

VIRGINIA  
JOURNAL of

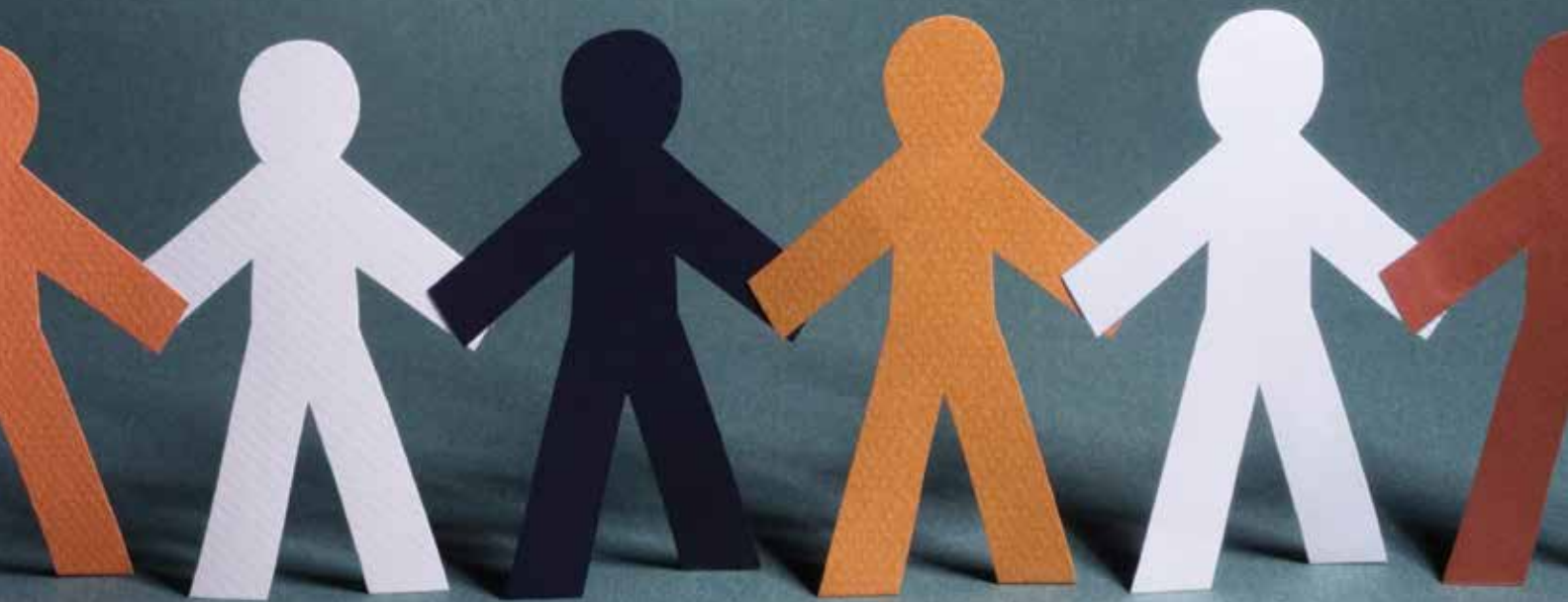
# EDUCATION N

The magazine of the Virginia Education Association

NOVEMBER 2018

## THE COLOR OF DISCIPLINE

Black students get suspended and expelled three times as often as  
White students. Solutions start with us.





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The Color of Discipline

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**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.



**"We interrupt this program to bring you a special message from your teachers: 'Have you finished your homework?'"**





**"I feel sorry for Mrs. Conway.  
She's having to repeat second grade."**

## Funding Inequities Can't Be Overlooked

Not spreading school funding around fairly can and does create alarming disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes for children. Money affects everything from class sizes to course offerings to teacher salaries for expert teachers, and it matters, according to a new report from the Learning Policy Institute (LPI). Not only that, but students from low-income families and students of color bear the brunt of the greatest disparities.

In "How Money Matters for Schools," LPI researchers found that increasing per-pupil spending by 10 percent in all 12 school-age years increases the probability of high school graduation by 7 percentage points for all students, and by roughly 10 percentage points for low-income children.

You can read the report at [learningpolicyinstitute.org](http://learningpolicyinstitute.org).



