aides and maids; many people believed anybody walking in from the street could be a paraprofessional. We weren't treated with the same dignity and respect as paralegals and paramedics, who also work alongside professionals.

In some schools, principals made paraprofessionals do grocery shopping and run other errands for them that had nothing to do with education. That changed when we got a contract, which became the paraprofessionals' bible. When principals asked them to do things outside of their job descriptions, paraprofessionals showed them the contract. The paraprofessional's job is to support student learning.

When a teacher works with another adult who is trained to help students who need extra attention, they make a wonderful team. Thanks to one-on-one time or small-group work with a paraprofessional, students can receive the ongoing support they need to be successful.

Paraprofessionals play a critical role in helping all students and preventing them from falling behind. I remember how every Friday, one teacher I worked with would identify a student who didn't grasp the week's lessons, and she would create a plan for me to implement with that student to review material he or she didn't quite understand. The best teachers knew how to schedule it so that the student didn't miss instruction in core subjects and fall further behind.

Because of their relationships with students, paraprofessionals can help identify students' needs. For example, one of the first students I helped was a kindergartner who would just sit in class without contributing and often seemed on the verge of tears. I asked a teacher to let me work with him, and I discovered that he had problems hearing and that his mother was illiterate and a prostitute. Because she couldn't read, she didn't want her son to read either. Every paper he took home from school, she tore up. Getting a star on his paper was just like giving him a whipping.

We found ways to reach him. I sent him to the medical center where he got his hearing straightened out. He started absorbing everything and learning quickly. And I helped his mother enroll in a GED program where she would also learn to read. In later grades, the boy excelled, and eventually he graduated from high school.

In addition to supporting students academically, paraprofessionals also help with classroom management, since they have specific training in it. Often, principals would intentionally pair a strong paraprofessional with a new teacher, to help her manage the class.

I believe that most paraprofessionals who decide to go back to school to become teachers become excellent ones because they've already mastered the biggest challenge for many new teachers: classroom management. Also, paraprofessionals have hands-on experience in working with children, which helps prepare them to become classroom teachers.

However, not all paraprofessionals want to become teachers, and that's OK. I know some who returned to school to earn their education degree, passed everything, and would have been strong teachers, but they enjoyed their work as paraprofessionals and only wanted to prove to themselves that they could further their education.

Paraprofessionals and the Labor Movement

When I look back on my time organizing paraprofessionals, I remember how hard it was asking people who made only $2.25 an hour to pay dues. But they paid dues willingly. That's because they wanted a voice and an identity. They wanted to be part of the faculty and to be treated with dignity and respect. They wanted to be recognized as the professionals they were. Once they were unionized, they became loyal union members.

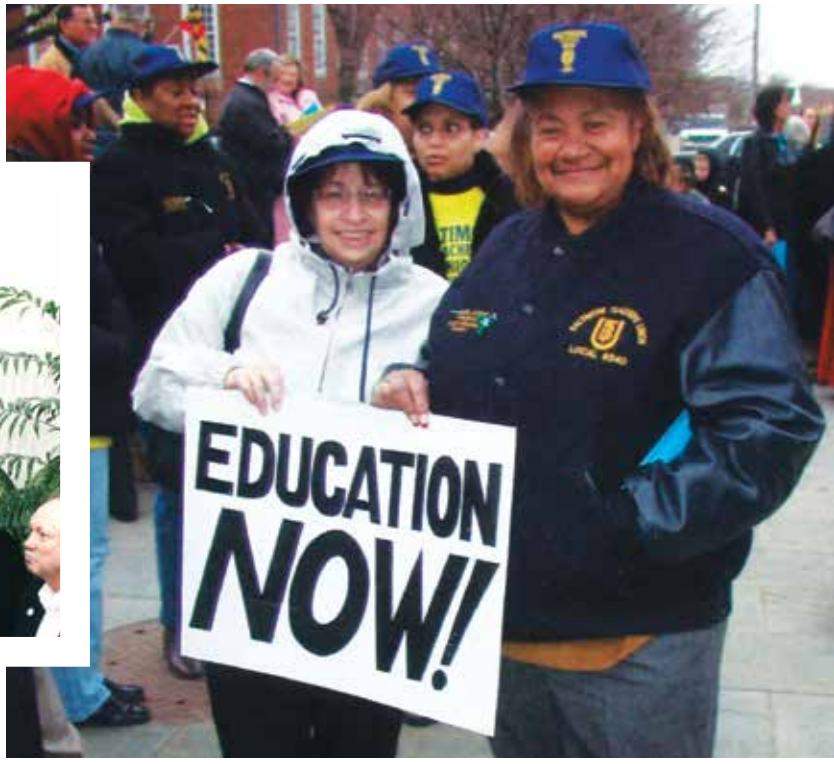
Many paraprofessionals are active union members because they know what the union has done for them. The labor movement—and more specifically the AFT—shaped us into a profession. It helped the public understand who we are and what we do. Ultimately, the union made a positive difference in the lives of many people, including people like single mothers, who raised families and became productive citizens.

One of the differences I think we made as a union was in starting an important conversation about how paraprofessionals are professionals. And just like professionals in other fields, they should have education, training, and certification. Specifically, from the time we started organizing paraprofessionals, the AFT saw a need to define their roles and responsibilities, set criteria for basic skills required for entry into the profession, specify appropriate pre- and in-service training, and identify advanced skills for permanent certification.

An opportunity presented itself in 1979, when then-AFT President Al Shanker asked me to represent the AFT on the National Task Force on Paraprofessional Certification, whose purpose was to establish criteria for employment and training of paraprofessionals. Al had wanted to support some type of certification on a state-by-state basis for paraprofessionals because, at the time, a hodgepodge of standards across the country gave the impression that anyone could do this job. We wanted to ensure that the people who worked alongside teachers were qualified and certified.

The task force focused on paraprofessionals working with special needs students, but I sought to expand this focus to *all* paraprofessionals. The work of this task force led to a published report and the development of a training module, which was tested in a couple of states. And that pilot went very well. But in the end, the task force stuck to its focus on certification of special education paraprofessionals, even though members agreed that all paraprofessionals should be certified. That said, the movement to establish paraprofessional standards lasted for more than 30 years, until the federal education law known as No Child Left Behind finally set paraprofessional qualification requirements for all instructional paraprofessionals (and such certification is still required today under the Every Student Succeeds Act).

At the same time the AFT was first raising the issue of standards for paraprofessionals, we as a union were also trying to organize them. To that end, in 1974, Al began sending me across



Above, Johnson traveling abroad with AFT leaders, including former AFT Presidents Sandra Feldman and Edward J. McElroy, and current AFT President Randi Weingarten. Right, Johnson at a BTU rally.

As AFT secretary-treasurer, Johnson continues to visit schools and engage with students and educators.

the country on organizing trips. I traveled to almost every state, bringing in chapters and working with locals to include their support personnel. All our hard work paid off. Today, the AFT represents more than 370,000 PSRPs.

My travels back then also included trips abroad. The AFT believed, and still believes, that its leaders should learn more about the international labor movement. The first time I ever left the country was in 1974. I was part of an AFL-CIO delegation of 13 young trade unionists under 40 who traveled to Germany.

Visiting countries such as Italy, Israel, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Taiwan, among others, allowed me to hear trade unionists' stories firsthand. When you travel and you talk to people living in a particular country, you gain a whole different perspective from what you read in news accounts or see on television.

In traveling abroad, I have come to realize that in the United States, we take many things for granted that other people are still fighting for. These trips have helped me understand what's important in life. I'm a black woman, and I've had tough times, but not as tough as some of the things I have seen overseas. My experiences abroad made me grateful for the opportunities I had to fight for working people in this country. Still, I've had to know when to pick my battles. I never battle for the sake of battling, because if you do, you're not going to win anything.

When I was organizing paraprofessionals across the country and learning about the labor movement abroad, I never dreamed I would one day become an AFT officer. In 2008, Randi Weingarten, who was then the president of the United Federation of Teachers and running for president of the AFT, asked me to run as executive vice president.

I didn't immediately say yes. I felt conflicted. My husband (a former plumber and union member) had just passed away. I was getting older, and I was unsure how long I would want to be in such an important position. But a rank-and-file member—a paraprofessional, in fact—told me, "Lorretta, you owe it to the PSRPs. They need to see that you can be in a teacher organization and rise to become the executive vice president." That inspired me to make the move.

In my time as an AFT officer, one of the accomplishments I am most proud of is chairing the AFT's Racial Equity Task Force, which last year published the report "Reclaiming the Promise of Racial Equity in Education, Economics and Our Criminal Justice System." I didn't know what to expect, but I did know we had to have that difficult conversation in our union. The AFT staff members who helped me put together the task force did a terrific job. And I'd like to think that report will be my legacy.

To keep the AFT strong, we must make sure the next generation knows our history.

As the AFT celebrates its 100th anniversary this year, I am thankful for all that the labor movement has done for me. It has been my family, and it has made me a better person. My husband supported my work because he and Al Shanker saw something in me that I didn't see in myself.

The AFT has helped not just me but millions of people in the workplace obtain both job security and the dignity that comes from work. But the AFT can't do it alone. That's why for 40 years I've been actively involved in the AFL-CIO. Today, I'm a member of its executive council and serve on the board of the Metropolitan Baltimore Council. I'm also a trustee for the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. You can't be a part of the AFT and not work in labor.

To keep the AFT strong, we must make sure the next generation of classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, and school-related personnel knows our history. I am a union leader, but union leaders alone cannot make a union strong. The engagement of members is what builds a strong union. That's why AFT President Randi Weingarten's push for member engagement is vital to the union's future. A union works because of its *members*. When we forget that, we fail.

When we engage our members, and let them know what we're doing and how they can help, we can truly make a difference in the lives of students, their families, and working people everywhere. When we engage our members and our members engage with us, we're successful. That kind of engagement has kept our union strong for the last 100 years and will ensure its power for 100 more. ☐

One Paraprofessional Makes a Difference

A Q&A with Nachelly Peña

For the last four years, paraprofessional Nachelly Peña has worked with English language learners (ELLs) in Volusia County, Florida. A native Spanish speaker with a bachelor's degree in psychology from the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, Peña moved to Florida in 2011 in search of career opportunities. At the suggestion of a friend, she decided to use her bilingual ability to help students and families in the public school system. Below, she discusses her specific job responsibilities, what she finds rewarding about her career, and the challenges that she and other paraprofessionals face in their work.

–EDITORS

Editors: As a paraprofessional, what does your work entail?

