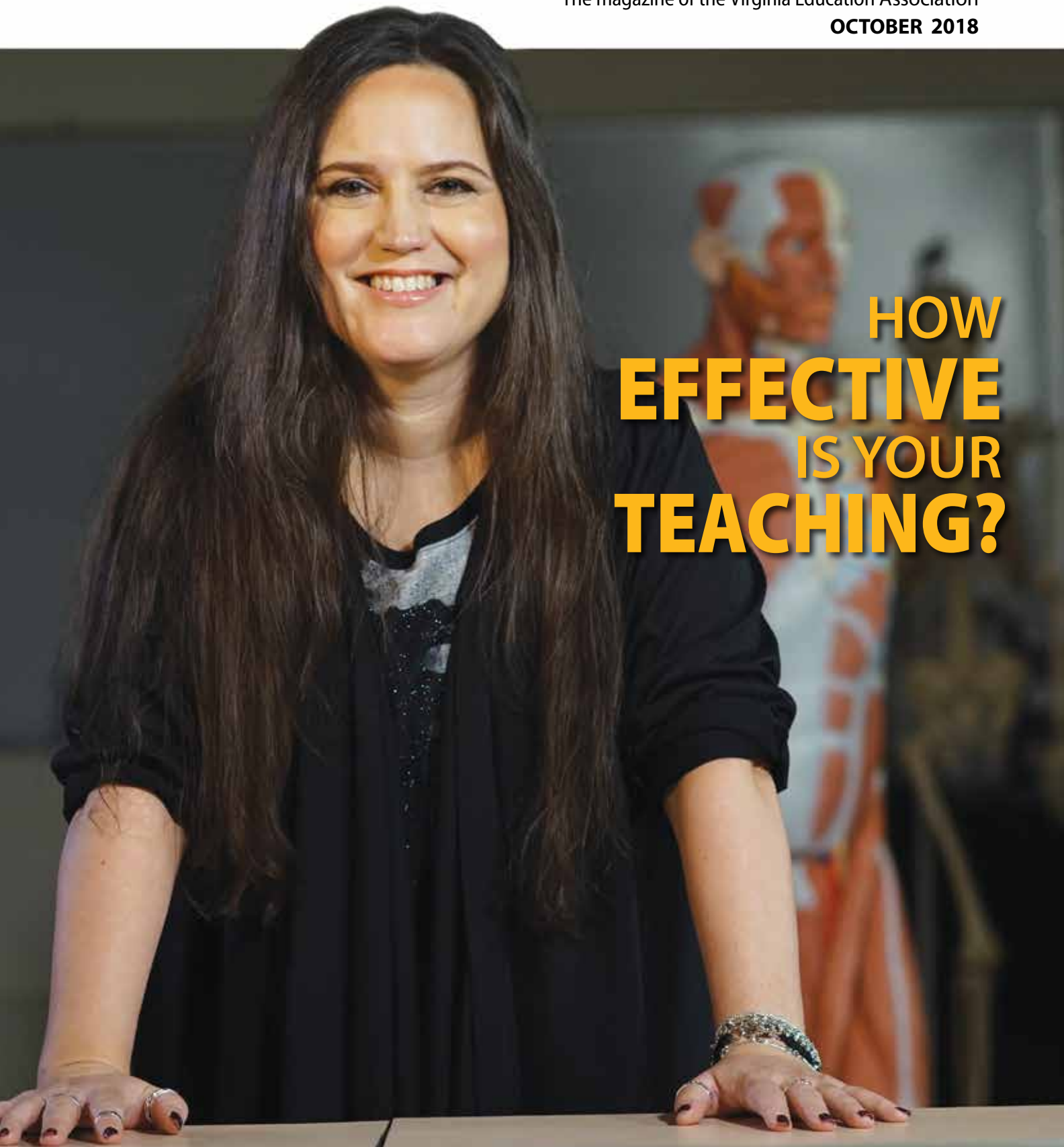


VIRGINIA  
JOURNAL of

# EDUCATION N

The magazine of the Virginia Education Association

OCTOBER 2018



HOW  
EFFECTIVE  
IS YOUR  
TEACHING?



8

## COVER STORY

Master Your Craft: Four Things  
Effective Teachers Do Especially Well

# CONTENTS

## UPFRONT

### 4-7 **This month:**

Appreciating teenagers, helping hungry students, a "Teacher Cabinet."

## FEATURES

### 14 **More Than Capitals, Rivers, and Climate Maps**

How GIS technology is making geography more meaningful for both students and teachers.

### 17 **Mounting Pressure**

The importance placed on SOL test scores has changed the climate in our schools.

## DEPARTMENTS

### 20 **Membership Matters**

Association leaders spent the summer in training.

### 24 **Insight on Instruction**

10 tips for new teachers (they work for veterans, too!).

### 30 **First Person**

Educators can be a shelter from the storm.

Cover Photo by Moses Mitchell Photography.



"Can we wait just a second?  
I'm downloading the Excuse app."



#### **Editor**

Tom Allen

#### **VEA President**

Jim Livingston

#### **Interim VEA Executive Director**

Tim Dedman

#### **Communications Director**

John O'Neil

#### **Graphic Designer**

Lisa Sale

#### **Editorial Assistant/Advertising Representative**

Yolanda Morris

---

#### **Contributors**

CHRIS BUNIN

BILL PIKE

KATHY SYDNOR

JAMES H. STRONGE

XIANXUAN XU

COURTNEY CUTRIGHT

---

Vol. 112, No. 1

Copyright © 2018 by the Virginia Education Association

*The Virginia Journal of Education (ISSN 0270-837X) is published six times a year (October, November, December, February, April and June) by the Virginia Education Association, 116 South Third Street, Richmond, VA 23219.*

#### **Non-member annual subscription rate:**

\$10 (\$15 outside the U.S. and Canada). Rights to reproduce any article or portion thereof may be granted upon request to the editor. Periodicals postage paid in Richmond, VA.

#### **Postmaster:** Send address changes to

*Virginia Journal of Education, 116 South Third Street, Richmond, VA 23219.*

**Article proposals, comments or questions may be sent to the editor at [tallen@veanea.org](mailto:tallen@veanea.org) or**

**Tom Allen**, 116 South Third Street, Richmond, VA 23219, 800-552-9554.

**Member:** State Education Association Communicators

#### **VEA Vision:**

A great public school for every child in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

#### **VEA Mission:**

The mission of the Virginia Education Association is to unite our members and local communities across the Commonwealth in fulfilling the promise of a high quality public education that successfully prepares every single student to realize his or her full potential. We believe this can be accomplished by advocating for students, education professionals, and support professionals.





"I text. Do I really need to learn the vowels?"

## Now *That's* a Productive Meeting!

Katy Anthes is the Education Commissioner for the state of Colorado, and she may be on to something: She's created a 20-member Teacher Cabinet to help her navigate the state's public education terrain. The Cabinet's members are all practicing teachers with a minimum of three years of classroom experience.

Anthes knows where to find top-notch expertise. "I believe teaching is, in fact, harder than rocket science, and as we grapple with some of our complex challenges, I want to tap into the best thinking from educators all over the state," she says, noting that the Cabinet will serve as a sounding board on education policy and will help brainstorm solutions for challenges faced in today's schools. ●



## Wisdom From NEA's 2018 ESP of the Year

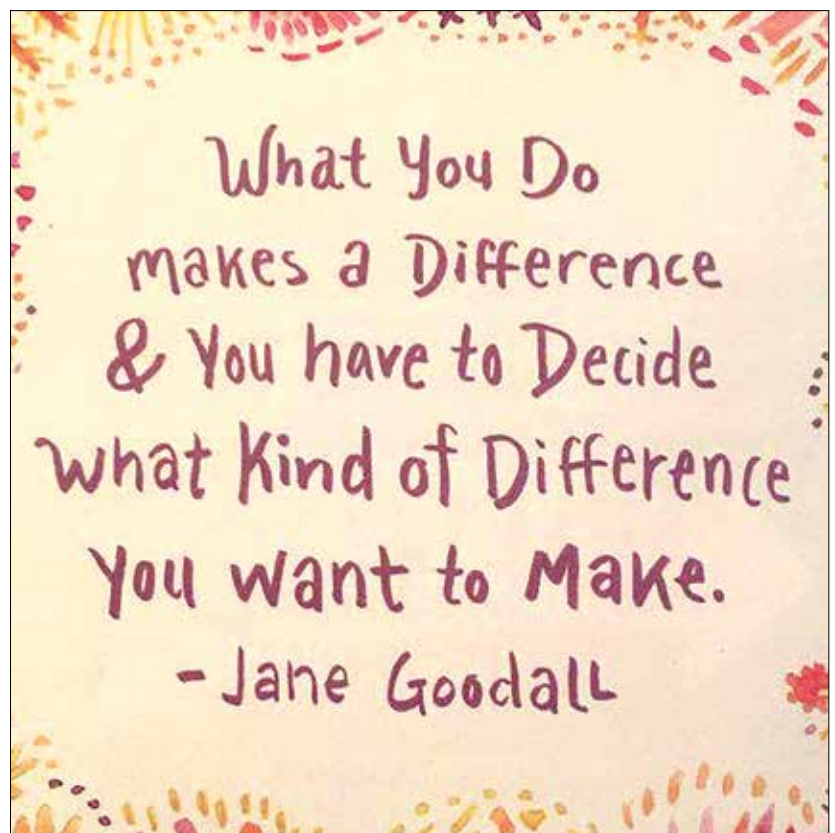
"We get up every morning before the sun rises and do our jobs. And do them well, I might add. We care for our kids. We nurture them. We love them. We educate them. We challenge and guide them. Whether others believe it or not, we create and touch the future in our own way. No one can ever take that away from us, no matter how hard they try.