## Better Reader = Better Thinker

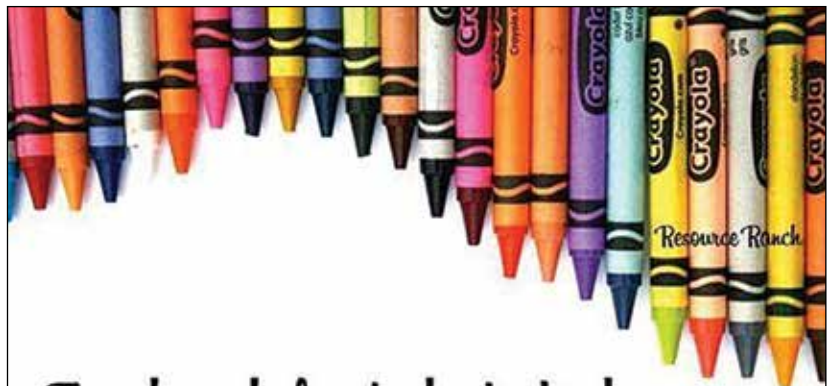
Unlike other species, humans use language as a kind of operating system for our big brains. Words act as handles that allow our minds to manipulate ideas, and written language invents syntaxes that go far beyond anything in spoken communication.



That's why advanced reading

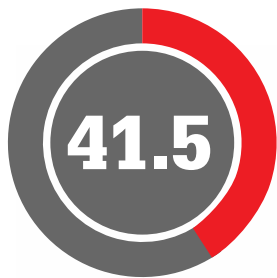
correlates so highly with critical thinking skills. Mastering advanced syntax allows our brains to work on a higher level. When we read Charles Darwin, George Eliot, Stephen J. Gould, or Toni Morrison, what they say increases our knowledge, but how they say it makes us smarter. For rapidly developing adolescent brains, engagement with great minds through their words activates deeper cognitive abilities. ●

— Matt Bardin, founder of Zinc Learning Labs and a former New York City public school teacher

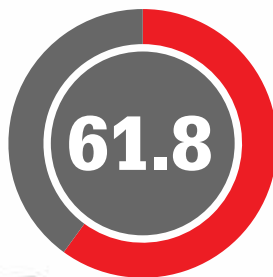


Teachers help students find important things they've lost every day. Sometimes it is a paper, backpack, or jacket... other times it is courage, confidence, or a smile.

# HANG UP AND DRIVE — No, Really: Hang Up and Drive!



Percentage of Virginia high school students who texted, called, emailed, or used the Internet or apps on a handheld cell phone while driving in the 30 days before the survey.



Percentage of high school students who rode with someone doing any of the above.

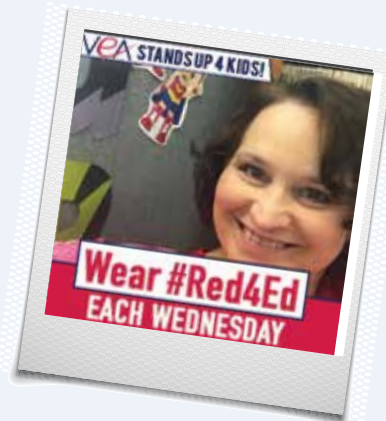


SOURCE: 2017 Virginia Youth Risk Behavior Survey

## A Salute to Education Support Professionals

### Students won't be taught unless

- A bus driver brings them to school*
- Cafeteria workers feed them*
- Nurses help them feel better*
- Custodians keep the schools clean*
- Secretaries and clerks keep records*
- Teaching assistants help teach*
- Techs make the computers work*
- Library clerks help them find resources*
- Maintenance staff keep it all running*



## TOUCHING BASE WITH...

### MARCIA CROWLEY

Halifax Education Association  
Information Technology Resource Teacher

#### What's something you like about your job?

I currently serve two elementary schools and the fact that I have training as an instructional coach seems to help: I understand their classroom struggles. I like to use humor with teachers, because there's nothing more frustrating than technology not working when you need it to work! Laughing seems to help.

#### How has being an Association member helped you?

This is my second year of being a member, and, quite honestly, I don't know what took me so long. I've been teaching for 16 years—I don't know why I went 14 years and didn't think I needed the Association! Joining was the best decision I've made because it's made me aware of many things that I didn't know and I've been able to network with educators across the state. That's invaluable to me. I have friends in other rural areas that I can ask questions about instructional issues or I can see what larger area Associations are doing. ●

Illustrations by iStock



**"Just read your report. No plugging your Twitter and Instagram."**

**newbie  
in the  
classroom?**

We're launching a podcast  
from educators who have been  
there and done that.