Nachelly Peña: I work with ELLs from kindergarten through fifth grade at Citrus Grove Elementary School in DeLand, Florida. I help them with math, social studies, and science. I basically give them the same lesson the teacher is giving them, but I translate the lesson for them. Citrus Grove enrolls 910 students, making it the largest elementary school in Volusia County Schools.

At Citrus Grove, the class size is around 30 students. The greatest number of ELLs I've ever worked with in a single classroom is 10. Because I typically don't spend more than an hour in each classroom, I must work quickly to see which students are struggling and need my help the most.

The majority of my students come from Mexico and from low-income families. Academically, they are below grade level. It's my job to help them catch up and reach their full potential. Citrus Grove does offer trainings so paraprofessionals can support students, but nothing prepares you like being in the classroom and actually working. The person I have learned the most from is Sandra Garcia, a former ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] teacher here, who retired last year after 44 years. She was an expert I respected and trusted. I could ask her any question I had about how to better serve my students. She was actually my ESOL teacher when my family and I lived here before moving back to Puerto Rico. She taught me when I was in third grade at another Volusia County school, Discovery Elementary School in Deltona, Florida.

Four other paraprofessionals work at Citrus Grove, but I'm the only one who works with ELLs. While the majority of these students speak Spanish, others come from Bangladesh and countries in Southeast Asia. I wish I had received more training in how to work with students whose languages I don't speak. I try my best, and I use all the strategies I've been taught, but I still feel like there's a gap when I work with students who speak a language other than Spanish at home.

Since I was an ELL student, I know what it feels like to struggle with English. As a result, my own experiences help me relate to my students. In working with them, one of my goals is to make them feel like they're not alone, that there's someone who cares about them, and to let them know I'm their advocate. My main goal is to help them understand the material being taught and not feel like they're falling behind because of their language situation. To that end, I differentiate the lesson and teach it in a way they can understand it.

I currently work with seven teachers in various grades. We communicate well with each other, and we get along great. They tell me what content students are struggling with, what assignments they haven't finished, and where they need help.

I often translate documents into Spanish, such as homework teachers assign or any information they want to send home. I also sometimes call Spanish-speaking parents to remind them of upcoming field trips.

Editors: What do you find rewarding about your job?

Peña: Making a family feel like they're heard, making them feel comfortable. Because my mom doesn't speak English, I know how important it is to have someone translate for you, someone you can trust, and someone who translates things correctly. So the relationship I have with the families and the students is very rewarding to me.

Parents confide in me. They tell me how they came to the United States and how hard they work so their children can go to school.

I have so many stories of students who I've helped these last few years. One in particular is now in fifth grade. He has a very rough home life. When I noticed he was struggling to concentrate and behave in class, I arranged for him to receive counseling here at school. I've even visited him at home over the summer to see how he's doing.

Editors: What do you find challenging about your job?

Peña: Even though I care deeply about my students and the teachers I work with, my pay is embarrassing. I earn $8.81 an hour. I have a bachelor's degree, and I am currently getting my master's degree in education from Stetson University, a few minutes away from Citrus Grove. To do what I do—what all paraprofessionals do—takes a lot of knowledge and skill. It's just not right how little we get paid. It's barely more than minimum wage.

To try to fight for better wages, I have gotten involved in my local union, the Volusia Educational Support Organization, which partners with the Volusia Teachers Organization (VTO). And I've gotten to know VTO's president, Andrew Spar. Thanks to him, I had the opportunity to attend the AFT Civil, Human and Women's Rights Conference* in New Orleans last October, and this year I also served on an internal organizing committee.

To succeed as a paraprofessional, you must be passionate about helping children. For those considering this career, the knowledge that you can change students' lives must be reward enough because people don't get into this line of work for the money.

Editors: Tell us about your partnerships with classroom teachers.

Peña: The best classroom teachers treat paraprofessionals like the professionals they are. They are eager to have us work with their students, they acknowledge us when we enter the classroom, and they have everything ready—the students we are going to work with and a designated area of the classroom where we can work.

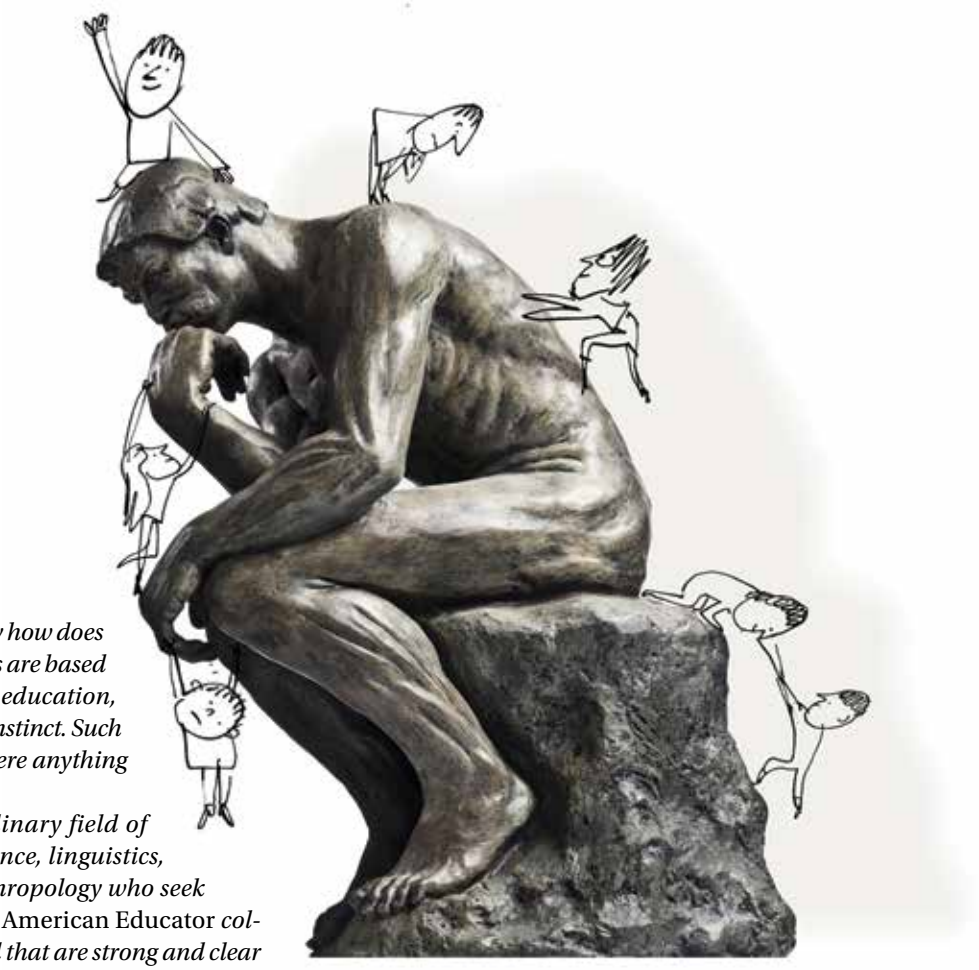
Classroom teachers know I'll do whatever I can to help. We discuss student learning whenever we can find the time, usually a few minutes after or between classes.

Their respect for me is apparent when I walk into the classroom; teachers are genuinely happy to see me. They will say to the class, "OK, Ms. Peña is here," and then they will direct a few students to sit with me, or they'll say "Ms. Peña, we're working on this." They make me feel like a valuable part of the instructional team. At the end of the day, it's gratifying how much they rely on me.

*For more on the conference, visit www.aft.org/news/activists-unite-racial-justice-aft-conference.

Ask the Cognitive Scientist

"Grit" Is Trendy, but Can It Be Taught?



How does the mind work—and especially how does it learn? Teachers' instructional decisions are based on a mix of theories learned in teacher education, trial and error, craft knowledge, and gut instinct. Such knowledge often serves us well, but is there anything sturdier to rely on?

Cognitive science is an interdisciplinary field of researchers from psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, philosophy, computer science, and anthropology who seek to understand the mind. In this regular American Educator *column, we consider findings from this field that are strong and clear enough to merit classroom application.*

By Daniel T. Willingham

Question: What do you think about grit? It seems to be in the news everywhere, but hasn't everyone always thought that determination and persistence were good? Is all the excitement just because it has a new name? Or has someone figured out how to teach grit?

Answer: Grit is something new. It's a character trait defined as "passion and perseverance for long-term goals."[1] Long-term goals are those that typically take years to attain. Passion in this context means what we might call an overriding concern in your life, something that gives direction and purpose to much of what you do.

Psychologists have studied related personal characteristics in the past (see the box on page 31 for details), such as self-control, for example, and conscientiousness. And now, researchers have found that the concept of grit adds something to our understanding of certain behaviors, especially those that require perseverance in the face of long-term, difficult work, like succeeding at West Point Military Academy, for instance. Whether you can teach someone to be gritty is quite another matter. It's likely you can teach parts of grit, but researchers are just beginning to explore how to do so.

Suddenly talk of grit—being passionate about long-term goals, and showing the stamina to pursue them—seems to be everywhere. In 2007, Angela Duckworth published an article, which has since been cited hundreds of times in the scientific literature, on the role grit plays in success.[2] The notion of grit (and its possible importance in education) was thrust into the public sphere a few years later in two ways: Paul Tough introduced grit to a broad audience in his 2013 book *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, which went on to spend a year on the *New York Times* best-

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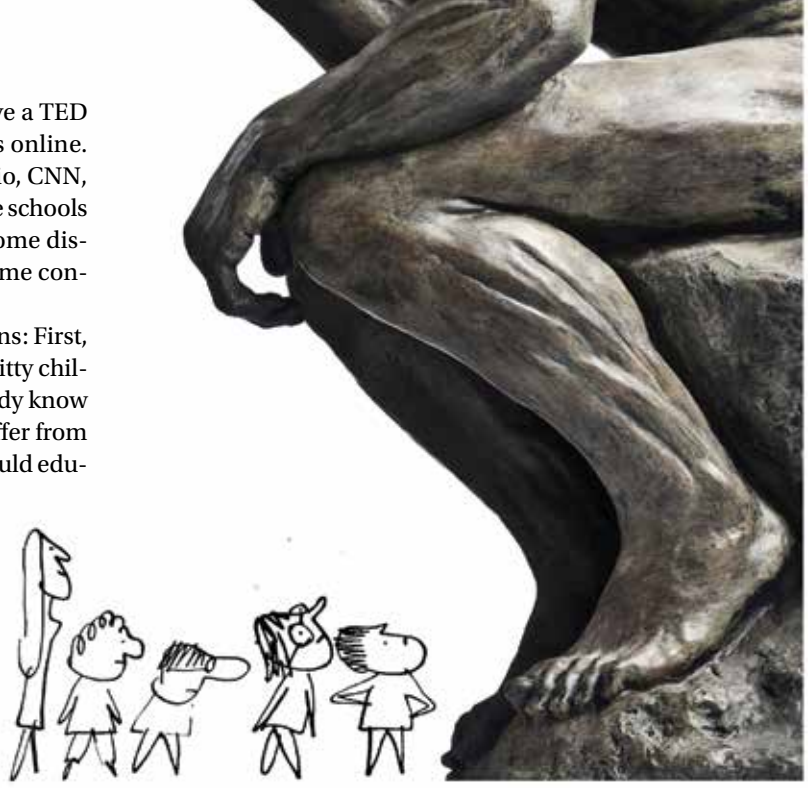
ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGE BLOCH

seller list.[3] And in the same year, Duckworth herself gave a TED talk, which has been viewed more than 8 million times online. Stories followed on the topic from National Public Radio, CNN, National Geographic, and many other news outlets. Some schools are seeking to teach grit, and (somewhat ominously) some districts propose to measure children's grit, with the outcome contributing to judgments of school effectiveness.[4]

This enthusiasm for grit invites the following questions: First, what is the scientific status of grit? Is it really true that gritty children do better in school? Second, didn't scientists already know that motivation matters to what gets done? Does grit differ from motivation, and if so, how? Finally, what, if anything, should educators do about grit?