Most of us will never make the headlines and our names will never be marked in the halls of fame.

But if we work together, we can achieve our vision. Years from now, when people take the time to look back on this incredible moment in history, they will know and learn about us. They will know that we stood strong and sacrificed much for a cause greater than our own." ●



*Sherry Shaw, a special education paraeducator from Alaska*



## Suicide Prevention: You Can Play an Important Role

Some grim facts about Virginia, from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for our young people ages 15-34.
- Almost three times as many people die in Virginia from suicide as from homicide.
- The numbers work out to one suicide death every 8 hours in the commonwealth.

As educators, you're uniquely positioned to pick up on suicide's warning signals. And, not surprisingly, your best preparation is education. Here are a few organizations that could, perhaps, help you save a life:

- The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, a national nonprofit dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide, and helping those affected by it.  
[www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)
- The National Association for School Psychologists offers resources on school-focused suicide intervention and tips for educators through the NASP Crisis Resources link.  
[www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)
- The Suicide Awareness Voices of Education promotes suicide prevention through public awareness and education.  
[www.save.org](http://www.save.org)●

**TEEN SPIRIT** "TEENAGERS ARE FUN. THEY'RE WITTY, CREATIVE, INQUISITIVE, PASSIONATE, AND TOTALLY UNPREDICTABLE. YES, THEY HAVE PIMPLES, THEIR VOICES SQUEAK, THEY ARE AWKWARD AND SENSITIVE, THEY SMELL BAD SOMETIMES, THEY SAY INAPPROPRIATE THINGS, THEY TEST THE BOUNDARIES. BUT THEY MAKE ME LAUGH EVERY DAY."

—Anne-Marie Cormier-Bausch, a 27-year veteran high school foreign language teacher

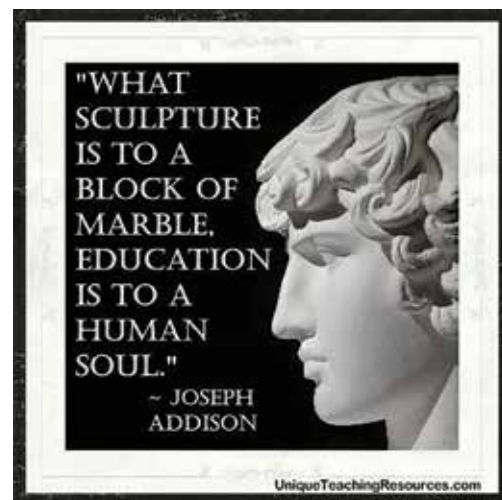


## Bringing Hungry Students and Meals Together

Any educator can tell you that a child in school whose stomach is rumbling from hunger isn't going to learn like he or she should. This is a significant problem in Virginia, but to the organization No Kid Hungry, it's one that can be solved.

No Kid's philosophy is that we've got plenty of food here in America, and we've got effective meal programs, too—the problem is that not enough kids know about and use those programs. School breakfasts, summer meals, and after-school meals are all available.

To find out how your students can benefit, visit [va.nokidhungry.org](http://va.nokidhungry.org)●



Illustrations by iStock

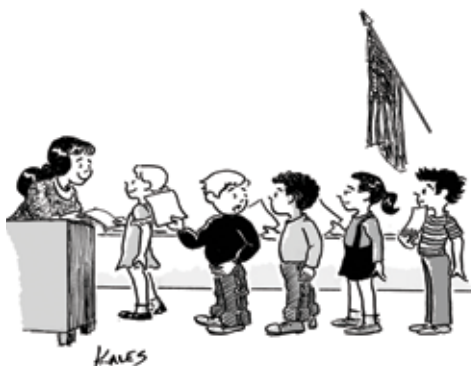


"Once upon a time, in a faraway land with a budget surplus..."



**YOUR POWER TO INFLUENCE** "MY THIRD GRADE TEACHER CAME UP TO MY MOTHER ONCE AT A PARENT-TEACHER MEETING AND SHE SAID, 'YOUR SON USED A WORD THAT I WAS TOTALLY AMAZED BY—HE SAID AUDACITY.'"

— Rapper Kendrick Lamar, winner of multiple Grammys and a Pulitzer Prize



"Mrs. Killen knows everything. I think she's secretly a robot."

## Teens Online for Many of Their Waking Hours; Facebook No Longer Top Dog

After dominating youth social media affections for years, Facebook is no longer king of the hill. A new survey by the Pew Research Center notes that



while just over half (51 percent) of American teens remain Facebook users, it has now been surpassed by three other contenders: YouTube (used by 85 percent of teens), Instagram (72 percent), and Snapchat (61 percent).

Whatever social media they may be using, U.S. teens are likely to be doing it on their smartphones: A full 95 percent now say they have one, or at least access to one, up from 73 percent in Pew's 2014-15 survey.

And, because they can be in cyberspace through those phones just about anywhere and anytime, a full 45 percent of teens say they're online on a "near-constant" basis. Another 44 percent say they're online at least several times a day, so just **about 90 percent of teens** are online for big chunks of time every day.

All that online time leaves teens divided about social media's impact. Almost one-third (31 percent) say social media's effects are "mostly positive," while 24 percent call those effects "mostly negative." However, almost half (45 percent) say social media's results in their lives are neither positive nor negative. ●

**OFF THE BOOKS** "NOT ONLY DO YOU LOSE THE PERSON CURATING THE RESOURCES FOR INFORMATIONAL AND PLEASURE READING, BUT YOU LOSE THE PERSON WHO CAN WORK WITH STUDENTS ON THE ETHICAL SIDE—HOW DO YOU CITE? HOW DO YOU DETERMINE A CREDIBLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION?"

— Steven Yates, president, American Association of School Librarians, commenting about research showing that America's public school districts have lost 20 percent of their librarians and media specialists since 2000

## It's Not "Just" Your Imagination!

"In America, the imagination is generally looked on as something that might be useful when the TV is out of order," says author Ursula K. LeGuin. "I think the imagination is the single most useful tool mankind possesses. Young human beings need exercises in imagination as they need exercise in all the basic skills of life, bodily and mental: for growth, for health, for competence, for joy. This need continues as long as the mind is alive."

Teacher Dianne Pappafotopoulos offers these suggestions for getting your students some imagination exercise, in *eSchool News*:

- Have them solve a problem collaboratively.
- Ask them to write a new and different ending to a well-known story.
- Encourage them to look at all sides of an issue and see the ethical ramifications and associated empathy.

Then, have them share their creative outcomes. ●



education is not  
preparation for  
life; education is  
life itself  
-John Dewey

## Teacher-Landlords? Many Educators Using Airbnb to Supplement Incomes

In what may seem a revealing commentary on the way we underpay our teachers, Airbnb, the popular online service allowing people to rent out their homes to travelers, released a report showing that almost 10 percent of its U.S. hosts are educators. Compare that figure with this one: National Center for Education Statistics figures suggest that less than 2 percent of American adults work as full-time K-12 teachers.

In at least two states, Utah and Wisconsin, over 25 percent of Airbnb hosts work in education.

Financially stressed teachers are supplementing their incomes to the tune of about \$6,500 a year, on average, which is, for most, a significant percentage of their salaries. Airbnb reports that 45,000 teachers rented out their homes or parts thereof in 2017, bringing in some \$160 million in total earnings. A third of that income came in during summer months, but many teachers are using Airbnb year-round. ●









# MASTER YOUR *Craft*

Four things effective teachers do especially well.

By James H. Stronge and Xianxuan Xu

**T**ime and again, studies show that teachers are the most influential school-related force in student success. But why? What do teachers do that so magically affects student learning? And can they all learn to do it? We can do a better job of answering those questions now, as research on teacher effectiveness has made momentous advances since it started in the 1960s—we know more about teaching and learning than we ever have.

Here, we'll take some of that research and look at four of the six key qualities highlighted in Dr. Stronge's book, *Qualities of Effective Teachers* (ASCD, 2018, 3rd edition): professional knowledge, instructional planning, instructional delivery, and assessment. In each of those areas, we'll offer a glimpse at some of the recent research, with a focus on moving from theory to practical implications.