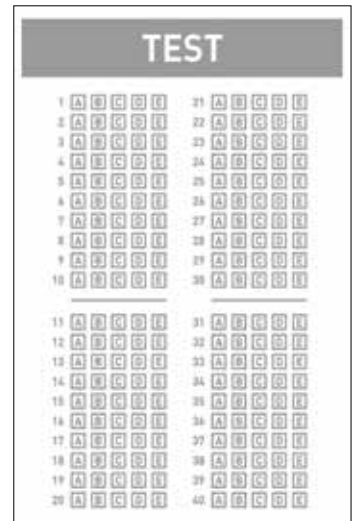
[www.nea.org/schoolme](http://www.nea.org/schoolme)



**"I see on your resume that you were an honors student featured on your parents' bumper sticker."**

## What Are We Measuring?

Any job evaluation is a matter of saying "This is what we're paying you to do." I don't think any taxpaying parent in the country would say, "We are paying teachers to get Junior to bubble in more correct answers on a standardized test," and yet here we are. This is where the "who" part becomes sticky, because bureaucrats aren't big on "Makes students feel positive about themselves" because that's hard to boil down to a data set of deliverables. But if your own child came home from school, crying because the teacher made her feel like a small, useless person, you would not think "No biggie—that's not what I pay that teacher for, anyway."



So what do we want to measure? Imparts content knowledge? Develops skills? Helps student become a better person? Creates a healthy environment? Helps individual student grow as best that student can? Or helps that student grow as measured against some outside metric? We've gone with standardized test scores because they're easy data to crunch—but that doesn't mean they're useful.

Accountability is important, but if we get it wrong, we end up with a system that does more harm than good, which is in fact where we are. To get to a better place will require a lot of conversation between a full range of stakeholders...teachers are perfectly happy to be held accountable by a system that is fair and accurate and that makes sense. Accountability by student standardized test score is not that system. ●

— Peter Greene, who spent 39 years as a high school English teacher, writing in *Forbes* magazine.



**GETTING A DIFFICULT JOB DONE WELL** "NOT OFTEN HEARD...IS SOME COMPELLING EVIDENCE THAT AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS, FAR FROM BEING AWASH IN FAILURE, HAVE OVERALL BEEN PERFORMING REMARKABLY WELL, PARTICULARLY IN THE FACE OF NEW CHALLENGES AND CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS."

— Thomas A. Cox, former professor of education policy and law, Emory University Law School

## Your Age is Showing...

Waynesboro High School is a Frankenstein monster of a building.

The original building was constructed in 1937. Since then, there have been additions in the '50s, '70s, and '90s. In that same time, points out school superintendent Jeffrey Cassell, the community has gone through four completely different hospitals.

Does it really matter how old the school is? Cassell responds this way: Would you rather have your heart surgery in the five-year-old, \$32 million cardiovascular center at Augusta Health, or in the building that housed the 1930s hospital? ●

*From an editorial  
in the Roanoke Times*



**IN GOOD TEACHERS WE TRUST** "TEACHING IS NOT A POPULARITY CONTEST, BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT STUDENTS DON'T LEARN FROM PEOPLE THEY DON'T TRUST."



—Rita F. Pierson, who spent her career in education and became a popular TED Talk speaker

## TREAD CAREFULLY IN CYBERSPACE

While you may be a social media whiz when communicating with family and friends, as a public educator there are some things to keep in mind. Here are a few:

- Know your school system's Internet and social networking policies.
- Assume that nothing you post is private. Put up only material you'd be comfortable seeing on the front page of your local paper.
- Stop and think before you post or hit "send." You're responsible for what you post.
- Maintain professional boundaries in cyberspace, just as you do in person.
- Never post any negative information about your students, co-workers or administrators.
- Remember that a deleted file, including an e-mail message, can often be recovered.
- Always use good judgment and common sense. ●

There is  
**NO**  
reason that the  
zip code you're  
born into should  
determine  
your  
**success or failure**  
in school.

*Naila Bolus, President & CEO, Jumpstart*

Illustration by iStock





# THE COLOR OF DISCIPLINE

Black students get suspended and expelled three times as often as White students. Solutions start with us.

By Michelle Cottrell-Williams

**A**s a relatively new teacher, I encountered Carlos, a ninth-grader, and it nearly brought my classroom career to a premature end.

I almost quit that year. Carlos (not his real name) didn't do school the way I expected him to. I'd made certain assumptions, and I thought he would want to meet my expectations once he knew how much I cared about him. But he and his friends had different assumptions and so I found myself getting on them all the time. I'd stand between their desks and they'd literally speak around me. They threw things across the room at each other. I'd have to just throw them out of my room.

When Carlos was a senior, our paths crossed again, but several things had changed for both of us. As you would expect, he had matured—but so had I.

I'd given birth to my first child and I knew I didn't get mad at her

when she cried—why would I expect her to know how to do things she'd never been taught to do? Having a daughter who was my world made me realize that each of my students was somebody else's world, too. So, I shifted my approach to children who don't act like me.