Does Grit Matter?

Psychologists seek to explain how and why people do what they do. Why do some children graduate from high school, while others drop out? Why would someone spend hundreds of hours memorizing words to compete in a spelling bee? Some explanations focus on circumstances in the environment and how people react to them, and others focus on characteristics of the person that are thought to be relatively enduring.

> It's likely you can teach parts of grit, but researchers are just beginning to explore how to do so.

Grit is an example of the latter. Being gritty means being deeply committed to a long-term goal and following through on that commitment by pursuing it over the course of years. That goal might be to graduate at the top of your high school class, or to have a successful career in the military, or to be an internationally competitive gymnast.

How do we know how gritty someone is? Duckworth and her colleagues developed a paper-and-pencil measure of grit that they called the Grit Scale.[5] It comprises just eight questions, and for each, you are asked to rate whether a statement describes you. Four statements concern perseverance—for example, "I finish whatever I begin." And four concern whether your interests stay consistent over time—for example, "I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one" (reverse scored). The eight answers are combined into an overall grit score, but in some experiments, the two factors—perseverance and consistency of interests—are considered separately.

Remarkably, what people say about themselves in this very brief survey relates to what they do over the course of *years*. Scores on the grit scale are related to college GPA.[6] Grit predicts whether or not you'll drop out of West Point[7] and your likelihood of finishing the grueling Army Special Operations Forces selection course.[8] Grit is also associated with success at the National Spelling Bee.[9]

The common thread among these diverse tasks seems intuitive. Each requires a great deal of hard work that carries little short-term reward. Grit seems to measure one's willingness to keep going even when the task becomes arduous, and there is some experimental evidence supporting that hypothesis. For example, grit is associated with how much musicians practice[10] and how much people exercise.[11] In a more detailed follow-up study of spelling bee competitors, Duckworth and her colleagues examined what gritty competitors did that their less gritty counterparts did not do.[12] Three types of preparation for spelling bees are common: reading for pleasure, being quizzed by others, and studying alone. Researchers found that contestants liked reading for pleasure the most and studying the least, but it's studying that really contributes to spelling performance. The grittier contestants were willing to do this unpleasant work in service of their long-term goal of spelling excellence.

It's too early to be certain about how or why people stick with difficult tasks, but one suggestion is that they think about them differently than others do. In one study, researchers asked 1,364 high school seniors who planned to attend college why they wanted to do so.[13] Most of the students were from low-income homes and would be the first in their families to attend college, populations in which college attrition has typically been high. In this group, grittier students were more likely to say they wanted to attend college for reasons that transcended personal success (e.g., they wanted to make an impact on the world or help others) and were less likely to offer reasons related to self-development (e.g., they wanted to develop their interests or learn about the world). These students also said that they found schoolwork more meaningful than did less gritty students. When the researchers followed up months later, they found that the students who had offered transcendent reasons for attending

college were more likely to still be enrolled. The researchers explained that the fortitude to continue with difficult tasks can come from seeing them as contributing to a transcendent goal, something larger than oneself.

Is This Really New?

Your reaction to the previous section may well have been, "Yeah, so?" Can it really be big news to psychologists that some people, for whatever reason, are highly motivated when they take on certain tasks and will work very hard at them? Psychologists have long recognized that what people do is determined not just by their ability and their environment, but by their personality traits, their proclivity to behave in certain ways over time.[14] The contribution of personality traits to academic achievement may be as great as or greater than that of intelligence.[15]

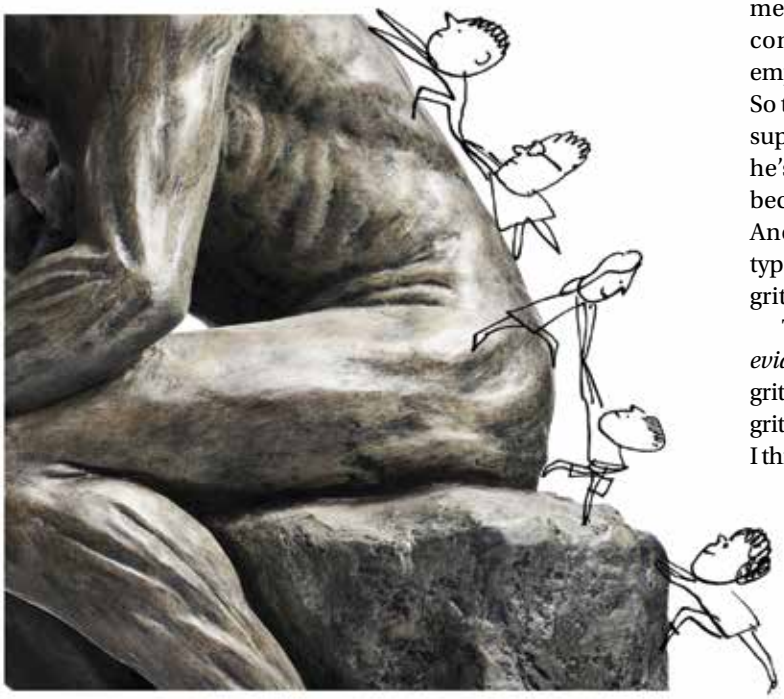
Some personal characteristics that psychologists have studied are, in fact, rather similar to grit. One is conscientiousness. The most successful theories of personality posit that it can be characterized by five dimensions: neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness.[16] This last dimension bears a strong similarity to grit. Conscientious people tend to be orderly in their habits, are industrious and like to get things done, take responsibilities seriously, and are dependable.[17] Those characteristics sound kind of gritty, and indeed researchers have reported that grit highly correlates with conscientiousness.[18] So it's no surprise that the kind of life outcomes we'd expect to be associated with grit are associated with conscientiousness: things like academic and professional success, staying out of prison, staying married longer, and even living longer.[19]

Another related personality trait is self-control. That's the ability to regulate emotions, behavior, or thoughts, especially when a person inhibits an impulse to do one thing in favor of another that he or she views as more beneficial in the long run.[20] An example is the famous marshmallow test, where a child is promised two marshmallows if she can resist the temptation of eating one marshmallow for 15 minutes. The child must resist the impulse to eat the marshmallow in order to reach her long-term goal—two marshmallows.

Self-control also applies to emotion, as when a student frustrated by a difficult math problem wants to say something sarcastic to his teacher but inhibits that impulse to ask for help politely. High levels of self-control are associated with a broad array of positive life outcomes: better academic achievement, greater likelihood of showing age-appropriate behavior, better relationships with peers, and, in the teen years, lower incidences of delinquency, unwanted pregnancy, and drug and alcohol abuse.[21] Self-control is also associated with conscientiousness[22] and with grit.[23]

If we're trying to describe aspects of personality that predict school success (among other things), and conscientiousness and self-control do a pretty good job, what does grit add? Certainly, there's a distinction to be made conceptually. Conscientiousness means doing what you're supposed to do right now, and self-control means avoiding impulses to do something else. Grit emphasizes passion for one goal that you stick with for a long time. So the conscientious teen practices piano because he knows he's supposed to. The teen with good self-control practices even when he's tempted to play Xbox instead. But the gritty teen practices because he's passionate about his dream of playing in a jazz trio. Another distinction is that conscientiousness and self-control typically apply to a broad array of situations, whereas people are gritty about just one thing or, at most, a few.

Being gritty means being deeply committed to a long-term goal, and following through on that commitment by pursuing it over the course of years.



These conceptual distinctions are all very nice, but is there any *evidence* that characterizing people as gritty is useful? As I've noted, grit predicts academic success, but so does conscientiousness, and grit and conscientiousness are themselves related. So maybe when I think I'm predicting academic success with grit, all I've really done is measure something close to conscientiousness and given it a different name. It's as though you had discovered that height and weight are correlated, and then I come along and say "Hey, I've made quite a discovery. The length of a person's pants is correlated with their weight!" My measure (pants length) is closely related to yours (height) and isn't really adding anything new.

"Grit" and Other Commonly Used Terms

Psychologists commonly use several terms that are close to grit. Here's how they differ:

- **Grit**, as described in this article, refers to persistence and passion for a very long-term goal (that is, something that will take years of work).
- **Self-regulation** refers to the ability to inhibit an automatic impulse because resisting that impulse will better serve a goal that's not immediate (but will not take years to reach). That impulse may be emotional (e.g., shouting at someone in frustration) or behavioral (e.g., playing a video game instead of doing homework). Self-regulation differs from grit because it refers to conduct in the short term, and it's not necessarily motivated by a passion. A student who always does her homework is exercising self-control, but she's not necessarily showing grit because it's probably not in service of a long-term goal.
- For most researchers, **self-control** is a synonym for self-regulation.
- **Executive control** refers to a function of working memory. Working memory holds information in the short term but also manages other aspects of thought. Executive control handles this management of thought, so here "control" means command, rather than resisting temptation.
- **Executive function** most often refers to how effectively all of the pieces of working memory operate, including self-regulation, executive control, and others.

–D.T.W.