## **Professional Knowledge: Knowing What You Need to Know**

Despite what some may think, you can't just walk off the street and into the classroom and become a teacher – certainly not an effective one. Classroom teaching is a complex activity

that demands a deep and rich knowledge base. A teacher's understanding of the facts, concepts, principles, methodology, and important generalizations in the subject area dictate his or her pedagogical thinking and decision-making. But effective teachers' professional knowledge extends well beyond subject matter expertise: it includes pedagogical methods, curricular skill, and an understanding of learners and their culture and community.

As you might expect, experience has a demonstrated effect on increases in teacher effectiveness. While such increases are most significant in the early years of a teacher's career, growth through experience continues to be meaningful in the second, and often third, decades of a classroom career. Generally speaking, the longer a teacher practices the craft of teaching, the better she gets at it – assuming she continues to learn and renew her teaching practices.

Recent research also shows that experience-based improvement varies dramatically for individuals and for groups of teachers in different schools. Some of the positive factors in teacher expertise over time show in recent studies include a supportive

professional learning environment for educators and a growing amount of experience in the same grade level or subject area. For instance, teachers who work in more supportive professional learning environments improve their effectiveness more quickly than teachers working in less supportive contexts. In one study, teachers who worked for 10 years in schools in the top 25 percent of professional environment ratings improved an average of 38 percent more than teachers in schools in the lowest 25 percent. The type of experience a teacher has also matters. Students of teachers with more grade-specific experience make greater progress than students who have a teacher with comparable experience but less grade-specific classroom time. Researchers have also found that the effect of grade-specific experience is about twice as large as the general experience effect, and that years of teaching at a particular grade level is actually a better predictor of student achievement than total years of teaching experience.

On the other side of those findings, but with a negative twist, teachers who switch grade levels tend to do a less effective job of >>>

improving their students' achievement. In fact, schools that have a high within-school "churning" of subject or grade reassignments disrupt student achievement. So, not only is it important to retain teachers, it's also advantageous to keep them in the grade or subject they teach. Stable grade-level assignments can be a low-cost way to allow teachers to develop grade- or subject-specific skills by teaching the same grade level or subject for multiple years and by specializing in subjects with which they are most effective.

### **Instructional Planning: You Must Be Ready**

Good teachers never walk into class with a blank slate; they know good planning is essential to good teaching. And they understand that planning for instruction involves both careful short-term preparation for specific lessons, and long-term – that is, strategic – planning to ensure quality teaching of the curriculum. Research has shown that student achievement is tied to the amount of content a teacher covers.

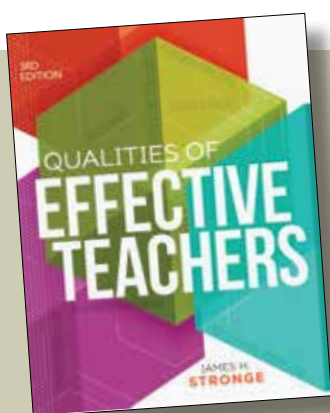
Beyond coverage, recent studies also show that planning is about alignment among intended learning outcomes, instruction, and



assessment: Effective teachers gather assessment information informally every day and formally on a regular basis, and use it to drive their work, to determine student readiness for new content, and to set ongoing, intermediate, and annual goals.

The ability to plan collaboratively is also important, as demonstrated by international comparative studies on teacher practices. Planning is often a solitary practice in the United States,

yet we know that discussing lesson plans with fellow teachers provides valuable opportunities to examine instruction from new perspectives. Team planning helps develop a collective approach to instruction, joint expectations, and common goals. As a result, many schools have begun to design common planning time so teachers have an opportunity to share experiences and expertise. This helps teachers develop horizontally and vertically coherent instruction, while eliminating gaps and redundancies across grades and subject areas. For instance, horizontal coherence ensures that what students are learning in a fifth-grade math class mirrors what students are learning in other fifth-grade classrooms in the building. Vertical coherence ensures the content is logically structured so that what is learned in the current lesson, unit, or grade level can prepare students for the next lesson, unit, or grade level.



### **More From James Stronge**

If you'd like to hear more on effective teaching from Dr. Stronge, the third edition of his book, *Qualities of Effective Teachers*, was published by ASCD earlier this year. In it, Stronge covers all six of his key qualities of effective teaching: professional knowledge, instructional planning, instructional delivery, assessment, learning environment, and professionalism. Learn more at [ascd.org](http://ascd.org).

Collaborative planning also provides a venue where teachers can reflect, share problems or issues related to teaching, and learn from each other. Such collaboration has been shown to boost both student achievement and teacher perceptions about their work environment.

### **Instructional Delivery: Mix and Match**

Here's a startling finding: About 45 percent of our students are mentally checked out or actively disengaged every day in our schools, according to a 2013 Gallup survey. And you don't have to be a master teacher to know that bored students aren't learning like they're capable of learning.

The good news is that effective teaching, where learning tasks are important, useful, and enjoyable, leads to higher engagement and quality learning. No single instructional strategy guarantees that you'll become an immediately effective teacher, no matter your subject matter or grade level, but two words often used to describe the most effective teachers are flexible and opportunistic. They use various techniques (such as questioning or observation) to monitor student learning and vary their practice to arrive at the intersection of subjects and students. To illustrate, a relatively straightforward technique that effective teachers use is to increase personal relevance of learning and activities by clarifying the relationship between the task and students' personal interests and goals.

Effective instruction is a dynamic interaction among content, pedagogical methods, needs of individual learners and classes, students' prior learning (i.e., pre-assessment), and the context in which the new learning is to occur. Research generally finds that teachers who successfully employ

a range of strategies reach more students because they tap into more learning needs and student interests. John Hattie, an Australian professor and internationally-known researcher on education effectiveness, analyzed a large sample of studies and found these strategies to be most influential in improving student achievement:

- Classroom discussion, with a gain of 29 percentile points on learning outcomes
- Scaffolding (also 29 percentile points)
- Feedback (26 percentile points)
- Problem-solving instruction (25 percentile points)
- Concept mapping (24 percentile points)
- Direct instruction (23 percentile points)
- Challenging learning goals (22 percentile points)
- Higher cognitive questioning (18 percentile points)
- Cooperative learning (16 percentile points)

But here is an essential point: That list had nine great instructional strategies; there may be 109! (We may be exaggerating a bit, but only slightly!) The key is knowing how and when to blend the best instructional methods/strategies to reach the best learning results.

Stretch your students: It's extremely important to infuse their classroom activities with the right amount of cognitive challenge. Effective teachers engage students in content at various levels of complexity. Challenge your students and they'll respond with greater >>>



## **How Your Association Helps Hone Your Skills**

VEA stands ready to help you be an even better teacher, offering a broad range of workshops on professional and instructional issues. Workshops are available for local associations, schools, and school divisions, and we'll bring them to you.

A sample of current topics:

- Classroom management
- Integrating technology into instruction
- Effective communication skills
- Bullying prevention
- Time management
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Conflict resolution
- Cultural competence
- Giving better PowerPoint presentations
- Understanding teacher evaluation

To learn more or to schedule a workshop, visit [www.veanea.org/workshops](http://www.veanea.org/workshops).





## How Are You Doing at Delivering Instruction?

This checklist, included in *Qualities of Effective Teachers*, is designed to help you identify key indicators of how well you're doing in implementing instruction. Use it to gauge your effectiveness, looking for both areas of strength and areas that could use improvement.

### ✓ INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Employs different techniques and instructional strategies, such as hands-on learning.
- Stresses meaningful conceptualization, emphasizing the student's own knowledge of the world.

### ✓ CONTENT & EXPECTATIONS

- Sets overall high expectations toward improvement and growth in the classroom.
- Gives clear examples and offers guided practice.
- Stresses student responsibility and accountability in meeting expectations.
- Teaches metacognitive strategies to support reflection on learning progress.

### ✓ COMPLEXITY

- Is concerned with having students learn and demonstrate understanding of meaning rather than memorization.
- Holds reading as a priority.
- Stresses meaningful conceptualization, emphasizes the student's knowledge of the world.
- Emphasizes high-order thinking skills in math.

### ✓ QUESTIONING

- Questioning reflects type of content, goals of lesson.
- Varies question type to maintain interest and momentum.
- Prepares questions in advance.
- Uses wait time during questioning.

### ✓ STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

- Attentive to lesson momentum, appropriate questioning, clarity of explanation.
- Varies instructional strategies, types of assignments, and activities.
- Leads, directs, and paces student activities. ●

interest, concentration, and enjoyment. Scaffold your lessons to guide students in their emerging skill and knowledge acquisition through step-by-step instructions, modeling, and providing the opportunity to apply new information and skills to novel situations.