I'd also had some training in cultural competency, learned a little about Brene Brown's research and been through "courageous conversations" training. I'd come to know something about school discipline statistics and how disproportionate they are for students of color.

All this made it possible to leave behind my past perceptions of Carlos and begin anew with him: I helped him, I talked with him like he was grown, I let him know that I knew he could succeed, and he flourished. I discovered that he loved making videos for class projects and watched with delight as his enthusiasm grew.

The difference was huge. I saw him that year, and he noticed that.

His joy at seeing that someone else believed he could do it, and then actually doing it, was awesome for both of us.

## **We Have a Problem**

There's no denying it: Students of color in our public schools, like Carlos, are disciplined at higher rates than other groups. News organizations like The New York Times and USA TODAY regularly publish articles about the overrepresentation of Black and Latino boys in the U.S. Department of Education's suspension data (see box "The Numbers Don't Add Up").

I teach at Wakefield High School, a highly diverse school in Arlington, one of the wealthiest and highest-ranked school divisions in Virginia. At Wakefield, no one demographic population makes up a majority: Hispanic students make up about 45 percent of our students, followed by White (21%), Black (19%), Asian (9%), and Multiple (5%). My colleagues are truly exceptional and care deeply >>>

about the success of all our students.

And still, our school's pattern of disciplinary action follows the national trend for students of color.

For 12 years, I've watched and worked with hundreds of young men and women of color. After all this time, I cannot believe that they're bad, or that they simply exhibit more challenging behaviors than their White and Asian classmates. Rather, here's where I think the heart of the issue lies: research indicates that our society is so socialized to believe in the criminality of our Black and Brown

students that educators spend more time watching young boys of color, unconsciously expecting them to be troublemakers.

A 1975 Children's Defense Fund report broke new ground when it highlighted racial disparities in disciplinary practices in our schools. Woven throughout the report were examples of classist and racially-motivated reactions from staff, with punishments meted out after little investigation into the causes of the students' behaviors. Nearly two-thirds of suspensions in 1972-73 were for nonviolent and

non-dangerous offenses and disproportionately affected children outside of the dominant, White culture. At my own school, the data for 2015-16 paint a brighter picture, with only 51 suspensions from a student population of nearly 2,000, all of which were related to fighting or drug-related offenses. Still, how much has really changed in the past 40 years?

Black students overall are suspended or expelled at a rate three times higher than White students, and Black girls at higher rates than any other girls and most boys,

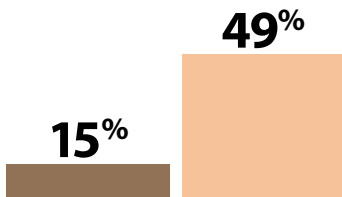
## THE NUMBERS DON'T ADD UP

According to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights:

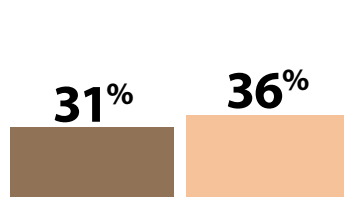


Students of color have a disproportionately high rate of school suspensions and expulsions. For example, Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than White students (**16 percent vs. 5 percent**).

U.S. Student Enrollment

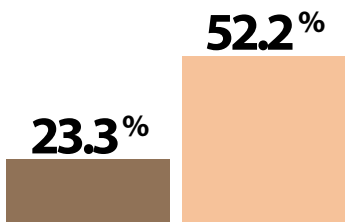


U.S. Students Referred or Arrested

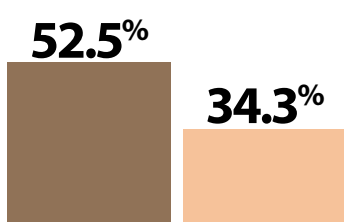


The same is true for students of color and their rates of arrest and referral to law enforcement. Black students represent **15 percent** of total student enrollment, but **31 percent** of students referred to law enforcement or arrested in school-related incidents. White students make up **49 percent** of enrollment, but **36 percent** of students referred to law enforcement and/or arrested.

VA Student Enrollment



VA Students Referred or Arrested



In Virginia, Black students are **23.3 percent** of total enrollment, but **52.5 percent** of students who received at least one out-of-school suspension. White students, while representing **52.2 percent** of enrollment, received **34.3 percent** of those penalties.

according to the U.S. Department of Education's 2014 "Data Snapshot: School Discipline." In addition, those disparities begin in preschool, where Black students are 18 percent of the enrolled population but 48 percent of suspensions, while the rates for White students are 43 percent and 26 percent, respectively. Also in preschool, 54 percent of enrolled students are boys, but they account for 79 percent of suspensions. Perhaps it's because I teach in a high school, but it's hard for me to imagine what justifies suspension in preschool, especially at such drastically disparate rates. USDOE's latest report shows that the statistics have remained consistent.