Statisticians have ways of dealing with this kind of problem. Conceptually, first you use people's height to predict their weight, and then you *add* the pants-length information to see if that makes your predictions any better than when you used height information alone. This sort of analysis has been conducted with conscientiousness and grit, and there is evidence that the latter is not simply the former with a different name.[24]

There are also instances where grit *doesn't* add much, or any, predictive value for grades over and above conscientiousness. One large study showed that grit added only a very small boost in the ability to predict standardized test scores in the United Kingdom,[25] and another smaller study examined grade point average and a few other measures of high school academic success.[26]

Given the nature of grit, it seems sensible that conscientiousness, not grit, would be decisive for grades. Many students earn high grades not because they are passionately working toward a goal, but because they do what's expected of them. Or if they are passionate and gritty, it's about just one subject. But sometimes, being the sort of person who does what's expected, putting one foot in front of the other, just won't cut it—the task requires long-term commitment. That's when it may be most useful to look at grit; grit seems to capture something important about people who can weather the trials of West Point, for example, or study years for a spelling bee.

Should We Measure Grit?

If grit predicts some aspects of life success, it seems that it would make sense to measure how gritty people are. Maybe colleges would like to admit a student who didn't score very well on typical academic ability measures but scored well on a measure of grit. Perhaps employers would like to hire gritty employees. Perhaps, but the measurement of grit is still in its infancy.[27]

The Grit Scale developed by Duckworth and her colleagues seems to have the properties that one wants: reliability, meaning that individuals' scores stay the same over time, and validity, meaning they predict the kinds of behaviors we expect (that is, people who score high do the types of things we expect gritty people to do, and people who score low do not).[28] But measurements are developed with a particular purpose in mind; it's hazardous to use them for other purposes. The Grit Scale was designed as a research instrument, not for college admissions. One obvious problem is that it would be really easy to answer the questions so as to appear gritty. A less obvious problem is reference bias: when people complete a survey evaluating themselves, they compare themselves to people they know.[29] When I am deciding whether the statement "I finish what I begin" fits me well, I'm inevitably influenced by whether I think I finish what I begin more often than people around me. That's an issue when I want to compare the absolute levels of grit of many people from many different settings.

We can avoid those problems by using a performance measure rather than a self-evaluation measure; that is, instead of asking "How gritty are you?," we have people do something, and we see whether they exhibit grit when they do it. For example, the marshmallow test mentioned earlier is a performance measure of self-control. But performance measures have their own set of problems. For example, they may be influenced by factors other than grit (e.g., I'm more likely to eat the marshmallow if I'm hungry), and they are frequently artificial, so students may behave differently, knowing they are being measured. And in the case of grit, we're interested in behavior over the course of years, so a performance measure may not be workable.

One way around these problems might be to examine a person's record of achievements for signs of grit. For example, a high school student who had committed to an activity—the school newspaper, say—for four years, and was made an editor in her final year, has shown grit.[30] That's probably as close as we are right now to a measure of grit that can be used in real-life contexts for decisions in schooling and employment. It's well to bear in mind that the wisdom or foolishness of weighing grit in these decisions is still unknown.

Another perspective is that we might want to measure grit not for evaluation but as a way of communicating to students that this characteristic matters. If the ethos of a school includes the ideal of intellectual passion, that individuals ought to find an idea or project or skill they want to pursue for years, despite difficulties or setbacks, because it fascinates them—well, isn't that grit? And if that's an intellectual ideal at the school, doesn't it make sense to check in with students periodically to see if they have found their passion? Note that this is a different role for grit. Now, grit is not a means to an end (such as academic achievement or success in the military) but an end in itself; the hope is that students will

find something they love enough to be gritty about. That changes the measurement problem; we're evaluating grit in the formative sense: "What needs to change so that your passion can be fulfilled, and how can I help?" And of course, measuring something is not enough—other aspects of the school experience ought to support the finding of a grit-worthy passion.[31]

Should We Teach Grit?

The surging visibility of grit has prompted questions from some observers.[32] A valid concern is that a focus on grit will prompt educators and policymakers to forget structural factors that impede student success—factors like poverty and underfunded schools. Is there not a danger that we might slip into a mindset where any problem the student faces is brushed off with the advice to "be gritty" about it? We must keep that danger in mind if we set out to teach grit.

But "Should we teach grit?" is actually the second question to ask. The first is "Do we know how to teach grit?," and the answer to this question is "no."

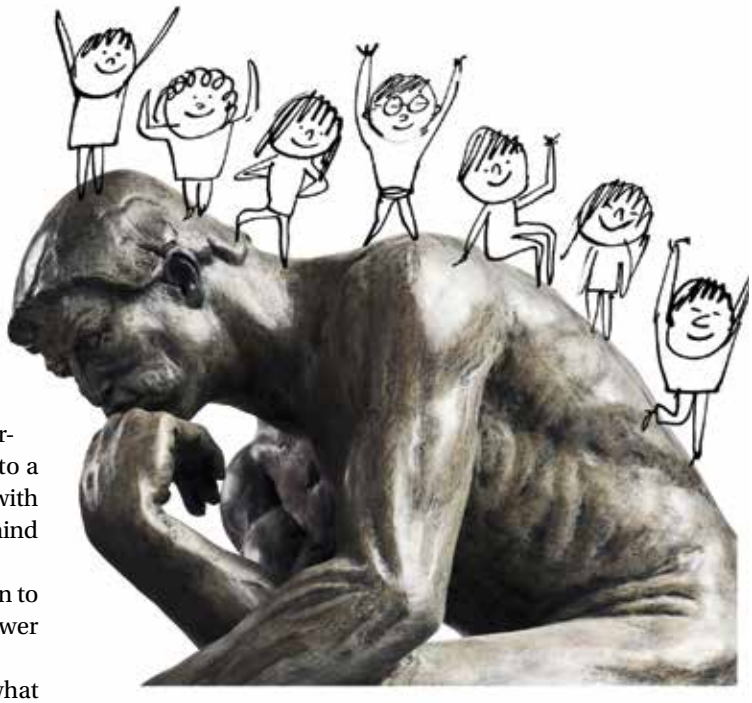
A number of people have taken educated guesses about what might make kids more gritty,[33] and the advice seems sensible: tell kids that failure is a normal part of learning, tell them that success is not a matter of inborn talent but of hard work, and teach them strategies for organizing their time and setting goals. In truth, much of the advice seems only indirectly applicable to grit, and more directly applicable to growth mindset and self-control. The teaching of each has been the subject of intense curriculum and program development work, with some successes.[34]

Grit is complicated enough that it's probably not productive to frame the question as "Can you teach grit?" If I asked you "How would you teach someone to be a good student?," you wouldn't have a simple answer. You'd say something like, "A student needs to know how to listen carefully, how to take notes, how to be a productive member of a group, how to study, how to write well, and so on." The same goes for grit. If we think about the lower-level behaviors that go into it, teaching it seems more tractable. Some parts of teaching grit might be: helping students identify what they are passionate about, encouraging them to pursue their passion, teaching them how to find resources to help them pursue their passion, teaching them to learn from failure, teaching them the importance of practice, teaching them when to persist and when to seek a different path if they encounter an obstacle, and so on.

When it comes to teaching and measuring grit, we should leave the last word to the key researcher of grit. As Duckworth said in a recent interview, "The enthusiasm is getting ahead of the science."[35]

So is grit a fad or a potentially powerful aid to teaching your students? Predictably, the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Grit is definitely real, scientifically, meaning researchers are finding it a useful construct for understanding human behavior. There's scientific heft behind the popular chatter.

But it's far from clear that it ought to have an exalted status in schools. There are many personality characteristics you probably try to cultivate in your students: conscientiousness, self-control, kindness, honesty, optimism, courage, and empathy, among others. Some are related to academic success, some contribute to good relationships with others, some contribute to a positive classroom atmosphere, and most do more than one of these.



Grit is another personality characteristic that you may want to nurture in your students. Grit is not necessary for a successful, happy life, and it's not sufficient for one either. However, understanding what grit is may serve you in helping along its nascent development when you spot grit in a student. □

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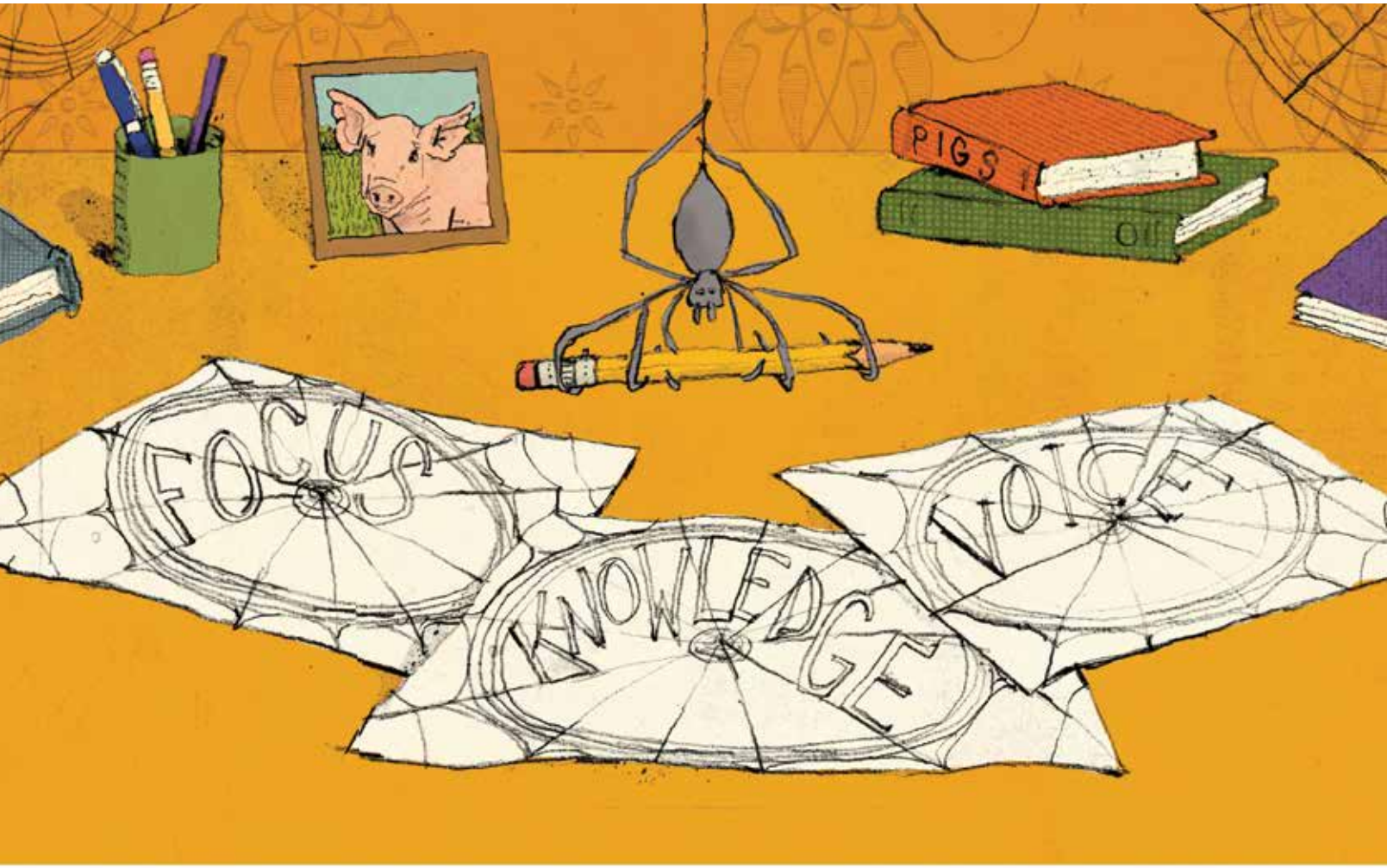
(Continued on page 44)

A Powerful Tool

Writing Based on Knowledge and Understanding



By the Vermont Writing Collaborative*

It had been a memorable summer on the Zuckerman farm. Wilbur the pig had spent his day eating the best slops the farm had to offer. The goslings had hatched. Best of all, Charlotte the gray barn spider had made friends with him and filled his days with friendship and happiness. Charlotte and Wilbur had gotten to know each other well. Each knew what the other liked to eat, how the other thought, and what the other cared about.

