Teaching is complex. It is a well-researched fact that teachers make more than 1,500 meaningful decisions per day. We make these consequential daily decisions based on a substantial breadth and depth of skills and knowledge. We are degreed professionals. Our practice is grounded in the science of learning, content knowledge, and diverse pedagogical skills that ensure each lesson is based on a variety of teaching methods, learning activities, and assignments.

We tap into our intelligence, creativity, empathy, and deep caring every minute of every day as we craft respectful, responsive learning opportunities for every student. The community should expect no less.

According to the US Department of Education, “Teachers are the backbone of our democracy – fostering curiosity and creativity, building skillful individuals, and strengthening informed citizens. A great teacher in every classroom is one of the most important resources we can provide students.”

So, why would some Albuquerque Public School Board members want to limit our teaching to a one-size-fits-all approach? Who benefits from their effort to limit the tools we use to meet the needs of diverse learners? Are they considering students’ needs when they insist we merely use the one instructional material the district decides to purchase?

THE CONTROVERSY

These APS Board members are working hard to revive an old, tired myth that teachers don’t know how to teach. The false narrative regularly repeated at Board of Education (BoE) meetings is that we teach “whatever we want” because of the professional rights guaranteed to us in the APS/ATF Negotiated Agreement. This is unabashed union-busting.

Our BoE has come to be dominated by educator-bashing board members and their big-business donors.
Disrespectful comments, falsehoods, fabrications, and stereotypes of bad teachers who can't be trusted to make decisions framed the arguments of four BoE members who voted to table the ratification of our negotiated contract last year.

Power was a central theme. These board members asserted that educators have too much power to make educational decisions for our students. They said we have “taken” the BoE’s power. They believe the board should make educational decisions about what and how we teach. They think the professionals who work every day with our students should follow textbooks like scripts and never differentiate our instruction or materials to meet students’ needs.

“I think we’re living in la-la land if we think [educators’] professional judgment actually works. We know it doesn’t.”
APS Board Member Danielle Gonzales (District 3), BoE Meeting 8-17-2022

Teacher bashing like this is not just an expression of a few personal opinions. It’s insulting, but the insults are actually part of a well-funded, politically motivated, anti-public education agenda deeply embedded in the charter school industry and funded by billionaires who ultimately wish to privatize our public schools.

Educator-bashing of this kind is a tried and tested technique championed at the national level by the education “reform” movement for decades.

ENTER ATTUNED EDUCATION PARTNERS

Having just won her seat in 2021, APS Board member and avowed education “reformer” Danielle Gonzales raised a quarter of a million dollars in just two weeks from corporate donors to hire a private company called Attuned Education Partners. Attuned conducted an “audit” of APS’ instructional program to guide the creation of a district strategic plan.

A quick Google search tells you all you need to know about Attuned. They are a for-profit, pro-charter school company.

Of the 34 team members listed in the “Who We Are” section of their website, at least 28 worked for the charter school industry.

According to multiple APS educators, Attuned employees spent no longer than a few minutes observing in a handful of classrooms while gathering data for their report.

Anyone with half a brain will tell you that this is not how you conduct serious, balanced research. Data collection must be extensive and rigorous to thoroughly back up any generalizing claims — unless you selectively collect and present data to legitimize false, foregone conclusions.

THE CHARTER HYPOCRISY

When four APS Board members voted to table the APS/ATF Negotiated Agreement last year, they cited the negotiated right of educators to exercise our professional
What the audit described as district-adopted High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) were not being used in over 70% of observed classrooms. Overall, the audit claimed, students were provided with opportunities to respond authentically to grade-level tasks in only 38% of observations.

The contract language in the crosshairs of the board’s scorn reads, “Educators have the discretion to augment the District-approved curricular programs. Educators may also adjust the pacing and scope and sequence of District-approved curricular programs to align with the CCSS [Common Core State Standards].”

To prove that our professional discretion is bad for kids, the board hired Attuned, a company with deep charter roots and a clear anti-public education agenda. Ironically, charter schools are purported to free educators from professional constraints so we can craft schools and classrooms that have a better chance of meeting students’ unique needs. With their relative autonomy, charter schools are touted as a way to spur school and classroom innovations.

How’s this for hypocrisy? Education “reformers” — who simultaneously bash public education systems and the professionals working in them and have deep connections to charters — claim charter schools are needed because they foster innovative teaching strategies and school structures. Yet, they are the same people who want to permanently bind educators to whatever textbook companies decide our kids — who they don’t know — should learn.