Differentiation in instruction is also crucial. Well-known University of Virginia researcher Carol Anne Tomlinson says effective teachers differentiate content (i.e., facts, concepts, principles, skills, and attitudes), process (i.e., learning activities), and product (i.e., assessments) to ensure all students in a mixed-ability classroom can have different approaches yet equal access to high-quality learning opportunities. And, in reality, all classrooms are mixed ability. Here is another essential point: Differentiation must—absolutely must—build upon knowing where students are in their individual pursuit of learning, and that requires assessment. No assessment, no differentiation.

### Assessment: Not Just a Test, But a Tool

Effective teachers must be good creators of, consumers of, and communicators about assessment.

To improve the validity and functionality of assessment, recent research brings to the fore the importance of alignment between written, taught, and tested curriculum. **Written curriculum**, or intended curriculum, defines the intentions, aims, and goals of teaching and learning. **Taught or enacted curriculum** is all about implementation and involves the actual interactions between teachers and students during a lesson or a unit to meet expectations outlined in written curriculum. **Tested curriculum** includes assessments designed and used to track student progress, measure a teacher's instructional quality, or measure a student's achievement on the goals and objectives. The ideal is for the components of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to work together,



creating a unified message about what's being taught and assessed. Just like the misalignment of car tires causes undue stress to the vehicle, increased difficulty in steering, and reduced safety and durability for the tires, misalignment in assessment will also hamper student learning.

To help your assessment methods be useful and valid, continue to challenge your students as you did during actual lessons. You may want to consider an assessment blueprint, also called a table of specifications, which spells out instructional objectives, the cognitive level of instruction, and the weight of the assessment items that assess each objective.

Effective teachers also realize that collecting student learning data is only the first step: they know they must make productive use of that data. Good teachers act on what they learned in student assessments to

provide remediation, acceleration, or enrichment. They also use more complex assessment assignments, such as open-ended performance tasks, authentic investigations, and portfolios. There is an increasing recognition that assessment need not always be judgmental and that it doesn't have to happen only when learning is finished. Instead, it should be embedded in ongoing instruction. We're seeing the concept of assessment as learning slowly replacing or conglomerating the concepts of assessment of learning and assessment *for* learning.

### More Effective Every Day

Teachers have a powerful, long-lasting influence on their students in many ways. They affect not just achievement, but young people's attitudes toward school, general interest in learning, and even on their outlooks on life and their futures. What's encouraging about all the

teacher effectiveness research we've investigated is that no study has ever found that a teacher's competence is a fixed entity. Expertise in the classroom is a malleable, improvable process. Effective teachers are optimists, and hope sustains them when they face setbacks. So, we wish you a hopeful school year, one that you approach with a spirit of openness to the future, and one in which you continue to support and guide students in their endeavors to reach their full potential. ●

*Stronge, PhD, is the Heritage Professor in Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership Area at the College of William and Mary. Xu, PhD, is a senior research associate at Stronge & Associates Educational Consulting.*



# More than Capitals, Rivers, and Climate Maps

How GIS is making geography more meaningful for both students and teachers.

By Chris Bunin

“I love maps!” is a common response when I tell people I teach geography and geospatial technologies. “Yes! We’ve got this,” my friends exclaim when they learn trivia night’s final subject is geography—only to be disappointed when our team is unable to identify the country home to the mysterious Nazca lines (the answer is Peru, for all of you playing at home).

When most of us think of K-12 geography, we probably think of memorizing capitals and rivers, coloring and labeling climate maps, and taking map quizzes. It may surprise you to know that my students use Geographic Infor-



mation Systems (GIS) to create digitized spatial layers, x,y data based on coordinate systems, and to make dynamic maps to analyze and answer complex questions. This isn't just happening in GIS classes: My students regularly plot and analyze data, compare differences between data layers, and learn the basics of GIScience in humanities classes, too.

### WHAT IS GIS AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

GIS is computer software that can combine layers of information about place and space. The name sounds complex, but at its heart GIS has three pieces: a map, tables of information (think spreadsheets), and a way to make the map and tables interact to create visualizations, show patterns, and conduct geographic analysis.

Geospatial technologies are in use everywhere. People use them to search for the cheapest gas stations based on zip code; meteorologists use them to prepare and deliver forecasts; Google Maps and other traffic apps use them to evaluate traffic patterns and provide real-time driving directions.

### FROM CUMBERSOME TO AWESOME!

My personal shift to using GIS in my social studies classrooms began in 2005 when I joined the Project GRASP (Geospatial Related Activities for Student Progress) professional development course at James Madison University (JMU). In that class, I was exposed for the first time to the power of GIS and its possibilities for teachers and students. Though I was jazzed about the technology's potential, I found myself afterward essentially on an instructional island when it came to finding colleagues ready to take the GIS plunge.

Back then, GIS was a hard sell

to teachers. The software was cumbersome, difficult to install, carried a steep learning curve, and lesson plans and data sets were limited. Today, the access and practicality of using GIS in the classroom is at an all-time high. Much of Virginia's accessibility is the ripple effect of work done by JMU, the Virginia Geographic Alliance, and Esri, the world's leading GIS software company. JMU, under the direction of Dr. Bob Kolvoord, dean of the College of Integrated Science and Engineering, held National Summits on Geospatial Technologies in K-12 Education from 2008-2011. There, teachers and education and industry leaders met to identify resources needed to make serious inroads into Virginia's classrooms. At the same time, Esri made GIS software more accessible to schools. Today, the company provides free cloud-based and desktop GIS technologies to any school in the U.S. As a result, Virginia has become a leader in classroom GIS use.

### A CULMINATING EXPERIENCE FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

As part of its outreach to our high schools, JMU launched a program called Geospatial Semester (GSS) in 2005, which seeks to offer high school juniors and seniors a culminating experience steeped in authentic engagement, workforce preparedness, and problem-based learning.

Today, students from 25 high schools participate in the program, earning dual-enrollment credit. They learn a cutting-edge technology that leaves them with valuable workplace skills, and also taught spatial thinking skills that are key to STEM careers and not taught elsewhere in the high school curriculum. They study how GIS is applied in emergency management, environmental science, public policy,

and community and business analytics. At the end of the course, students complete capstone projects that are assessed by JMU professors. Recent project topics have included:

- *An Analysis of the Change in the Amount of Ground-Level Ozone for the Metropolitan Region from 2013-2016—Washington-Lee High School, Arlington*
- *Proposal for Realignment and Placement of Heavy Rescues in Loudoun County, Virginia—Briar Woods High School, Ashburn*
- *Setting Up a Volleyball Defense—Shenandoah Valley Governor's School*
- *An Interactive Guide to Nelson County Hiking Trails—Nelson County High School*
- *An Analysis of EMS Calls within Albemarle County—Albemarle High School*
- *Refugee Camp Site Selection in Jordan—South Lakes High School, Reston*
- *Rerouting the Iditarod—Dominion High School, Sterling*

These and other projects can be seen at [www.isat.jmu.edu/geospatalsemester/recognition.html](http://www.isat.jmu.edu/geospatalsemester/recognition.html).

"When I began using GIS I viewed it as a tool to make pictures," says Albemarle High School student Claire King. "As I gained more experience, its functionality seemed to multiply. I began to view it as an investigative tool to explore, visualize, and model data rather than simply as an image creator. Understanding how to use GIS has made me more curious about the world around me. Having the ability to satisfy my curiosities through GIS has been surprisingly rewarding. Knowing that I can answer my own inquiries and represent my findings in a way >>>



**Albemarle High School students learn how a drone can be used to collect real time geospatial data (previous page) as Matteus Frankovich of SkyClad Aerial demonstrates. Above, a student maps affordable housing in Charlottesville, using GIS technology.**

that is presentable to others is empowering. Learning to use GIS in school brought me the opportunity to have an internship with the University of Virginia which allowed me to have my work published as a junior in high school."

She's not alone: Many students have parlayed the GSS into an internship or summer work experience," says Kolvoord, who helps supervise the GSS program. "It's also introduced geography as a potential area of study for many students. In fact, JMU geography enrollments are at an all-time high, in part due to a steady flow of students from the GSS."

## INTERDISCIPLINARY GIS: THE ISTEM FRAMEWORK

Albemarle middle school teacher Julie Stavitski learned about the power of geospatial technologies through the

iSTEM Teacher Scholars Program. "Ten minutes of seeing GIS in action in my classroom was enough to convince me of the power of this technology," she says. "I was surprised at how quickly I became comfortable with it. In one training session, Kathryn Keranen, a GSS co-founder, sensed our hesitance and shared a perspective that gave me permission to explore using GIS in my classroom: the scale of our first activity doesn't matter as long as we just did something to get the kids using the technology."

The iSTEM Teacher Scholars program, founded in 2014, focuses on workforce preparedness and GIS as an interdisciplinary bridge. Designed to be more than a hypothetical exercise, it helps classroom teachers develop practical and transferrable approaches to GIS classroom use.