So when Wilbur learned that Mr. Zuckerman planned to turn him into bacon, Charlotte went into action. It was imperative that Mr. Zuckerman understand what she knew to be the truth about Wilbur. (In fact, she needed to *persuade* Mr. Zuckerman of her point of view—Charlotte was nothing if not aware of her audience!)

She thought and thought, and she came up with a plan.

She wrote. Choosing her words with great care, using all the technical skill she could muster, Charlotte turned her web into a thing of meaning—a clear and powerful expression of the essential truth about her friend Wilbur.

"Some pig!"

Charlotte, the clever spider in E. B. White's immortal classic *Charlotte's Web*, was not writing because she needed to pick an interesting topic and she had to come up with something to say. She did not write a first draft to show she knew how to use a process.

Nor was Charlotte writing from a sketchy knowledge base. She had not spent 10 minutes hastily researching facts about pigs. She had spent the summer with Wilbur; she knew him well. From that

Founded by public school teachers Eloise Ginty, Joanna Hawkins, Karen Kurzman, Diana Leddy, and Jane Miller, the Vermont Writing Collaborative is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping all students become powerful thinkers, readers, and writers. This article is adapted from their book Writing for Understanding: Using Backward Design to Help All Students Write Effectively *(Vermont Writing Collaborative, 2008).*

*Eloise Ginty, Joanna Hawkins, Karen Kurzman, Diana Leddy, and Jane Miller.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN BAXTER

deep understanding had grown a very personal connection. Wilbur was Charlotte's friend. Charlotte's writing saved his life.

Writing is not always about life and death, but in the end, writing is always about meaning. From the efficiently constructed grocery list, to the first-grader's tribute to his mother on Mother's Day, to the fourth-grade essay on how chickadees survive in the winter, to the eulogy composed for a dear friend, to the investigation of the effects of global warming on polar bears, a piece of writing has meaning for the writer—and for the reader. Such writing can only come from knowledge and understanding.

Charlotte was right. Writing matters, for all kinds of reasons. Today, in an era when people are deluged with information and ideas, the ability to make sense of them and to express that understanding in coherent writing is a critical skill.

As Charlotte knew, writing is not easy. Because it is not passive but active, not receptive but generative, it often involves hard mental work. *This is precisely what makes it a powerful tool to put into the hands of students.*

Writing is not always about life and death, but in the end, writing is always about meaning.

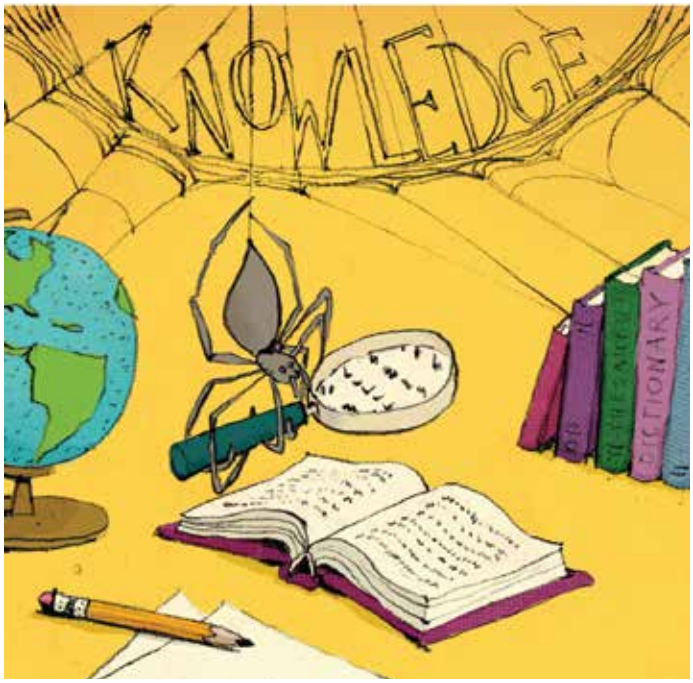
Looking Back: The Writing Process

Teaching students to write effectively is challenging. The National Writing Project (NWP) has contributed enormously and consistently to the effort to help teachers help students learn to write.* In the early 1970s, researchers such as Donald Graves and Janet Emig began studying the ways writers go about the task of thinking and producing polished writing. The NWP's book *Because Writing Matters* further chronicles the development of the field of composition pedagogy as well as the understanding of writing as a process, not only a product.[1]

This work evolved into what has become known to teachers as the *writing process*, an approach that has stressed the importance of stages in writing: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.† Over the past 30-plus years, many teachers and schools have instituted various incarnations of process writing, often in the form of writing workshops.

However, more than 30 years since the writing process approach began to enter classrooms, writing is still a challenge for students, and teachers struggle to find the best ways to help them. The majority of eighth-grade students have not yet reached the proficient level, and in most states the level of proficiency in writing is low to very low.[2]

In the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in writing (the most recent year with comparable data), the national percentage of students scoring at the "proficient and above" level was virtually unchanged from the 2002 assessment. A bit of good news is that two of the three states with the highest percentage of proficient students (Connecticut and New Jersey) had a slight majority of their students scoring in the "proficient and above" range, but the national percentages showed little growth.



The need for help for teachers is clear: teaching the writing process, as we have understood it, is not enough.

What Works?

Charlotte was onto something. She knew Wilbur well before she set to work on writing in her web, and she worked hard on her web missives. From Charlotte, we learn that writing depends on knowledge, it requires careful attention to structure, and it takes time.

Interestingly, NAEP agrees. In 1998, it asked the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the National Writing Project to study a sample of classrooms where more than two-thirds of the students had strong achievement on the fourth- and eighth-grade NAEP. NAEP wanted to know what kinds of classroom assignments produced strong writers. They found that some degree of personal choice in writing matters, as does audience—both staples of "process writing."

But they also found that other things matter, including:

- **Thinking.** Students need to be given the opportunity to reflect

*The National Writing Project focuses the knowledge, expertise, and leadership of educators on sustained efforts to improve writing and learning for all students. For more about NWP, visit www.nwp.org.

†For more on the challenge of helping students write, see "Writing about Writing" in the Summer 2014 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/summer2014/waddell.

on their knowledge, to analyze information, to synthesize. They need questions and assignments that ask them to "transform the information from the reading material in order to complete the writing assignment"[3]—in other words, to construct real meaning.

- **A framework for organizing and developing ideas.** Students do not just figure out how to organize their ideas. They need assignments that show them the way—if not literally mapping it, then at least pointing in a familiar direction.
- **Frequent opportunities to write.** A 2002 report on National Writing Project classrooms in five states added another significant factor that matters: time. It found that "NWP teachers spend far more time on writing instruction than most fourth-grade teachers across the country. Eighty-three percent of NWP classroom teachers ... spent more than ninety minutes per week on writing activities, compared with just 31 percent of fourth-grade teachers nationally."[4]

This does *not* mean that all National Writing Project classrooms produce more effective writers.[5] It does, however, indicate a correlation between *how much* students write and how well and thoughtfully they write.

Taken together, these reports seem to point to what components are needed to help all students write effectively. What are they?

The vital role of knowledge

First, remember that the ETS report to NAEP emphasized the value of a thoughtful question to drive student writing, with the clear message that writing is about thinking. So far, so good.

We find, however, that the "thoughtful question," by itself, is not enough to produce effective writing. Our work has convinced us that, even with a thoughtful question, many students fail when they write. This failure occurs not because they don't have a thoughtful question, but *because they don't have sufficient knowledge in the first place.*

It seems clear, then, that it is up to teachers to provide activities and experiences that give students knowledge and help them construct meaning from that knowledge. If writing is about making meaning, then ensuring students have the raw materials—information, knowledge, understanding—is fundamentally important. Students cannot think deeply—or at all—about knowledge that they do not have.

The role of structure

Second, the ETS report also referred to the importance of scaffolding for structure for students. The implication is that students need a clear and specific sense of direction when they write, to help them understand how to put the piece of writing together.

Again, however, we find that the minimal level of scaffolding recommended in the ETS report is not sufficient when students are actively learning to write. A student cannot invent a structure she has never seen before. She cannot intuit the concept of "thesis statement" if she has never worked to develop one.

In fact, our work has shown us that structures are more than tools for organizing ideas. Forms and structures in writing are not merely techniques to be learned, they are techniques *for* learning. The act and process of selecting, ordering, and developing ideas pushes students to find meaning and to construct understanding as they write.

We have found that when we introduce students, from primary grades through high school, to a variety of flexible structures and give them guided practice in using them, they become able to "own" those structures in their own thinking. Those structures become a *vehicle for thinking*. Students are able to use them to make meaning in their own minds and on paper, meaning that is clear to both the writer and the reader.

The great caveat here with structure, of course, is this: *structures are not a substitute for knowledge*. Flexible structures do indeed give students a vehicle for thinking—as long as they have something of substance to think about.

Students need a clear and specific sense of direction when they write, to help them understand how to put the piece of writing together.

"Writing for Understanding" Works

Over many years of work with students of all ages and abilities, we have developed an approach that builds our findings into the writing process: writing for understanding.