### **How Widespread is Implicit Bias?**

When students are suspended, they miss valuable instructional time, and the subsequent impact on academic achievement cannot be overlooked. The UCLA Civil Rights Project estimates that in 2011-12, public school children lost close to 18 million instructional days due to suspensions. This means that an entire cohort of students was pushed further away from academic success. When students miss school, they can't keep up with their peers. Since exclusionary discipline practices are implemented as early as preschool and only increase in frequency into high school, they are essentially forcing certain children into a downward spiral.

It's clear that inequitable discipline practices disproportionately affect Black and Latino students. But why? Are they really exhibiting worse behaviors, or is something else going on? Researchers at Yale University explored implicit bias in preschool teachers, tracking eye movements and finding that when asked to watch for and report challenging behaviors in a group of preschool children, the

## **WE MUST GO DEEPER**

**By Toney L. McNair, Jr.**

The disproportionately high rate of suspensions and expulsions among students of color is, in my opinion, an indication of deeper systemic issues and under-addressed factors like insufficient family engagement, limited consideration for learning styles, wrong placement of students in certain classroom environments, lack of Black male educator role models, and false assumptions about the Black and Brown culture that subconsciously influence how students are dealt with.

There is much work to be done in these areas if we are going to have a significant impact on school discipline statistics. For example, I'm an avid proponent of family engagement from the very start of schooling. My parents were actively engaged, and so were many others in my community. Are we doing enough to engage parents and families, at all levels? Is the school environment inviting, or is our welcome just empty words? When I've been able to give parents more ownership in teaching and learning by inviting them to freely come into my classroom, negative behaviors go way down. In fact, over the past few years, I can count the number of referrals I've written in my class on one hand! The point is that we need to look at what causes the behaviors that lead to school suspensions and expulsions.

The numbers will not decrease unless there is a true commitment to addressing those causes. Educators need training in areas including equity and diversity, understanding learning styles, creating innovative learning environments, and incorporating community stakeholders in the learning community. ●



Dr. McNair, president of the Chesapeake Education Association, was Virginia's 2017 Teacher of the Year.

participants spent significantly more time watching the Black boy, followed by the White boy, the White girl, and finally the Black girl.

The fact that the Black girl received the least attention from participants is important and certainly warrants further exploration. However, the extra attention paid to the Black boy, in anticipation of challenging behaviors, is most striking. None of the children in the study actually misbehaved, but the data made clear that participants expected the Black boy to cause the most trouble. These early implicit biases can lead directly to higher suspension rates for Black

boys, uneven implementation of discipline, and a racial climate that undermines their achievement.

### **Do We Teach Students to 'Act White'?**

Several other factors, along with teacher bias, converge to give our Black and Latino students negative messages. Schools tend to promote assimilation by rewarding students whose speech and behavior fit in with the dominant, White, middle-class culture. While most teachers would never believe they're teaching students to "act White," they nevertheless perpetuate >>>



**The author with some of her Arlington students.**

ate this message by favoring more compliant students with positive attention, good grades, and more leniency. Students who express Black authenticity through their dress and speech are seen to be challenging cultural norms, often leading school authorities to more quickly label them as dangerous and defiant. When a teacher assumes the worst of a student, she's much quicker to view behavior as confrontational or challenging and refer to an administrator without stopping to understand. Without empathy, it's much easier to apply punitive discipline to nonconforming students.

Additional researchers argue that Black students are referred to the office and punished more often than other racial groups for minor infractions that rely on subjective interpretation. They posit that this discriminatory treatment is part of the larger system of racial inequity across both school and society. While investigating reasons for the disproportionality in school discipline data, they found that Black boys are suspended more often because they receive more office referrals. This finding is consistent with the argument that racial bias and assimilationist

thinking affect teacher perceptions because there is no actual higher incidence of challenging behaviors from these students.

Finally, the practice of tracking students into academically rigorous and non-rigorous classes disproportionately affects students of color, particularly those with a history of suspensions that led to losing significant instructional time. Too often, lower-tracked classes are taught by less experienced teachers who assert themselves with a classroom management style more aligned with a philosophy of rigid authoritarianism. Students of color, especially at the secondary level, tend to resist teacher authority or aggressive shows of power, which leads to harsher disciplinary punishments, thus continuing the cycle. Certainly, the cumulative effects of feeling singled out by teachers in lower grade levels may work to increase challenging behaviors exhibited by Black and Latino students as they enter adolescence. Well-known education researcher Pedro Noguera has said, reflecting on when teachers win an argument, take a cell phone, or otherwise defeat a child: "[Students learn] that if they were the one with the force, they could win." While this

is certainly not something we try to teach students, it's the hidden message they receive from authoritarian disciplinary practices.