GIS offers a way to meet the

difficult challenge of incorporating STEM skills and strategies into the humanities. In most academic situations, core science and social science subjects are taught in isolation, which limits opportunities for teachers and students to engage in integrated STEM learning. GIS can be a way to combat a general lack of interest in STEM fields amongst students, if we can develop ways to inspire and extend these skills, tools, and concepts beyond the silos of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

One excellent way to do this is #YouCanMapThat!, a flexible curriculum that contains best-practice GIS activities for multiple grade levels and disciplines. It's been published in iBook format, is free to the public, and available for download at <http://bit.ly/YCMT>. Some examples of the iSTEM lessons in the curriculum in-

clude Exploring the Fate of the Titanic, Mapping the First Five Presidents, and Querying the Reach of Jim Crow.

"Participating in the iSTEM Teacher Scholars Program brought into focus the notion that teachers teach students and not content," says Andy Dojack, a teacher at William Monroe High School in Greene County. "By providing students with skills in GIS, I have been able to give them the type of independent learning environment that fuels curiosity and growth. Students use the software to explore and analyze all sorts of topics that transcend disciplines. This provides a deeper understanding of subject matter when compared to teaching with traditional resources. Put simply, the iSTEM method empowers students through the use of 21st-century technology."

Through funding partnerships with Esri, the Virginia Geographic Alliance, Battelle, The National Council for the Social Studies, and the Library of Congress' Teaching with Primary Sources Eastern Region, the **#YouCanMapThat!** curriculum has been used to train over 250 teachers how to use GIS and iSTEM GIS activities in their classrooms. It has also created an online professional learning community so that once teachers have completed their training they don't find themselves in GIS isolation with limited support.

"The iSTEM Teachers Scholars Program has been instrumental in showing teachers the value of including GIS in their teaching," says Dojack. "Most teachers are willing to try new

methods, but many are hindered by a limited amount of professional development time. This program provides a convenient, straightforward set of lessons and activities."

### HOW TO GET STARTED USING GIS IN YOUR CLASSROOM

So, now the question for many of you is, "How do I get started?" Here are a few ways you can immediately begin integrating GIS into your teaching practices:

1. Download the **#YouCanMapThat!** iSTEM iBook at <http://bit.ly/YCMT> to introduce yourself to GIS and gain access to best practices.
2. Check out the Geospatial Semester at [www.isat.jmu.edu/geospatialsemester/](http://www.isat.jmu.edu/geospatialsemester/).
3. Register your school for a free Esri ArcGIS Online (AGO) Organizational Account. There is no catch.

Register at ESRI's website and gain access to a lot of GIS bells and whistles, including an organizational account that allows you to enroll and manage 500 student accounts; the ability to create customized classroom or student

maps; and access to advanced functions of ArcGIS Online, such as density analysis, proximity analysis, and interpolation. With these accounts you can have students become digital historians who research, design, and create their own story maps. It is a great option for your tech-savvy

students. You can register for an account at [www.esri.com/industries/education/software-bundle#](http://www.esri.com/industries/education/software-bundle#).

4. Explore and use Esri's GeoInquiries (<http://bit.ly/GeoInquiries> and click on Gallery). They're 15-minute activities, each with a teacher's guide with questions and answers and a professionally designed Web GIS map. No installation, fees, or logins are necessary. The more than 100 activities include ones specific to earth science, English/language Arts, mathematics, human geography, U.S. history and world history.
5. Go to Esri's Story Map Gallery (<http://storymaps.arcgis.com/en/> and click on Gallery) and browse the ready-made interactive maps.
6. Attend a workshop on using GIS in the classroom. There are many options available. For example, the Virginia Geographic Alliance has a five-week online asynchronous course, "**#YouCanMapThat!**", covering beginner and intermediate skills and ways to seamlessly integrate GIS into the K-12 classroom. If you're interested in taking the course, fill out the online form at <http://bit.ly/VGAGIS>.

*Bunin, a member of the Albemarle Education Association, teaches A.P. human geography, world history, and geospatial technologies at Albemarle High School, is an assistant professor of geography at Piedmont Virginia Community College, and the Geospatial Technologies chair for the Virginia Geographic Alliance. He was named the 2016 Secondary Social Studies Teacher of the Year by the National Council for the Social Studies, and received the 2017 Brunn Creativity Award for the Outstanding Teaching of Geography from the National Council for Geographic Education. You can follow him @ahsgeo.*

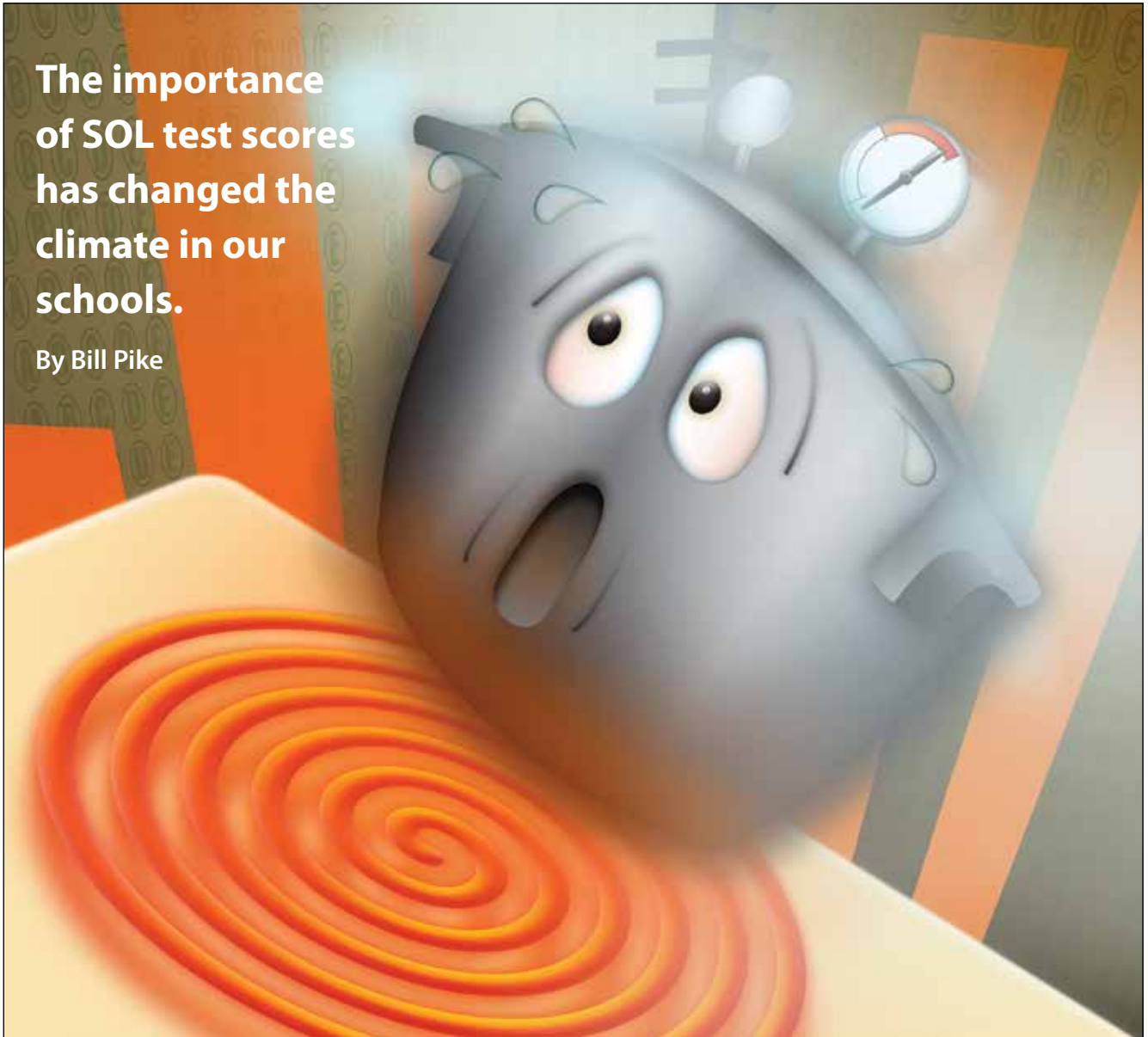
**Ten minutes of seeing GIS in action in my classroom was enough to convince me of the power of this technology. I was surprised at how quickly I became comfortable with it.**



# MOUNTING PRESSURE

**The importance of SOL test scores has changed the climate in our schools.**

By Bill Pike



**L**ike all educators, my career was filled with ups and downs, successes and failures. But without question, my last nine years as principal of Henrico County's Lakeside Elementary School are locked in my memory banks forever, for one very simple reason: the introduction of

the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests

Those tests changed my life. Immediately, I felt like an old pressure cooker sitting on top of a hot stove burner, ready to explode. Tums and Roloids didn't work anymore. I was thankful for the invention of Prilosec.

We saw that pressure play out

recently in a SOL testing scandal at a Richmond elementary school, a school that had been recognized for its testing success at the local, state, and federal levels.

Sadly, we shouldn't be surprised. In our society, "everyone loves a winner," and this is especially true at an

underperforming school.