Based on the idea that writing is ultimately about meaning, this approach places a premium on understanding. Students need to understand the ideas with which they are working. They also need to understand the structures and writing elements they are using. And they need all this not just for this particular writing task; they also need it for transfer, so that they can apply it to other thinking and writing tasks down the road.

Our approach has three premises. The first is backward design. We are indebted to the "understanding by design" work of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe.[6] We base our approach on the idea that teachers plan best when they plan backward for instruction, starting by identifying the understandings they want students to communicate in writing by the end of the unit, then planning backward for specific instruction, in both content knowledge and writing structures and craft, so that all students are able to produce a solid, thoughtful piece of writing at the end.

The second premise is an emphasis on understanding. In order to write effectively, students require two types of understanding. First, we have seen students struggle with writing for many reasons, but one of the most frequent and least addressed is knowledge and understanding of content: *too often, students do not know what they are talking about*. An essential part of backward

design planning, then, involves planning for students to develop deep content knowledge.

It also includes understanding of writing craft, including structure. Our work is geared toward students being able to write not just about the ideas in a particular piece, but as a transferrable skill. It is geared toward students gaining conceptual and structural knowledge of elements of writing, standards, and genres of writing—expressive and informational/expository. We want students to internalize and increasingly "own" the concept of introduction, of transitions, of images, of all those elements it takes to write well, so later they can transfer them to new writing situations.

The third premise is direct instruction. We have all seen students benefit from direct instruction (and then lots of guided practice) in many ways: riding a bike, making a foul shot, parallel parking, being polite to siblings. Our approach incorporates direct instruction, as needed, into every aspect of an instructional unit, so that by the end, students have a piece of writing that is clearly structured, well developed, and thoughtful—and a set of skills that are on their way to being transferable.

At the heart of effective writing is the building of meaning and expression so that others can follow the writer's thinking.

This direct instruction includes frequent, built-in oral processing. It is true that sophisticated writers can sometimes write more effectively than they can speak. For student writers, however, we find that this is rarely true. Students cannot write what they cannot speak. This is as true for high school students as it is for first-graders.

Oral processing before writing and during writing, then, is a fundamental aspect of writing for understanding. It allows students to work out their ideas in guided conversation before they have to work with them in writing.

Effective Writing

How do we know when a piece of student writing is effective? Do we all agree on what effective student writing is?

The good news is that while there is certainly room for variety (in fact, great variety) in writing, and emphasis varies on what matters most, in our experience, there is general consensus about the basic elements that constitute effective writing:

- **Focus.** Every piece of writing must have a single focus. This is true for a grocery list and a literary analysis, a letter to Aunt Martha and a doctoral thesis.
- **Organization.** While structures can and do vary widely, a piece of writing must have a structure—an organizational pattern that makes sense for the focus. Typically, elements of structure include introductions, transitions, conclusions, the way ideas are chunked, and overall text structure.
- **Development of details, elaboration.** A writer needs to develop and support a focus (accurately!), regardless of the structure she is using. The development will vary depending on the genre, the particular focus, the audience, the grade level of the student, and any of a number of other factors.
- **Appropriate voice and tone.** These vary with the purpose of the piece, the developmental level of the child, and other circumstances. As writers grow in sophistication, they pay more and more attention to the tone of a piece. Should it sound formal? Informal? Silly? Moving? Outraged? A writer needs to know how to work with voice and tone effectively.
- **Conventions.** Simply put, the conventions of standard English matter. Students need to know how to spell and how to correct spelling, and they need to know how to work with punctuation, usage, grammatically correct sentences, and the rest of the elements of standard English, as appropriate to their grade level. Any particular piece of writing needs to reflect this basic mastery of conventions.

What is unspoken in all these elements, of course, is meaning—the very purpose of the writing itself. A focus exists to direct the meaning that the writer is constructing. The structure the writer uses exists to help make that meaning clear. Details and information, ideas and images, are all present in an effective piece of writing to make meaning more accessible. Voice and tone, even conventions, are not ends in themselves—they are there in the service of meaning, first for the writer and then for the reader.

Teacher Planning for Effective Writing

The "writing for understanding" approach recognizes (like NAEP and others) that at the heart of effective writing, by any accepted definition, is the building of meaning and expression so that others can follow the writer's thinking. As previously discussed, we know that students need to be able to incorporate certain elements into their writing for it to meet this definition.

In this approach, then, the teacher's backward planning becomes critically important. Before sitting down to write, the student must have all the above elements in place—especially the first three. The teacher, therefore, needs to plan for instruction that will help the students gain access to each one of those elements. (For more on the planning components of such instruction, see the box on page 38).

After planning and instruction, the teacher looks closely at the resulting work of students. What did they get? What did they not get? Where is the understanding strong? Where is it weak? What transferable writing tools have the students gotten from this that they'll be able to apply more independently next time? And what transferable writing tools still need more work?

After that comes more planning. Using information gained from the first pieces of writing, the teacher plans the next unit of instruction that will include writing. Working with the idea of a gradual release of responsibility, the teacher decides where

students still need very direct guidance and instruction and where they need a little less.

Ultimately, the teacher is planning so that, both now and down the road, students will show solid understanding of their subject in effective writing.

Moving toward Independence

The last few years have seen a surge of interest in how to help students comprehend what they read. Recognizing that reading comprehension is, in fact, what reading actually is, teachers have searched for ways to help students become able readers. They have searched for ways to help students become readers who can navigate many kinds of text and who have the tools and strategies to make meaning out of that text, even when the text is difficult.

As those strategies are identified and broken down into skills (activating prior knowledge, finding the main idea, questioning, predicting, and the like), there is sometimes a tendency to expect students to abstract these skills very quickly. If we give students lots of practice in finding the main idea, the reasoning sometimes goes, they will be able to transfer that skill to, say, reading a primary source document like *The Federalist Papers* or the description of a set of symptoms for a complicated disease. If we do several exercises with predicting, we hope, students will be able to transfer this abstract skill to reading *Crime and Punishment*, or their science textbook, or the *Consumer Reports* article on the recall for their car, or a presidential candidate's position on protecting the environment.

In fact, however, giving students fragmented "practice" in reading strategies does not help students very much. They do not become more capable readers.

Researchers have discovered that the ability to transfer knowledge to new situations—in short, to solve new problems—does not come from being a sort of generic "good thinker" or a "good problem solver." Rather, it appears to grow from a deep familiarity with a particular body of knowledge.* Only when people have that deep knowledge base are they able to form general principles and concepts, which they can then transfer to new situations and new demands.[7]

In the world of reading instruction, this understanding about learning means that students are far more likely to become capable, strategic readers if they are learning reading strategies while in *the process of acquiring deep content knowledge*. The National Reading Panel states that "when the strategy instruction is fully embedded in in-depth learning of content, the strategies are learned to a high level of competence."[8] In other words, students use reading strategies to build specific content, or domain, knowledge and understanding. When they have many successful experiences with these strategies, they are far more likely to abstract those strategies and apply them independently to new situations.

Building on this insight, the 2004 *Reading Next* report states that, if we are serious about helping our struggling adolescent readers with reading comprehension, one of the essential components of the curriculum is that instructional reading strategies be embedded in content-area instruction.[9]

Students are far more likely to become capable readers if they learn reading strategies while acquiring deep content knowledge.

We have found that the need to teach skills by *embedding the learning in the deep consideration of content is just as true for writing as for reading*, perhaps even more so. Students will not learn to write by being taught abstracted elements like "details" or "voice." Even if instruction is broken down into smaller components ("introduction" or "transitions" or "show, not tell" craft lessons), students cannot and will not become effective writers if this kind of instruction occurs in a fragmented or decontextualized way. Writing absolutely needs these and other skills, but it is much more than a set of separate skills.

Just as students will not learn to read capably across a wide range of texts and in a wide range of situations if they are given only abstracted skill lessons without deep, coherent content consideration, they will not learn to write thoughtfully if they are taught only discrete, abstracted skills in the absence of deep, coherent content knowledge. In our experience, students need to be helped, over and over again, to experience what it is to write thoughtfully, clearly, and with solid understanding.

*For more on why reading comprehension depends largely on knowledge, see the Spring 2006 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2006.

Just how much is "over and over again"? How much practice do students really need, and what kind?

There is no easy answer to this, of course. Perhaps the best way to think of it is in terms of other skills that take practice. A basketball player does not expect to dribble expertly or make great layups on the basis of a few gym classes or sessions on the neighborhood playground. A piano player does not expect to be able to play Mozart's "Minuet in G" or a Scott Joplin rag after a few runs through the sheet music. A parent does not want his son or daughter getting behind the wheel of a car after a single highway experience. Developing competence in any of these fields requires much practice.

Further, the practice is not limited to a series of drills or skills sessions, though it surely includes that. Rather, the young basketball player has many experiences with whole games, with another team opposing his, and with the opportunity—in fact the necessity—to think on his feet, to monitor what he is doing, and to adjust as he goes. He is building meaning of the game. The piano player, even at the most basic level, does not just play scales or finger exercises, though those surely matter. Instead, he plays whole pieces frequently—first with one hand, then with two, then with chords—building meaning of the music. In each case, the learner is putting discrete skills to work flexibly, as needed, to build meaning.

Writing for understanding is built on these principles. Knowing what they want students to be able to do in the end—produce writing that makes sense and conveys meaning to both writer and reader—teachers plan backward so that students have plenty of knowledge and guidance and practice in getting there, including *plenty of opportunity to write whole pieces that make sense*. Their instruction takes into account the need for all students to understand what they are writing about and to have tools of written expression to demonstrate and develop that understanding.

E. B. White ends *Charlotte's Web* with this reflection on Charlotte through the eyes of her good friend, Wilbur—the pig whose life was saved by her writing.

"Wilbur never forgot Charlotte. ... She was in a class by herself. It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both."

Indeed. Like Wilbur, we are lucky to be still learning from this remarkable spider! ❐

Endnotes

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Planning Components of "Writing for Understanding"

Central Ideas

- What is it that I want students to understand about this content (and what misunderstandings might I need to address)?
- What understandings about the craft of writing do I want them to develop?
- How will I plan backward from my goal to design instruction so students can get there, and how will I know when they've got it?

Focusing Question

- What question will I pose so that students can see how to approach this thinking and writing in a specific, appropriate, manageable way?

