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# PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PRESIDENT

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## Abstract

KATE President Nathan Whitman provides personal and general educational reflections and insights into the 2022 school year, including an overview of educational fads in government, a statistical snapshot of trends and problems in teacher retention – including censorship, happenings within KATE’s programming for educators, and a call to action.

## Keywords

perspectives, reflection, COVID-19, pandemic, teachers, retention, education, turnover, statistics, educational leadership, censorship, No Child Left Behind, NCLB, redesign, colleagues, hope



If one thing is certain, this year has been one of constant change and *uncertainty*. For me, personally, this change came in the form of working for a new district—a change that was much needed for mental health and opportunities for professional growth. Even though I was moving from a building of 250 to a building of more than 2,000, for the first time, I had the opportunity to work with a true English department (no more one-man show!). There was a lot to be nervous about, but despite the uncertainty, I had the opportunity to help lead our school’s Gender and Sexuality Alliance. I had the opportunity to grow relationships with new colleagues and students in the building I graduated from, while improving its climate and environment for them. In a year where lots of stress and uncertainty surrounded me, I was able to find the good of change, yet I recognize change isn’t always for the better. Oftentimes change leads to mixed or muddled results, and, in the worst-case scenario, disaster.

In my decade of teaching, I’ve witnessed the tail end of the devastating Brownback administration’s effect on Kansas education coupled with the woefully implemented No Child Left Behind. I’ve witnessed the pearl clutching and fear-mongering surrounding the well-intentioned attempt to implement Common Core State Standards. I’ve witnessed and participated in school redesign. I’ve also witnessed how Governor Kelly helped to revitalize funding for Kansas schools, only for those efforts to be undermined by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Consequently, like my colleagues, I’ve never before witnessed such flux in the state of Kansas, let alone the nation, when it comes to teaching and staffing shortages. As of right now, there are 1,664 teaching vacancies in the state (*Educate Kansas*, 2022). An exodus of unprecedented proportions is occurring in our nation’s public schools; 51% of all teacher vacancies are from resignation, and the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to 61% of all staffing shortages (National

Center for Education Statistics, 2022). On top of staffing, teachers presently feel like or find that they are under attack from those who wish to censor the diverse offerings of libraries, classrooms, and curriculum: *All Boys Aren't Blue*, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, and even *Romeo and Juliet*—among others—have found themselves in the crosshairs of concerned parents and overzealous congressional leaders. Our state and nation are at a tipping point, and I wish I had a solution. However, I know that there is no one absolute fix for all of this.

What does one do in this present climate to stay sane and stay in the profession? I, for one, look to my colleagues for renewal and inspiration—like this year's return of the [KATE Fall Annual Conference](#) with Laura Packer and Samira Ahmed, or the silver linings of what the pandemic did bring to education. Innovative approaches to technology, integration, funding, and movement towards increased equity have made great strides amid the hardships. I also look toward future KATE Book Clubs and the return of gatherings like [KATE Camp](#). It's easy to look at the negatives because even though we're more connected in a digital age, we may still be geographically far apart, and we are waiting for the hope that the CDC data will bring regarding how and what endemic COVID-19 will look like. Nevertheless, I know that there is hope.

Thus, one thing I challenge all teachers of English reading this journal to do is to reflect on the connections they have with their departments, with one another, with their students, and with their communities. I also encourage you to take the scholarship, poems, teaching tips, and advice from educators featured in this journal and make positive change in your classrooms and teaching practices. Finally, embrace the change of the seasons. It's summer! You've earned your break. And, if you are going to leave the profession, run towards something greater. Effect change on a larger front: run for your local Board of Education. Run for office. Give voice to those of us still in our classrooms trying to effect change one pupil at a time.

### References

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### Author Biography

Nathan G. Whitman (he/him), M.A. English, B.A. Secondary English Education & Creative Writing, is the current Kansas Association of Teachers of English President and the Editor in Chief of its [Voices of Kansas](#) journal. He teaches English at Derby High School USD 260 and is also an adjunct professor at Hutchinson Community College and WSU Tech. He is a recipient of the 2014 Kansas Cable Telecommunications Horizon Award and a member of the Kansas Exemplary Educators Network. He can be reached at [nwhitman@usd260.com](mailto:nwhitman@usd260.com) and on Twitter [@writerwhitman](#).