I still recall the ratcheting up of pressure in the principal meetings I attended. Led by the superintendent and central office staff, the drumbeat was steady, the message clear at these meetings—pass the tests and earn accreditation at each school.

I will give Henrico credit for the support we received from our subject matter educational specialists. They had done their homework and knew how to help our teachers with instructional techniques linked to the specifics of the Standards of Learning. Additionally, we had access to funding that allowed us to hire instructional tutors who worked with small groups of students. But not every school division can do that.

I was certainly not alone in feeling the pressure created by the SOL testing. Classroom teachers, especially those in grade levels where the tests were administered, couldn't escape it, either. Their lesson plans were linked to the SOLs, they had to give benchmark testing every grading period, they attended extra department meetings, and they had to coordinate additional instructional opportunities for students. All this wore them down, too.

Our test results were miserable the first year. We did not pass. Lakeside sits in the middle of Henrico County, and we had a diverse student population whose parents covered a wide economic spectrum.

In 1998, as the SOL tests were being implemented, we hired a new fifth-grade math teacher. After our dismal first year of test scores, she felt like she had no choice but to be laser-focused on the SOLs included in the fifth-grade math curriculum, essentially turning her teaching into "drill-and-kill" every day.

She remembers a later principal telling the staff that "one student,

missing one question, could determine accreditation for the school," and has never forgotten the kind of pressure that created for her and her peers.

Even though the pressure was beyond intense the second year, our students passed the tests, earning our accreditation. But that good feeling was brief. Once you earn accreditation, the pressure increases to sustain that success for another year. When a school that doesn't earn accreditation for consecutive years, parents have the right to choose to send their children to a different school. So, while the school board was appreciative of the success, the pressure did not let up one bit.

Eventually, our fifth-grade math teacher transferred to another elementary school, one where earning accreditation isn't a yearly struggle. There, the goals are more focused on achieving incremental growth in SOL test scores.

Public educators and their schools are under constant scrutiny, and there are no easy school environments to work in anymore. Layers of pressure exist at every level in our public schools. The pressure to meet accreditation standards will never go away in underperforming schools.

Why is this?

Is it the lack of building-level leadership, inadequate instructional skills, funding limitations, disruptions in the learning environment, over-reliance on technology, substandard facilities, a widening economic gap, insufficient mental health assessments, lack of parental involvement, indifference, or resistance to change?

I don't recall an "all of the above" bubble on the SOL answer sheet. But I think it's the correct answer here: this list, and other factors, affect our school personnel and students on a daily basis.

Personally, I think another factor is often overlooked in debates about public schools, one that creates a

different layer of pressure—the erosion of families. One indicator that the erosion of our families is being felt in our schools is that some elementary schools now employ a Family Advocate.

School systems have access to a lot of data. What might we learn from this data about the erosion of our families and the strain it puts on school personnel and the students they are attempting to serve?

Some might read all of this and see it as excuses. I understand that perception. I would counter that with an invitation—follow the required protocols in a school system and offer to volunteer in an underperforming school.

Whether you consider "all of the above" as factors or excuses, one thing is perfectly clear: Breaching SOL testing protocols isn't acceptable at any level in our schools.

I have never forgotten these words from a fellow educator: "Students take their signals from adults."

Parents and our communities must be able to trust our educators to send the proper signals to students no matter the school or environment. When children and communities lose trust in public educators, recapturing that trust is an exhausting journey.

"Mistakes are the portals of discovery," James Joyce once said.

The SOL pressure cooker wears down educators and affects the students and communities they serve.

Moving forward, we need to be willing to ask—what can we learn from this pressure and from this breach of SOL testing? ●

*Pike, now retired, spent 31 years in education working as a teacher, coach, administrative aide, assistant principal, and principal. He can be reached at [wapike1@gmail.com](mailto:wapike1@gmail.com).*

## VEA Leaders Spend Summer in Training to Fight for Public Education

"We must change to meet the challenges of the future," VEA President Jim Livingston says, and change was, indeed, the focus of concentrated training for VEA leaders this summer during a week in Richmond that combined the Association's Reggie Smith Organizing School and Local Officers Retreat.

More than 100 local leaders were immersed in workshops on diverse topics including basic organizing, digital communications, reaching out to new educators, working with journalists, political activism, social justice, and teacher evaluation. Members left prepared to take action. "I wanted to learn to be more politically active and how to strengthen my local association," says Maggie Gannon, a Culpeper County Education Association member and Association Representative for Culpeper members in grades 3-5. She believes she accomplished that, adding, "We have a sound plan to take back home to build our ability to organize."

Local leaders also had a chance to hear from guest speakers who are serious education reformers, including Schuyler VanValkenburg and Cheryl Turpin, both VEA members who were elected to Virginia's House of Delegates last year, and Alexis McKinney, a recent graduate of Howard University who was among the leaders of Howard Resist, a student group that occupied the school's administration building for nine days earlier this year.

It was a lot to take in. "At times I felt like I was drinking from a fire hose," says Ashley McLaughlin, president-elect of the Smyth County Education Association. "But everyone was so supportive and helpful."

Success stories from around Virginia were showcased in joint presentations from members, superintendents, and school board members from Pulaski, Chesterfield, and Bristol, who discussed their working relationships.

"We really are stronger together," VEA Vice President Dr. James Fedderman reminded attendees, leaving attendees with a fiery mission: "Clear your voice and speak out for what's right! Speak from a spirit of truth. Stand on the side of the right, each and every day!" ●



**Summer school in session: VEA President Jim Livingston (above left) speaks to attendees at the Local Officers Retreat; Groups of Association members study and network. For more photos of VEA's summer training activities, visit [www.flickr.com/veacomm](http://www.flickr.com/veacomm).**





## VEA's IPD Conference: The Lowdown From Your Professional Colleagues

Who knows more about the important work going on in our schools than you and your colleagues do? No one—and that's one reason the VEA's annual

Instruction and Professional Development Conference is so popular. It's world-class professional development, delivered by educators.

This year's event, themed "We've Got the Power," will be in Richmond on Friday, November 16 and Saturday, November 17.

Stay tuned for details and registration information. You don't want to miss it! ●

# CALENDAR

## conferences

**VEA Education Support  
Professionals Conference**

**October 12-13  
Richmond**

**VEA Instruction and Professional  
Development Conference**

**November 16-17  
Richmond**

## Use myVRS to Plan Your Future

VEA wants you to be informed about your retirement benefits and well-equipped to plan for your financial future. As a full-time employee of a school division in Virginia, you are a member of the Virginia Retirement System and you can access your secure online account (myVRS) at [myVRS.varetire.org](http://myVRS.varetire.org). Here are a few ways you can use myVRS to start planning today:

**myVRS Retirement Planner** helps you assess your retirement readiness and goals. In about 10 minutes, you can create and save a retirement plan, allowing you to project your income and expenses in retirement, based on how you envision your future. The planner also includes articles, a video, calculators and a budgeting worksheet.

**myVRS Benefit Estimator** allows you to test different hypothetical retirement dates and payout options so you can see how each affects your benefits and decide which scenario best meets your needs.

**myVRS Financial Wellness** is a self-paced money-management educational program made up of articles, videos, calculators, educational games, budgeting tools, webinars and mini-courses. The information you gather here can help you make informed money decisions about subjects such as personal budgets, student loan repayment, and debt and credit management.

All members can review their account summary and annual statement using **Membership at a Glance**, which shows which plan you're in, your VRS membership date, your years of service, your earliest retirement date with a reduced benefit, and your unreduced retirement date that will provide your maximum benefit. Plus, you can review your account balances in your member contribution account and any Commonwealth of Virginia or Hybrid Retirement Plan deferred compensation balances. VRS Plan 1 and 2 members also can review their annual statement, known as the **Member Benefit Profile** (MBP), for similar details.

Register for myVRS at [myVRS.varetire.org/register](http://myVRS.varetire.org/register). Once you register, you'll just need your username and password for future access. In most cases, registration will take 10 minutes or less. If you need assistance, contact VRS toll-free at 888-827-3847 (select option 3), 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m., Monday through Friday. ●



## School Buildings Send a Message! What Are We Saying?

There are far too many deteriorating school buildings in Virginia. A 2013 statewide inventory showed that more than 60 percent of our schools were more than 40 years old. Over 200 opened before WWII. Some of our buildings and the classrooms inside them are just plain crumbling.

You can help bring this issue to the public's attention. Send us photos of rundown conditions. We'll run a collection of them, and we won't identify schools, except perhaps by school division. People need to know.

Send your photos to [TAllen@veanea.org](mailto:TAllen@veanea.org). ●

# 2019 VEA LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

## VEA WILL INITIATE LEGISLATION TO:

- Use a teacher evaluation model with multiple measures, reduced reliance on standardized test scores, and an accurate reflection of a teacher's effectiveness.
- Give the Virginia Board of Education the option to reprimand in professional license action instead of only suspend, cancel, or revoke.
- Implement and fully fund a statewide, reliable, nationally-validated school personnel climate survey.
- Reinstate state funding dedicated to capital improvements of our public schools.
- Establish a duty-free lunch period for all teachers during the regular school day.
- Expand Virginia Retirement System membership to include part-time school employees.