When we consistently tell students that they're bad, the harmful impact cuts two ways. One, many young men of color begin to actually believe it. Two, and even more insidious, is the underlying message their classmates receive: that men of color are trouble, they don't fit in, or even that they are dangerous and will hurt you if you don't take measures to protect yourself. Something needs to be done to help increase our understanding of cultural differences and our empathetic responses.

### **Encouraging News: Training Helps**

Here's one very positive piece of news: A recent Stanford University study examined the effectiveness of empathy training on suspension rates at three U.S. middle schools in different parts of the country. The results: One year of empathy training cut suspension rates in half at all three schools. The driving hypothesis was that punitive discipline actually encourages future misbehavior. The researchers hoped to show that when teachers respectfully respond to behaviors in ways that value students' needs and perspectives, challenging behaviors are reduced. In the training, teachers participated in two short exercises designed to create a more empathetic mindset. At the end of the year they found that, even when controlling for race and gender, suspension rates were 9.8 percent in the control group, but only 4.6 percent among participants.

I think the results of this

simple approach are both astounding and encouraging. I remain convinced that all but a very small minority of teachers come to the profession with the best of intentions and are truly doing their best for students. Therefore, I have to believe that when teachers are reminded of their responsibility to practice empathy, especially with their most challenging students, and are able to see a positive shift in their relationships as a result, they'll feel empowered to respond with kindness.

It's imperative that we find ways to close the discipline gap by addressing three of its biggest culprits: the implicit biases of educators, a lack of empathy or understanding for "the other," and an ill-placed need for some teachers to maintain control by forcing compliance with culturally-specific rules. As educators, we need training to recognize our biases, develop culturally responsive pedagogies, and practice empathy for all students. If we can be better-equipped in these areas, we'll grow in the use of culturally responsive practices and keep students in the classroom instead of referring or suspending them, causing them to fall even further behind.

That Yale study on implicit bias in preschool teachers has been the most eye-opening piece of research for me. If we're unintentionally profiling Black students by watching the boys more closely in anticipation of bad behaviors and essentially ignoring the girls, I think about how the effects of these biases must build up over the years. Black boys surely begin school with the same enthusiasm and willingness to please as any five-year-old, but it can't be easy to feel like you're constantly watched, expected to misbehave, and punished every time you slip up. I have to imagine, as the years go by, many of these students choose to live up to stereotypes their teachers hold of them, figuring if they're going to get in trouble anyway, they may as well misbehave on purpose. Others may lose trust in their

teachers and want to rebel out of anger or shame over the labels they've been given.

How can a child be expected to inherently know how to overcome this cycle? And yet, these children come to high school, where their teachers assume they already know how to comply with the myriad of expectations held by every adult who interacts with them each day.

In my own classroom, I work to build trust and empathize with my students. I learn who they are, value their stories, and respect their experiences. I listen and allow students the benefit of the doubt. I share my intentions, my expectations, and my philosophy with them. I take their side. I don't often experience disruptive or disrespectful behavior in my classroom but when I come across it in the halls I respond with kindness instead of anger. I believe in second chances and fresh starts each day.

When I was in high school, I was never once reprimanded by a teacher, sent to the office, given detention, or suspended. In fact, I was usually considered a favorite among my teachers. However, this cannot be because I always followed the rules. As teenagers do, I at times skipped classes, forged my mother's signature, cheated on assignments, and spoke unkindly about my peers. Despite this, the adults in my life chose to give me the benefit of the doubt. They trusted that my motives were not malicious and allowed me space to explore the boundaries of my adolescence. They showed me empathy and guided me as I developed into a confident, capable adult. I believe that every student deserves to be treated with this same generosity and empathy.