The discussion draft Attuned presented to the APS Board in January 2023 includes these statements identified in red as negative:

- What the audit described as district-adopted High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) were not being used in over 70% of observed classrooms.
- Overall, the audit claimed, students were provided with opportunities to respond authentically to grade-level tasks in only 38% of observations.

These claims are practically copied and pasted from a teacher-bashing report published by TNTP (formerly known as The New Teacher Project) called The Opportunity Myth.

In fact, four of Attuned Education Partners’ team members previously worked at TNTP. Attuned’s Chief Learning and Knowledge Officer Ana Menezes even served as TNTP Vice President.

Can you smell the bias?

**A CONVENIENT MYTH**

You can find The Opportunity Myth at opportunitymyth.tntp.org. Search the document for the phrase “grade level” and you’ll encounter language nearly identical to that used in the Attuned report about APS teachers.

Education advocate and writer Thomas Ultican has identified TNTP as a core element of the “Destroy Public Education Movement.” Ultican describes TNTP as “one of several organizations that only exist because billionaires have financed them” to disrupt public education and the teaching profession.

TNTP’s report claims to expose what it labels the “opportunity myth” in American education: that while schools purport to prepare students well, they don’t deliver. Why? Because, according to the report, most educators are bad at their jobs and their
poor decisions are the reason students of color and kids from low-income families fail in school and struggle in higher education. According to TNTP, “Students spend most of their time in school without access to four key resources: grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers who hold high expectations.”

As with all the other non-peer-reviewed privatization propaganda TNTP churns out, the data behind the report’s findings is cooked to suit TNTP’s anti-educator bias.

Journalist and former educator Peter Greene has written a piece on *The Opportunity Myth* which expertly skewers the report’s flawed data-gathering:

“There are somewhere under 15,000 school districts in the country. TNTP ‘partnered’ with five of them. That is not an impressive sample size — and they weren’t even randomly selected. This is like deciding that, since you have a problem with geese running into jets at the airport, you will go study some penguins in the zoo.

They observed 1,000 lessons — but that’s 200 per system. They followed 4,000 students, but that’s just 800 per school. Within each system, according to their technical appendix, they divided the district into elementary, middle and high grades. Then they split those subgroups between 1/2 above-average students and 1/2 below-average students. So the study literally does not include any average students. Ten teachers volunteered from each school, and each teacher picked two classes to have included in the study.

For the three urban districts, the percentage of students involved in the study was 5% or lower. In the single rural district, 64% of the district’s students were in a study classroom.

But wait — there’s less!! In each of the two classrooms, the participating teachers selected six students — two way below level, two just below level, and two above level. So once we dig down, we find a tiny sampling of students that is skewed toward underachievers. Well — relative underachievers, because these six were within one classroom. So presumably we’ve got the student in an AP classroom who is in over her head, and we’ve got the student who is taking the low-level class that is way below his ability.

From this tiny not-even-sort-of-random sampling, the authors are able to make all sorts of sweeping statements about how different sorts of students are being educated in this country.”

**THE POSTER CHILD OF EDUCATOR-BASHING “REFORMERS”**

Originally called The New Teachers Project, TNTP was co-founded by a figurehead of the “reform” movement, former Washington, D.C. Chancellor of Schools Michelle Rhee. Few have done more to push the educator-bashing narrative.

During her tenure at the helm of DC Public Schools, Rhee rapidly set about opening charter school after charter school in the buildings of public schools she shut down. She also fired hundreds of public educators and went to war with the teachers’ union.

These authoritarian power moves won her the unabashed support of corporate media outlets. Time magazine even went as far as to lionize Rhee’s purge of educators.
More than 75% of respondents pushed back against the attempt to remove our right to exercise professional judgment. Likewise, three-quarters of respondents felt not enough is being done to encourage collaboration and communication between educators. 63% of respondents said they are treated disrespectfully by school administrators. Just under 60% said they aren’t given the latitude needed to address the needs of each student. 44% said they planned to retire in the next five years with 19% saying they would likely retire in the next two years. 84% of the respondents said that the efforts to reduce paperwork and non-

In an op-ed piece in the Washington Post, education specialist Valerie Strauss stressed that, despite working for a Democratic mayoral administration, Rhee chose to listen to “unelected billionaires and conservative ideologues without any education expertise” over the advice of many professionals and community leaders in D.C. who had a strong history of advocating for improving the district’s public schools.