Building and Processing Working Knowledge

- How will I make sure that students know enough about this subject by the end to actually be able to write about it? How will I make sure they know about the craft of writing?
- What will they read, and how will I help them read it?
- What vocabulary do they need?
- What do they need to draw or make?
- What experiences do they need to have?
- How will I engage all students in purposeful conversation in order to build knowledge/understanding?
- How will students select from and analyze the knowledge through the lens of the focusing question, then capture it in notes or some other type of visible thinking so that they have access to ideas to use in their writing?
- How will I monitor their developing understanding so I am sure they are getting it? How will I give them feedback as they acquire and develop that understanding?

Structure

- How will students know how to construct this piece of writing so that their thinking is clear, both to them as writers and to the readers of their work?
- What will I show them as a model?
- What tools will they need?
- What concepts of craft will they need to understand and use in their writing?

Writing

- How will students draft and revise so that their final writing is clearly focused, organized, and developed to show understanding of the central ideas?
- Again, how will I monitor their writing so I am sure they are getting it?
- How will I give them feedback as they write and revise to show that understanding?

Resources for Professional Learning Opportunities

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS has long recognized that union work goes beyond the traditional bread-and-butter issues of salary and benefits. As a result, AFT members can access a variety of programs designed to enhance professional growth.

As you reflect on the past school year and consider your goals for the upcoming one, take advantage of the following opportunities from the AFT. For more information, go to **www.aft.org/education**.

AFT Teacher Leaders Program

Ever notice the lack of teacher voice in education policy discussions? Ever notice that *actual* classroom experts are rarely asked for their input on how to create learning opportunities for all children? To ensure that the voices of educators are heard, the AFT established the Teacher Leaders Program in 2011.

One Saturday each month during the school year, teachers across the country meet with their union colleagues to discuss current federal, state, and local education policies; develop and implement personal action research projects; create plans to build community support for their schools; and network with local leaders. These teachers then serve as catalysts to build the profession and strengthen the union and its connection to the community, in order to generate support for and understanding of public schools.

For more information, see the box on page 17.

PAUL ZWOLAK

AFT Professional Development Program

The AFT Professional Development Program represents one of the union's major efforts to improve classroom teachers' instructional approaches and professional growth. The classes model research-based strategies that provide the most effective adult learning experiences. In order to appeal to all educators, the AFT Professional Development Program offerings include 45-hour graduate-level courses, three-hour modules, webinars, and technology tools. Topics include instructional strategies in math and literacy, the Common Core State Standards, and teaching English language learners, to name a few.

AFT Professional Development Online

A new AFT e-learning site helps educators from preschool to 12th grade learn new techniques and skills, as well as provides tips for creating engaging classroom environments. This site also provides a space where educators can connect with their peers across the country for support and to share helpful research. It hosts a variety of professional development opportunities, including webinars, self-paced courses, and blended learning. Topics range from budget courses for union leaders to the appropriate uses of assessments for educators. Affiliates can contribute to the site by adding their own online offerings to the platform or by announcing face-to-face offerings available to union members in their school districts.

Resources and professional development opportunities on the site are free to AFT members. Go to **http://elearning.aft.org** to create your account. For more information, email **elearning@aft.org**.

–AFT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT

RESOURCES

A SECOND LOOK AT TEACHER DIVERSITY

Teacher Segregation in Los Angeles and New York City, a new report from the Albert Shanker Institute, focuses on how minority teachers are distributed within the nation's two largest school districts. It details meaningful levels of teacher segregation in these districts, particularly of black teachers from their white, Hispanic, and Asian colleagues. The report follows a 2015 Shanker Institute report on the state of teacher diversity in nine large cities. Both reports are available at **http://go.aft.org/AE216res1**.

VOICES OF THE PROFESSION

A new report from the Center on Education Policy (CEP), *Listen to Us: Teacher Views and Voices*, offers fresh findings from the organization's 2015 national survey of educators. The report shows that public school teachers are concerned and frustrated with shifting policies, an overemphasis on student testing, and a lack of voice in decision making. "Looking at these results, it's not all that surprising that enrollments for teacher prep programs are dropping," said CEP Executive Director Maria Ferguson. The report and technical appendices are available at **www.cep-dc.org**.

FINDING EDUCATIONAL GEMS

The website **EdReports.org** is an independent nonprofit that offers free reviews of education materials with a focus on alignment to the Common Core State Standards and other educator-recommended indicators. The search engine is easy to use, and development of the site is being shaped through feedback from such organizations as Student Achievement Partners and Achieve, as well as the perspectives of teachers. Together with Textbook Navigator/Journal and similar online resources, EdReports.org may be helpful to classroom teachers and district administrators alike.

ACCOUNTABILITY REVISITED

"Leveraging the Every Student Succeeds Act to Move toward New Accountability" is a new AFT resource that explains how, under the new federal law known as ESSA, states are empowered to replace the status quo with new approaches that truly address the needs of children, particularly the most disadvantaged. The document, which highlights accountability provisions under ESSA and explains major considerations for school intervention strategies developed by states and districts, is available at **http://go.aft.org/AE216res2**.

Undocumented Youth and Barriers to Education

It is hard not to be moved by the stories in *Dreams Deported: Immigrant Youth and Families Resist Deportation*. The book, the third in a series published by the UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, is edited by Kent Wong and Nancy Guarneros and written by their students, many of whom are immigrants themselves or from immigrant families.

The book recounts the harrowing experiences of undocumented students who are trying to pursue an education and keep their families together in the United States. Divided into two parts, "stories of deportation" and "stories of resistance," the volume tells of the pressures undocumented youth, like Adrian González, face.

Above, a student chained to a ladder at a civil disobedience action against deportations outside the Metropolitan Detention Center in Los Angeles. At right, immigrant rights activists in San Francisco.

PHOTOS BY ADRIAN GONZÁLEZ

In the 1980s, González and his family came to the United States on foot from Mexico. He was too young to remember their journey, which led them to Anaheim, California. Once settled, his parents found steady work. Despite the challenges he encountered because of his undocumented status—not having a Social Security number, for instance—González, after graduating from high school, enrolled at Santa Ana Community College in 2005. Thanks to California state law, which allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition and to access state financial aid and non-state-funded scholarships for colleges and universities, González was able to pursue higher education.

In college, he joined IDEAS (Improving Dreams, Equality, Access and Success), a student-run organization that supports and advocates for undocumented youth. "IDEAS was the only student club he joined because it was for students just like him," writes Mayra Jones, the author of the chapter about González. "He had no idea, however, how much support they would provide after his parents' deportation."

In 2008, Immigration and Customs Enforcement appeared at his family's home, and his parents were soon deported. González was left to care for his two younger brothers. Fortunately, he received scholarships to continue his education, and he became an activist to fight policies like the one that tore apart his own family. Jones writes that González has since used his passion for photography to highlight "the protests, marches, hunger strikes, and civil disobedience actions organized by immigrant youth throughout Southern California." In fact, a few of González's compelling images are featured in *Dreams Deported* (and are also shown on this page).

González's story is similar to others told in this slim (just under 100 pages) yet powerful volume, which includes answers to "Frequently Asked Questions on Immigration, Detention, and Deportation." This section provides definitions for "undocumented" and "deportation" and also shows a graph outlining the approximate number of deportations under the last five U.S. presidents. According to the book, more than 2 million people have been deported under the Obama administration.

Dreams Deported considers President Obama's 2012 announcement of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which "provided undocumented youth with a two-year reprieve from the threat of deportation and the opportunity to apply for work permits," a temporary victory. But it ultimately calls on the U.S. government to put politics aside and enact comprehensive immigration reform.

What Are DACA+ and DAPA?

The expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA+) and the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) are federal immigration programs issued in November 2014. These programs give undocumented immigrants who meet certain requirements a reprieve from deportation, as well as the opportunity to obtain a Social Security number and a work permit that is renewable every three years. Deferred action is not a green card or citizenship. Rather, it is a temporary protective status for undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children under the age of 16 or who are parents of U.S. citizens or lawful permanent resident children.

DACA+ and DAPA are based on the original DACA program announced in June 2012, which has helped 700,000 undocumented immigrants adjust their status. Additional information is available at **www.aft.org/immigration**.

Meeting the Needs of Unaccompanied Child Refugees

By Sarah Pierce

More than 102,000 unaccompanied children from Central America and Mexico were apprehended by U.S. Customs and Border Protection at the U.S.-Mexico border from October 2013 to August 2015.[1] While most of the Mexican children are quickly returned to Mexico, children from noncontiguous countries, under U.S. law, are transferred to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to be processed and simultaneously placed in removal proceedings. The vast majority of these children are released by ORR into the custody of a parent, relative, or friend in the United States while they wait for their cases to progress through the immigration court system.[2]

Most unaccompanied children are likely to remain in unauthorized status in the United States for a long time, and many will experience substantial economic hardship.[3] The costs associated with the specific service needs of unaccompanied children are borne by local counties and school districts.

Yet the needs of unaccompanied child migrants are extensive. Many have little formal education, are not proficient in English, and have suffered socioeconomic hardship and trauma. Upon arriving in the country, they experience the challenges of living in an unfamiliar culture and reuniting with relatives they have not lived with in years, if ever, or, in a smaller number of cases, they enter the U.S. foster care system. Many find themselves amid unfamiliar faces; even those reuniting with parents and family members do so after long periods of separation.[4]

As these cases make their way through the courts, the children become further ingrained in communities and school districts across the country. Communities and school districts largely continue to face challenges in meeting the needs of these children and have responded in disparate ways to their arrival.

For example, Montgomery County (Maryland), with one of the largest concentrations of unaccompanied child migrants in the country,[5] has tapped into a number of programs, including a specialized program of instructional and emotional support for students with limited schooling and English skills, a bilingual parent volunteer program to help families navigate the school system, an entry-level job skills program for Spanish-speaking students who will not receive a diploma by the time they are 21, professional development courses and resources for educators in meeting the needs of undocumented students, and working groups to review the school district response to the needs of unaccompanied minors.[6] These programs are in conjunction with initiatives from the broader county government, including a mental health support program in the most affected schools, a cross-sector committee to coordinate the county's response to undocumented children, and an agreement with local colleges to support certain at-risk students.[7] The county's Care for Kids program provides affordable healthcare for children from low-income families who are not eligible for other state or federal health insurance programs.[8]

Some localities have created or use existing transitional programs or "newcomer academies" to ease the transition process. In San Francisco, the Mission Education Center serves newly arrived Spanish-speaking elementary school students[9] and provides one- and two-year programs to help students transfer into mainstream classes. And in Sussex County (Delaware), which already had in place a large Guatemalan population and supportive bilingual programs for students, teachers quickly put together a newcomer program for high school students, which enrolled 46 students in fall 2014.[10]

The Office of Refugee Resettlement also offers some short-term services.