My responsibility is not to teach students how to become more like me; rather, it's to help them become

more themselves. By trusting my students and maintaining a practice of empathy, I allow them the space they need to find their voices and become their best selves. ●

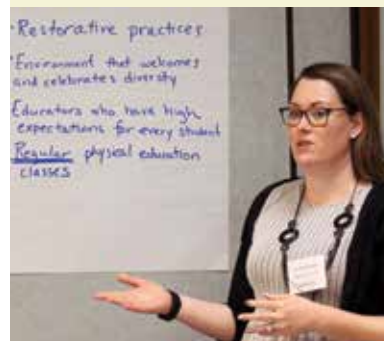
*Cottrell-Williams, a member of the Arlington Education Association, is the 2018 Virginia Teacher of the Year and a social studies educator at Wakefield High School. Since 2006, she has taught many different subjects and levels of students but is most passionate about teaching social justice and supporting English learners. Here, she finds the greatest opportunities to support students who sometimes struggle to feel like they belong. Her website is [www.michelle-cottrellwilliams.com](http://www.michelle-cottrellwilliams.com) and you can find her on Twitter at @WakeHistory.*

## VEA STEPS UP TO HELP

Your Association stands ready to help you become part of the solution to the inequity in school discipline statistics. Through VEA's Office of Teaching & Learning, you and your colleagues can arrange training workshops on topics such as:

- Cultural competence
- Diversity
- Conflict resolution
- Communication skills
- Improving school climate
- Dealing with difficult people
- LGBTQ awareness

For more information and to schedule a workshop in your area, visit [veanea.org/home/training-and-workshops.htm](http://veanea.org/home/training-and-workshops.htm). ●



# Of the People, By the People, For the People

Why we must teach civics to our young people.

By Tom Coen



**P**rotest marches, sit-ins, walkouts, and confrontations on new media: today's students are dealing with a wide array of options for civic engagement. Adults are having enough trouble keeping the debates civil, so it's clear that our young people are sorely in need of some education about expressing their views in constructive, positive ways. And, as so often happens, it falls upon educators to step up and fill the void. I think

there are two excellent ways of doing so: classroom activities which model exemplary behavior and bringing the real government, particularly local government, to students.

Hands-on learning can make a difficult concept more understandable, as well as offer opportunities for students to learn how to interact. They also can learn when which method is appropriate: While sit-ins and walkouts can be effective methods at times, test day is not likely to be one of them.

The effectiveness of classroom simulations depends on the students, their grade level and maturity, and their willingness to buy into the activity. It also requires extensive preparation and a willingness to somewhat loosen control of the class.

One popular activity is a Mock Congress or State Legislature, both of which allow students to debate issues, but within the manner and rules of the legislative body. These rules are made to foster a more respectful interaction



and prevent direct personal attacks. It's been useful to have students follow the rules of the House of Representatives, complete with asking party leaders for time and being stopped when time has expired, and then use Senate rules, which allow more free-flowing debate. In real life, speeches are pre-written, but this can stifle open thought and interaction. We're fortunate in Virginia in that both the House of Delegates and the State Senate allow classes to come to the chamber and do these mock

activities there. The change of location and, yes, more professional attire, also raise the maturity of the students.

The Articles of Confederation can also be used to offer students another chance to think outside the box. Here, students represent the 13 original states and must follow the rules of the Articles to address issues confronting the nation, such as land claims, trade, and foreign policy. In larger classes there can be two groups of states or students can represent foreign governments. This exercise helps young people understand why there was a drive for a new form of government, the basic conflicts of large vs. small states, and if power should reside at the federal or state level. These issues run throughout our history and are the basis of many confrontations today. The process then was difficult and frustrating, and students will see why the concepts of checks and balances and federalism are so fundamental to our government.

People loudly and frequently interrupting each other on the evening news shows are giving many of our students an inaccurate idea of what a debate really is. Staging formalized debates can shift their perceptions.

There are several ways to do this. Mock trials, using either the U.S. Code or Hammurabi's Law Code, are useful in exploring the legal system. Everyone participating learns the importance of rights and evidence. A simulation of the Congress of Vienna or the Peace Conference after World War I teaches how to state your positions and work jointly to achieve and maintain peace. The same can be done with the Cold War.

Putting your students in a different mindset and a structure forces them to engage in a more civil manner. So can bringing government to >>>

## Democracy is Not a Spectator Sport, Part I

This is how seriously Tom Coen takes being a role model for his civics students and for his community: In February, he was appointed to the Stafford County Board of Supervisors.

He believes that having an educator on the Board is invaluable. "We spend a lot of money on public education, and there are programs and terms that aren't familiar to people in many other professions," Coen says. "I've been able to explain them and help delve into specific areas of the budget."

He must also wrestle with the problem of educator pay from a public official's point of view—and it's not easy. "I understand how difficult it is to make ends meet, to work many jobs to get by, and I know a lot of people living paycheck to paycheck," he says. "It's also an issue for our fire, rescue, and police personnel. Too many of our educators and first responders are leaving our county for higher-paying jobs."

Improvement to school buildings, the preservation of open space and farmland, and stabilizing employment are also on the Board's docket.

