May 15, 2019

Dear AEA members,

We are writing to address member concerns about the AEA 2018 Annual Conference’s Thursday morning plenary, “American Grit,” performed by Brooke Haycock from the Education Trust (now of the Baltimore City Public Schools). In her performance, Ms. Haycock portrayed the experiences of youth of color, sharing a piece she regularly performs for diverse audiences in order to educate, promote social justice and encourage activism; this performance, however, offended some members of the AEA conference audience who experienced the performance as hurtful and disrespectful.

We are very sorry and apologize to those members who felt offended, angry or hurt by that performance. As president and executive director, it is our wish and commitment to ensure a program that is uplifting, informative, inspirational, and constructively challenging. A hallmark of our conference is that, year after year, it creates a welcoming space where we can reunite, learn and support each other in our professional endeavors, and if some of us have a negative experience, it matters to all of us.

We have been in conversations with some of you about how to avoid such experience in the future, and in response, we have new clauses in speaker contracts about acceptable practices, a robust review of plenary presenters, disclosures, and plans for a special safe space at the conference for conversations if needed.

This difficult experience has given the AEA community a chance to think creatively and constructively about how to rise stronger and ensure that we continue to have a positive conference experience for all participants. We are grateful for all of your suggestions and ideas.

Sincerely,

Tessie Tzavaras Catsambas      Anisha Lewis
AEA President                  AEA Executive Director

More about Brooke’s work can be found at: https://edtrust.org/team/brooke-haycock/ and https://edtrust.org/issue/student-experiences/. Her performance used data from transcripts of more than 300 interviews she conducted over time and with youth, educators, and leaders from higher education, business, and industry. The characters and dialogue in her
performances are excerpts from interview transcripts in the form of a performance. You can learn more about her process and intent by viewing the Q&A session that followed the performance at the AEA conference: https://www.dropbox.com/s/xdyydtaqxbkocjz/2983.mp4?dl=0