## We'll Keep You Informed

Keep up with all the latest legislative news affecting schools by reading VEA's daily updates during the General Assembly session. You'll find them at [www.veadailyreports.com](http://www.veadailyreports.com).

## VEA SUPPORTS LEGISLATION THAT:

- Provides resources to ensure that school employees earn a living wage and that teacher salaries are at or above the national average.
- Attracts and retains high-quality teachers and school personnel and improves professional development opportunities.
- Fully funds the revised Standards of Quality (SOQs), as adopted by the Virginia Board of Education, to accurately reflect what it costs to educate Virginia students and support their mental health needs.
- Implements and funds school safety measures and the effective use of threat assessment teams.
- Maintains designated school property as gun-free zones.
- Increases funds directed towards Virginia's most at-risk students.
- Supports the needs of and addresses the inequities in Virginia's small and rural school divisions.
- Implements, improves, and funds programs and staffing to counteract student behaviors that lead to suspensions and expulsions.
- Protects professional teaching licenses.

## VEA OPPOSES LEGISLATION THAT:

- Undermines the Virginia Board of Education's efforts to meet its Constitutional authority to define the standards for a high-quality public education in our Commonwealth.
- Provides public dollars to non-public schools.
- Transfers the authority for granting charter schools away from the local school board.
- Undermines the health or retirement benefits of school personnel.



PRESIDENT'S  
MESSAGE

## Welcome Back! Let's Get Organized!

Welcome to a new school year, another year of doing the incredibly important work of public education! You're not only creating the future, you're ensuring it's a better one. Never doubt that you make a difference.

As you embark on the 2018-19 school journey, I'd like to ask you to reflect on a vital part of both your success and our schools' progress—Association membership.

You are part of an organization that proudly serves as our state's largest, most effective public education advocate, and has done so for more than 150 years. The VEA is the only organization with an open invitation to the governor's office, the only organization with members standing up and stepping out in every school division in the state, and the only organization that's there, every time, when decisions are made in the halls of power that affect our public schools.

In the last several months alone, the efforts of VEA members were absolutely critical in getting a 3 percent raise for teachers into the state budget. That's just a first step.

In addition, VEA efforts were a huge part of the reason that Medicaid expansion is finally happening in Virginia. That's a win-win: Not only are thousands more Virginians getting better access to healthcare, but millions of dollars in state money were



freed up for public schools.

Those are just two examples of what happens when VEA members work together. Thank you for your part in building the power of our Association and using it to make positive, lasting change.

As always, there is more to be done. The year ahead is extremely important as we look to the elections of 2019, in which every seat in the General Assembly will be contested. What happens in Richmond has a direct and immediate impact on our professional lives, and next year we have the opportunity to put a solid pro-education majority in place, one that will work even more closely with us to strengthen our public schools and the working conditions of those employed there.

We, as Association members organized and pulling together, can accomplish things that no other organization or individuals can.

Talk with your colleagues who are not yet Association members. Every new member makes us stronger and more able to forge ahead. No one should be on the sidelines in these times.

Again, thank you for what you've already done, and for what you do every day. We need you. ●



## Two VEA Members Earn Presidential Teaching Awards

Two VEA members are among just 104 educators across the country to receive the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, regarded by many as the top honor in the U.S. for teachers of those subjects.

Montgomery County Education Association member **Kathleen O'Dell**, who teaches sixth grade and advanced math at Christiansburg Middle School, earned the award for K-6 mathematics, and **Julia Young**, a member of the Chesapeake Education Association and a fifth-grade science and math teacher at E.W. Chittum Elementary School, earned it for K-6 science.

Both will receive a cash award from the National Science Foundation, a presidential certificate, and a trip to Washington, D.C. for a series of recognition events and professional development activities.

Winchester Education Association member **Byron Clemens**, a career and technical education teacher at John Handley High School, has been named the High School Teacher of the Year by the Virginia Technology and Engineering Education Association.

**Marjorie Clark**, a retired Chesterfield County educator and VEA-Retired member, has been appointed to serve on the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy by Governor Northam.

Harrisonburg Education Association member **Amy Wheeler**, a health and physical education teacher at Harrisonburg High School, has been named the High School Teacher of the Year by the Virginia Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. ●



# 10 Tips for New Teachers

## (they work for veterans, too!)

Taking charge of your first classroom can be daunting: You want so much to succeed, to help your students learn and grow. Take a deep breath—you've got the training and the skills to do this job, and do it well. Here are 10 tips to help you get off to a great start, courtesy of Edutopia:

1. Be patient with yourself. Being a good teacher is a skill that takes time.
2. Keep a journal that you can read later in your career and laugh!
3. There will never be the perfect lesson plan. They're forever evolving, like you and your students.
4. Get connected as fast as you can with the best teachers and resources you can find, both online and in real life.
5. Take one day at a time.
6. Get a good, supportive pair of shoes.
7. It's OK to make mistakes. Admit them, learn from them, and move on!
8. Always remember that the child who challenges you the most may be the one who needs you the most.
9. If I had known the fabulous feeling of helping teens, I would have signed up sooner.
10. Be yourself. ●





# Who is the 'Average Teacher'?

Not surprisingly, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, she's a woman. A 2016 NCES survey found that about 77 percent of American public school teachers are female. Here's a little of what else the poll of 40,000 teachers nationwide found:

- Our teaching force is not nearly as diverse as our student population. About 80 percent of our public school teachers are white, 9 percent are Hispanic (an increase of 3 percent since 2000), 7 percent are black, 2 percent were Asian, and 1 percent are of two or more races.
- There's a wealth of experience in our teaching corps: American public school teachers have an average of 14 years in the classroom.
- The average teacher workweek is 53 hours.
- Our teachers take their own education seriously. Fifty-seven percent have earned a postbaccalaureate degree (for example, a master's, education specialist, or doctoral degree), up 10 percent from 2000.
- Almost all teachers (94 percent) spend their own money on classroom supplies, at an average clip of \$479 annually.●








## Don't miss your opportunity to be a part of the solution

Do students and educators at your school have everything they need? **HAVE YOU COMPLETED YOUR OPPORTUNITY CHECKLIST?** [Insert State Name] students and educators are an important part of the planning when it comes to implementation of the laws impacting education. **Make your voice heard – complete the checklist and visit: <http://myschoolmyvoice.nea.org>** to learn more about what new state laws may mean for you and **how you can get involved.**



For more information on Virginia Education Association's efforts contact:  
Dr. Antoinette Rogers at 804-648-5801.



Illustration by iStock; cartoon by Janny Hawkins

## Ode to My Desk

By Kathy Sydnor

*Always sitting at a window,  
it  
and  
I.  
It is my place for studying,  
for writing,  
for dreaming,  
for watching the outside world.*

*Once it was a brand new, shiny,  
Light-stained wood color.  
Now its hue has deepened,  
and it has been aged  
by glue spots,  
pen and pencil marks,  
and rings from endless cups of tea or Coke.  
The edges are slightly worn and darkened  
where my arms have leaned through the  
years of endless papers and books and  
thought  
The top has been marred  
by little holes and lines,  
the impressions from the times  
I foolishly wrote without a paper underneath.*

*It followed me to grad school  
and to my new home  
when I "got on my own."  
Still in front of a window,  
it patiently waits  
for me to sit down before it again--  
as I do every day.*

*It holds my past  
in its four chock-full drawers,  
my present  
in its covered-with-schoolwork top,  
and my future  
in its ability to transport me anywhere--  
merely by my sitting in front of a window at  
my desk.*

Sydnor, a VEA-Retired member, taught for 31 years in King George County. ●

## The Power of One

We've always known that teachers make a difference in their students' lives. Now a new study by researchers at Johns Hopkins University is also pointing to the lasting influence teachers of color can have on some minority students. In the study, low-income African-American students who had at least one African-American teacher while in elementary school were significantly more likely to become high school graduates and consider going on to college.

The study followed about 100,000 black students in North Carolina. Those who had at least one black teacher in grades 3-5 had a 29 percent reduced probability of dropping out of school, and the results were even better for very low-income black boys, whose chances of dropping out fell 39 percent.

Earlier research had shown short-term benefits for children who had a teacher of the same race, but this study demonstrates that such benefits may be longer-lasting. ●



## Bringing Students Up to Legislative Speed

When legislators gather early next year for the 2019 General Assembly session, you can help your students figure it all out a bit better with The Capitol Classroom. It's a state website offering understandable legislative information for K-12 students and adults.

Among the topics covered are how bills become law, Virginia's symbols and emblems, lesson plans, General Assembly members (including how to identify your representatives), and resource and classroom activity sections. Educators can even use the site to arrange a tour of the State Capitol.