By the end of Rhee’s D.C. chancellorship, significant achievement gaps remained between students in high-performing and low-performing school districts, and between white and Black students. Despite this, Rhee contends that student achievement in D.C. public schools greatly improved under her watch — something education historian Diane Ravitch categorically rejects. Ravitch argues that “cheating, teaching to bad tests, institutionalized fraud, dumbing down of tests, and a narrowed curriculum” were the true outcomes of Rhee’s tenure.

Although Rhee’s reputation is tarnished, her legacy lives on through the work of anti-public education organizations like TNTP and Attuned.

When APS Board Member Danielle Gonzales raised $250,000 and hired a private company with extensive connections to the charter school movement to publish an educator-bashing report, she did it to justify her “education reform” agenda. But it’s clear that Gonzales and the other hostile, anti-union BoE members don’t serve our students. They serve the interests of the reform movement’s nefarious funders.

**FIX THE SYSTEM, NOT THE PEOPLE!**

Teachers and students have the same needs.

**What’s good for educators is good for students because our teaching conditions are students’ learning conditions.**

As educators, we are proud of our work. We are trained professionals. We know what our students’ interests are and how best to meet their needs. One of the most pressing issues in retaining quality educators in our schools is teacher efficacy. Educators’ ability to make professional decisions on how to best serve our students has been proven to enhance both educators’ feelings of value and students’ success.

If you want to know what improvements are needed to help public education thrive in Albuquerque, don’t listen to billionaire-owned think tanks and pro-charter private companies, listen to the voices of the people who actually do the work. Listen to educators.

Every year, the Albuquerque Teachers Federation conducts a survey of our members on which we base our negotiations with APS. In our 2023 survey, ATF members gave detailed responses that clearly show how our system is broken and how best to fix it.

Here’s the truth from the practitioners:

- More than 75% of respondents pushed back against the attempt to remove our right to exercise professional judgment.
- Likewise, three-quarters of respondents felt not enough is being done to encourage collaboration and communication between educators.
- 63% of respondents said they are treated disrespectfully by school administrators.
- Just under 60% said they aren’t given the latitude needed to address the needs of each student.
- 44% said they planned to retire in the next five years with 19% saying they would likely retire in the next two years.
- 84% of the respondents said that the efforts to reduce of paperwork and non-
For public education to thrive in Albuquerque, we can’t have a school board dominated by members beholden to private “reform” companies and billionaire-funded think tanks.

Our current superintendent has announced that he will step down at the end of the next school year. That means the APS Board will hire the next superintendent!

It’s up to us to ensure our next superintendent is chosen by board members who actually want to preserve and improve our public schools.

This November, we MUST elect school board members who will respect educators and strengthen our public education system.

ATF-endorsed school board candidates running for election this November are:

District 1 - Robert Trujillo
District 2 - Ronalda Tome-Warito
District 4 – Heather Benavidez

If you are an APS educator who is not yet a union member, JOIN YOUR UNION NOW. It is our collective voice that will protect us from those who wish us harm and would dismantle our public schools.

If you are a union member, contribute or increase your contributions to your union’s Committee on Political Education (COPE) so that we can fight back against the big money pouring into the 2023 board race from those who want to destroy public education in Albuquerque.

Most importantly, vote, get everyone you know to vote for our endorsed candidates, and help us get out the vote by phone banking and canvassing this fall.

Email act@atfunion.org to learn about opportunities to get involved.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

For public education to thrive in Albuquerque, we can’t have a school board dominated by members beholden to private “reform” companies and billionaire-funded think tanks.

Based on the results of our survey, we can conclusively say the following matters need to be addressed so that strong educators stay in our schools and help our students succeed:

- Reduce educators’ workloads and non-teaching duties.
- Ensure respect and support from administration.
- Protect our ability to make decisions related to our profession.
- Value collaboration and communication. Uplift educator and staff voices.
- Provide us with additional resources to meet professional responsibilities and student needs.
- Increase supports for students by hiring the essential related services staff needed to educate the whole child.
- Provide better mental health support for staff.
- Reduce reliance on additional assessments related to standardized testing and reduce district assessment requirements.

JOIN YOUR UNION