ERIC GAY-POOL/GETTY IMAGES

Before child migrants are released to sponsors, they are housed in ORR-funded shelters where they receive classroom education, mental and medical health services, help in case management, and access to social opportunities and recreational facilities.[11] They also receive family reunification services to facilitate their safe and timely release to family members or other sponsors. In less than 5 percent of cases, and generally for children who are victims of trafficking or have disabilities,[12] ORR funds a home study (which includes background checks and interviews) to make sure the potential sponsor is able to ensure the child's safety and well-being.[13] However, most sponsors receive little screening.

Unaccompanied child migrants have been entering the United States for years, but the recent spike in their arrivals has made the issue more pressing. Though the unaccompanied child population has been characterized as temporary in nature, it is likely that a large number of these children will live in the United States for a long period, perhaps even permanently. As the primary institution that unaccompanied minors are entitled to access under U.S. law, schools offer a venue for providing needed services to these children. They bear this responsibility with very little federal support. Communities, service providers, and local schools need to know more about their arrival and stay, in order to allocate resources appropriately to best meet their needs.

(Endnotes on page 44)

Sarah Pierce is a research assistant with the U.S. Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Institute. This article is excerpted from the Migration Policy Institute's report Unaccompanied Child Migrants in U.S. Communities, Immigration Court, and Schools, *which is available at www.migrationpolicy.org/research/unaccompanied-child-migrants-us-communities-immigration-court-and-schools.*

For more on addressing the needs of unaccompanied children, visit **http://go.aft.org/BorderCrisis**.

sharemylesson
POWERED BY AFT

Teacher Leadership

THE IDEA of teacher leadership—educators playing a role in crafting their profession from the inside out—isn't new or revolutionary, but it has evolved over the past few years. For decades, the logical career trajectory for those seeking to advance in the profession consisted of moving from the classroom into administration. Becoming an administrator was seen as both a promotion and a symbol of leadership in a school building. As educator and author Charlotte Danielson has written, this was the only way to grow in what was perceived as a "flat" profession.

But successful schools require more than administrative leaders; they demand teacher leaders who directly work with students in the classroom. Because teachers tend to stay in the same schools and districts longer than administrators do, they have institutional knowledge that administrators may lack.

Just as important, classroom teachers have the instructional expertise necessary to carry out ideas and projects that principals or school boards may want to enact. And they can lend their perspective to important school reform discussions. As a result, it's crucial that teachers use their position as classroom experts to influence education policy debates and help their schools to improve.

Types of Teacher Leaders

There are two main types of teacher leaders: formal and informal. Formal teacher leaders take on responsibilities that come with particular positions, such as department chairs, master teachers, instructional coaches, and curriculum developers, some of which may require an application process.

Rather than being selected, informal teacher leaders take the initiative and earn the respect of their peers, although they lack official authority within their schools. Every teacher knows these types of leaders: those who do their jobs so well that novice and veteran teachers alike always seek their advice.

Roles for Informal Teacher Leaders

As detailed below, teacher leaders can take on many types of roles, and it's important to find the one that best fits you and your personality. That's where the Share My Lesson website can help.

Lesson plan provider

Have a great catalogue of activities, handouts, lessons, or other resources you can share? Then do it! Ask colleagues if they need your resources to teach a particular unit. Or if you notice a newer teacher struggling with organizing his classroom, share successful strategies you have learned over the years. Interested in sharing with a larger group? Post your resources today on the AFT's own Share My Lesson website: **www.sharemylesson.com**.

Mentor

Informal mentorship can be one of the most rewarding types of teacher leadership. Rather than being used as a replacement for formal mentorship programs offered by many school districts, informal mentoring can help all teachers, not just new ones.

Perhaps you've observed a colleague do something amazing, and you think she can have an impact well beyond her particular classroom. Spend some time with that teacher to plan ways to share her successful approach with others. For more on informal mentoring, visit: **http://go.aft.org/AE216sml1**.

Blogger

Have something to say about education but not sure anyone will listen? Try blogging. Take a stand on issues affecting your school, share your curriculum planning expertise, and grow your own professional learning network. For more on blogging, visit **www.sharemylesson.com/blog**.

Teacherpreneur

Interested in exerting more influence within your school and throughout the profession as a whole? Grow your influence without leaving the classroom by becoming a "teacherpreneur."

This term was popularized by Barnett Berry (whose article about teacher-powered schools appears on page 11 of this issue) and the TeacherSolutions 2030 Team, who in 2011 wrote *Teaching 2030: What We Must Do for Our Students and Our Public Schools—Now and in the Future*. According to the Center for Teaching Quality, which Berry leads, teacherpreneurs are educators who "hold hybrid roles: leading beyond their schools while continuing to teach students part of the time." For more on teacherpreneurs, visit **http://go.aft.org/AE216sml2**.

The Need for Leadership

The time has come for more teachers to become leaders in their school communities. The voices of those who work with students each day must be heard. Hopefully the ideas outlined here will encourage you to consider your strengths as a leader and explore ways to get involved.

–THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM

Reconnecting McDowell

(Continued from page 9)

"The only thing stronger than fear is hope. And this program definitely delivers it."

Visits to places as storied as the Greenbrier, an iconic resort in the Allegheny Mountains, about a two-and-a-half-hour drive from McDowell, have enabled Nealen to see "the other side of life," as he puts it. Although a friend of his works at the Greenbrier and has shown him pictures, seeing it in person is different—and better. "Just knowing that I walked into the same building that certain celebrities and athletes have come to is amazing," he says.

But for Nealen, a history buff who hopes to become a civil rights attorney, this visit pales in comparison to the Broader Horizons trip to Washington, D.C. Seeing the White House, the Supreme Court, and the Library of Congress, as well as meeting with his representatives and senators on Capitol Hill, thanks to staff members from the AFT, were among the highlights.

Just as memorable, Nealen says, was the time he was invited to speak at a Reconnecting McDowell meeting to let Randi Weingarten, Gayle Manchin, and the rest of the board know all that the program has done for him. After he gave what he calls a "decent speech," he received a standing ovation that thrilled him.

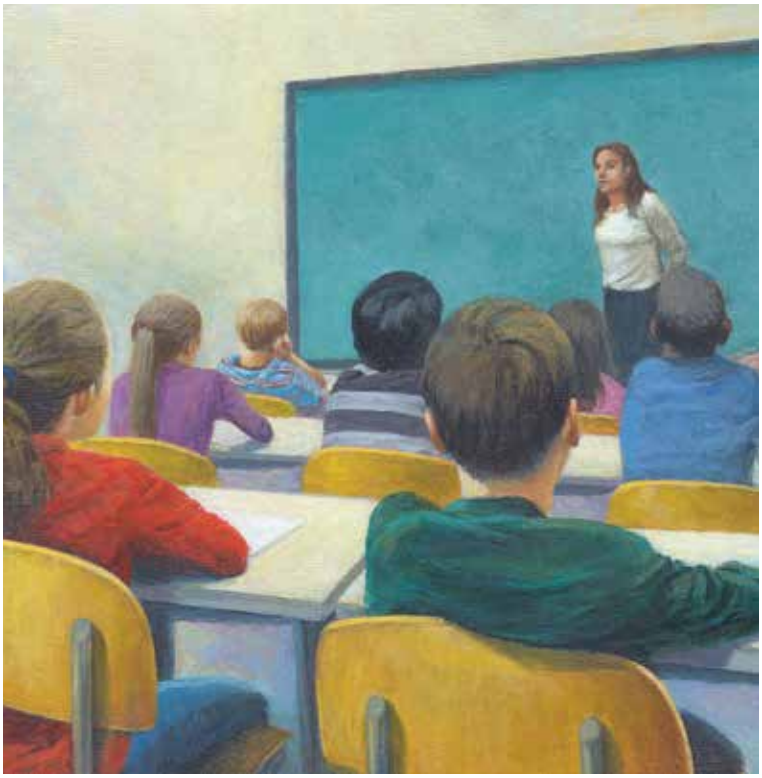
"I want these kids to experience every facet" of life, says Superintendent Nelson Spencer, who is grateful for the exposure that such trips have given students. "So now when someone talks about a five-star resort, well, it has a meaning to them." Spencer acknowledges that while students can read about Washington's monuments in a book or on a website, walking up the steps of the U.S. Capitol or seeing the expansive White House lawn up close is much more powerful. "The more experiences you have as a human being, the more you can draw from them and make intelligent decisions," he says.

Such experiences have given Rebecca Hicks the confidence to pursue higher education far from McDowell. In the fall, the senior at River View will attend Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. Hicks received a full scholarship to attend the prestigious liberal arts institution, where she plans to double major in English and economics. One day she hopes to be a novelist and run a nonprofit that helps disadvantaged people become more self-reliant by teaching them to recycle water sustainably. As a resident of McDowell, the need for sustainability has often crossed her mind. "Our natural resources are running out, and, aside from coal, we have nothing to offer to the global world, so we are quickly being forgotten," she says.

But Hicks is doing her part to counter that trend. She has spent her high school years trying to improve the county's environment. Through a science enrichment program run by the state, she started McDowell's first recycling program. Within its first year, the amount of paper the program recycled was the equivalent of 800 trees, she says proudly.

Taking a page from Broader Horizons, Hicks also started a mentoring program at her high school. The program matches seniors with freshmen to help them apply to college, study for the ACT, and prepare to leave River View.

In the six years since her high school opened, Rebecca Hicks says, not one student has attended college out of state, making her the first.



In the six years since her high school opened, Hicks says, not one student has attended college out of state, making her the first. When we talked, she had not yet visited Carleton. But Reconnecting McDowell was working on flying Hicks and her grandparents to see the campus for the first time. She says her grandparents, who have never been on a plane, are excited but apprehensive about her latest adventure. "They've rarely left West Virginia, so it's a big cultural shift for them to start expanding their perspective."

However, they are grateful for the opportunities that Reconnecting McDowell has afforded her. Bob Brown recalls the time several months ago when Hicks's grandfather broke down and cried as he thanked him for letting her see the world. Brown, overcome by the outpouring of emotion, simply told him, "That's what this program is for." ☐

Teacher-Powered Schools

(Continued from page 17)

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Unaccompanied Children

(Continued from page 41)

Endnotes

1. "Central America" here refers to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, the three countries in Central America that have significant migration flows to the United States.

2. William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-457, 122 Stat. 5044 (2008). Removal and removal proceedings refer to the administrative processes used to determine whether an individual is eligible for removal or deportation under U.S. immigration law. Individuals who are removable may apply during these proceedings for relief from removal, or for eligibility to stay in the United States.

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