You can visit the site at <http://cap-class.virginiageneralassembly.gov/>. ●







# Live Well for Less...

with savings of up to 50%  
on fitness, skin care, makeup,  
salons, spas & more



Bath & Body Works®

THE BODY SHOP

**GymNetwork**

Powered by GlobalFit



Search or scan the QR code on the right to download "My Deals" from the App Store or Google Play. Register using these codes; 100891- your VEA member I.D. For help call (877) 489-4703.



## Some Ideas for Better Communication with Parents

What are the parents of your students most looking for from you? According to recent polls, they want information on home-work and grading policies and what their child is expected to learn during the year, and to be notified if grades are slipping. Most of all, they want a relationship with the teacher. Here are some helpful ideas for making all this run smoothly from your colleagues around the country, collected by NEA:

1. Contact parents early on – before there is bad news.
2. Focus on a child's strengths, since parents see themselves in their child and may become defensive.
3. Respect parents' schedules. Many work long hours and cannot communicate or meet with teachers during regular hours.
4. Stress collaboration instead of criticism. Say "How can we work together to improve Mary's study habits?" instead of "I'd like to talk to you about Mary's poor study habits."
5. Ask parents if there is anything you should know about the student that may affect their school work.
6. Send a monthly or bimonthly newsletter or e-newsletter to parents.
7. Post grades online.
8. Create a parent e-mail list for updates and assignments.
9. Emphasize that you and the parents are partners working together on behalf of the student.

To learn more, visit [www.nea.org/interact](http://www.nea.org/interact). ●



Photo and illustration and by iStock

# TEAM UP

## WITH CALIFORNIA CASUALTY

**Give your athletes a sporting chance  
with a Thomas R. Brown Athletics Grant.  
Apply to receive \$1,000 to \$3,000 for your  
middle/high school's team.**

The California Casualty Thomas R. Brown Athletics Grant was established to provide support to public school sports programs impacted by reduced budgets.

As an employee of the school and a member of the National Education Association (NEA), you can apply for a grant award for your school's sports program.

**Applications received through January 15, 2019  
will qualify for 2019 consideration. Recipients  
will be announced in April 2019.**



**To apply for a grant, go to:**  
**[CalCasAthleticsGrant.com](http://CalCasAthleticsGrant.com)**

Grants not available in AK, HI, MA, MI, NY and WA. Please visit [CalCasAthleticsGrant.com](http://CalCasAthleticsGrant.com) for full program rules.  
©2018 California Casualty CA Lic 0043343

NEA® Auto and Home Insurance Program

**nea** **Member  
Benefits**  
In partnership with

 **California Casualty**

AH511018



Valued at \$7,500

ENTER TO WIN!

SCHOOL  
LOUNGE  
*Makeover*



## EDUCATORS GIVE SO MUCH. WE'RE GIVING SOMETHING BACK.

We've seen your remarkable dedication firsthand and we're proud to show our appreciation. So we would like to help you transform your school lounge to extraordinary.

Create a cheerful, restful environment where you can collaborate with colleagues, nurture your creativity, or just plain catch your breath.

# ENTER TODAY ✓

NEA® Auto and Home Insurance Program

**nea** *Member  
Benefits*

In partnership with

 **California Casualty**

[NewSchoolLounge.com/NEA](http://NewSchoolLounge.com/NEA)

©2018 CMC. CA Lic#0041343. No quote or purchase necessary. See website for complete details. NEA, NEA Member Benefits and the NEA Member Benefits logo are registered marks of NEA's Member Benefits Corporation. AH511018

## Educators Can Be a Shelter From the Storm

— Courtney Cutright

Being a teacher requires me to wear many hats: Most days I'm more than an educator delivering language arts instruction to seventh-graders. Some days I'm a nurturer, a disciplinarian, a mediator, or even an unofficial counselor. I feel the pull to support my students socially and emotionally, as well as academically.

There's another important hat to add to the rack, though. Today, we must also be on alert for issues related to students' mental health.

Back-to-school professional development at my school began with a half-day of mental health training from a regional healthcare organization. It was a heavy topic on the heels of summer.

While educators aren't expected to become mental health experts, there is a critical need for us to be able to identify signs and symptoms of mental illnesses in our interactions with students. I've often leaned on the jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none mentality, but I acknowledge that as an educator I cannot be complacent.

Let's face it—in today's public schools, our day-to-day existence is enmeshed in rapidly rising mental health concerns, as seen in factors from students being diagnosed with and medicated for mental health disorders at younger ages to a sickening prevalence of mass school shootings.

The trainer reminded us that one of our most important roles in dealing with young people is to be anchors, to be individuals who care about students and are there when they ask for help. This is the area in which I feel most effective. Sure, I can teach the rules of comma usage or how to write a five-paragraph essay, but what will really stick with a student is knowing there is an adult at school who cares about him or her.

National statistics show that more than 1 in 5 youth between ages 13 and 18 are severely affected by anxiety, behavior, mood, or substance abuse disorders.

In our training, we learned that the sooner an individual gets help for these disorders, the more likely there will be positive outcomes. That's why it's important for educators to be on the lookout for signs and symptoms—we interact with students every day.

The average onset for anxiety disorders is 11 years old, which means many of the 12- and 13-year-old students in my classroom could be affected.

Refusal to participate is the most common way I've seen these disorders manifest in the classroom. A student will shut down, either by putting down his or her head, hiding under a hooded sweatshirt, or even sleeping. Chronic absenteeism is another effect.

I spend about eight hours a week in class with my students, and I try to use as much of that time as possible to get to know them and to build relationships. The reason behind it is two-fold: I genuinely care and want to get to know them, and the students are more likely to buy in to instruction and take an active part in class if we have that foundation.

When I notice changes or shifts in a student's behavior, I ask questions. One thing I've learned about middle school students is how much they love to talk about themselves. Sometimes they share too much information. There is social drama daily, and what you or I may view as minor might be a tragic emergency to a middle-schooler. Throw emotions and hormones into the mix and adolescents have trouble seeing that there is life beyond middle school. To top it off, today's

students are dealing with so many more pressures than past generations: bullying, social media, gender identity and sexuality, body image, and the list goes on.

Sadly, suicide is the third leading cause of death among people ages 10 to 24 in our country, according to the Centers for Disease Control. The result is more than 4,600 lives lost annually in the U.S.

The bottom line, as stated by the trainer, is that knowledge can be lifesaving, and because we interact with adolescents on a daily basis we can offer hope to students during life's darkest moments.

As the new school year begins, I'd like to challenge you to take the time to get to know the students in your classroom. You never know the impact you'll have—and you may be the only positive adult interaction that student has that day. ●



Cutright ([courtcut@gmail.com](mailto:courtcut@gmail.com)), a member of the Roanoke County Education Association, teaches English at Northside Middle School.



# CONGRATULATIONS



## CHAMPIONS 2017-2018\*

Champions are Arlington Public Schools that show a commitment to encourage employees to use sustainable transportation modes, such as public transit, ridesharing, biking, and walking.



### SCHOOL BENEFITS INCLUDE

- Improved employee health and productivity
- Improved safety around school sites
- Community building

### CHAMPIONS REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE

- Promote multimodal transportation options
- Enhance walking and biking to school
- Create staff carpools and offer priority parking

### PLATINUM LEVEL

Oakridge Elementary School

### GOLD LEVEL

Arlington Community High School  
Discovery Elementary School  
Glebe Elementary School  
K. W. Barrett Elementary School  
Swanson Middle School  
Tuckahoe Elementary School  
Williamsburg Middle School

### SILVER LEVEL

Arlington Career Center  
Ashlawn Elementary School  
Claremont Immersion Elementary School  
H-B Woodlawn Secondary Program  
Key Immersion Elementary School  
McKinley Elementary School  
Patrick Henry Elementary School  
Yorktown High School

### BRONZE LEVEL

Drew Model Elementary School  
Langston High School Continuation Program  
Randolph Elementary School

Arlington Transportation Partners

Twitter Instagram Facebook @ATPCommutes



\* Champions list as of 8/6/2018



Horace Mann



Now through Nov. 30, Horace Mann is giving away \$60,000 in DonorsChoose.org funding. Administrators, principals and teachers are all eligible to win!

## Win big for your school!

To learn more visit [Horacemann.com](http://Horacemann.com)



Teaching. Learning. Leading.

A publication of the Virginia Education Association  
116 South Third Street, Richmond VA 23219

[veanea.org](http://veanea.org) [vea4Kids](#)



# STUDY HISTORY IN ITS NATURAL HABITAT



*Fredericksburg*  
TIMELESS  
SPOTSYLVANIA STAFFORD

For more information email  
[jrgaston@fredericksburgva.org](mailto:jrgaston@fredericksburgva.org)  
or call 540-372-1216

Download copy of Study Tour at  
<http://bit.ly/studytours22401>  
or see VisitFred.com for more details