While tackling all those issues can

seem daunting, Coen believes serving on the Board of Supervisors has not only been a great opportunity,



it's also made him an even more effective teacher. "I definitely bring this experience to the classroom," he says, "and it seems to have motivated my students to learn more about government and politics. And my colleagues know I'm going to bring their issues forward." ●

## Democracy is Not a Spectator Sport, Part 2

By Renee Serrao

Don't just teach about democracy; practice it with your students. Give them work with meaning and a real audience and they'll be hooked. These ideas originated in 12th-grade government classrooms, but many could be adapted for other subject areas or ages:



- **Letters to the editor** are a great way for students to practice succinct argumentation before an authentic audience. And the kids love it when they're published!
- **Letters to legislators** are another way to make student voices heard. Try to tie the communication to specific bills.
- **Budget feedback** for your local government or school board can teach students about important but overlooked issues. Budget cuts looming in your school division? Have the kids research the programs they care about and communicate their priorities
- **Use headlines** to make the founding documents come alive. How would James Madison, author of Federalist 10, feel about the federalism dilemmas posed by conflicting marijuana laws at the state and federal level?
- **Spark generational conversations** by having students ask family members about their voting habits and motivations. Let students use ages instead of names for their interview subjects; this will encourage open and far-ranging discussions.
- **Use social media** to illustrate your curriculum. Challenge students to find references to all the presidential roles (Commander-in-Chief, Chief Diplomat, etc.) in the president's Twitter feed. Use Factcheck.org or Politifact.com to fight back against fake news and instill good media habits.
- **Make the most of campaign season** by teaching kids to research platforms, compare campaign promises, and make informed choices. They can then create their own campaign ads based on actual candidates, pick the best ones, and forward them to the campaigns, asking them to pick a winner. That authentic audience will encourage kids to be both factual and creative.
- **Apply critical thinking** to current events. Have students research Cabinet members and create a Cabinet Report Card. What grade does the president deserve in subjects such as "Qualifications" or "Swampiness"?
- Above all, **prepare them to be informed voters!** Constantly stress the importance of voting, and if you're lucky enough to teach 12th-graders, help them register. If they have a driver's license and bring their Social Security number, they can register online in class in less than 10 minutes. Brainstorm ways that those who aren't citizens can make their voices heard. ●

*Serrao, a member of the Chesterfield Education Association, teaches government at Cosby High School. She was the 2015 winner of VEA's Award for Excellence in Teaching.*



your classroom. In today's world, many use social media to express their opinions and ignore ones they don't agree with. At public meetings, there's a tendency for people to speak at officials, not with them. A recent student had been attending school board meetings to express his views on transgender issues. Later, when a local candidate came to an after-school club, the student was confrontational and, well, rude. We discussed this the next day and he admitted that he had no experience in a setting where he listened directly to an official or candidate; public comment time at board meetings is one-way communication. He began to learn more about respectful, two-way communication and, while he didn't change his strongly-held views, he did learn to listen. Fortunately, the candidate was respectful to him and saw the exchange as a learning experience for the student. As our classroom activities became more interactive, I saw this student practicing listening and compromising skills.

Simulations like these immerse students in government and can show





them the importance of not only expressing their opinions, but also another key element of governance: representing voters. In a Mock Congress or Mock State Legislature, I prefer students to represent specific states or areas and to prepare by studying the businesses, demographics, voting patterns and nature of the people there. Often, students must wrestle with the very realistic and valuable moral dilemma of choosing their view or that of their voters.

Virginia has elections every year, so there are always opportunities for young people to get involved in actual campaigns and in government. Making contact information available for all candidates allows students to choose and demonstrates your fairness.

Another avenue available to students is a citizen's advisory committee. Here in Stafford, the School Board has seven such committees, on topics such as special education, technology, diversity and capital improvements. At times, not enough adults have shown

an interest in serving but students have, and in such numbers that the county created official student members. Students now have a say in policy and the future of the schools.

Stafford also has the YES (Youth Engages in Stafford) Program, which permits one student to serve on each county board and commission, from Agriculture to Utilities. While they're not voting members, they do have input, get the information that the adult members get, and often raise issues or questions others have not. Students see how policy is made, how budgeting works, and how local government addresses citizens' needs.

Of course, government discussion in the classroom can raise concerns. Educators must be careful not to advocate for one side of an issue. This is difficult; for some, just offering the other side's view is painfully difficult. However, if you begin by explaining both sides and offering positive and negative examples of what both are doing, students will see you making a concerted effort to be

balanced, as will parents and administrators. For example, when explaining how Executive Privilege has been abused, use examples of both a Democratic and a Republican president. As in so much of what we do, we must model behavior for students.

Today's generation is becoming involved in a broad range of issues and causes. With our help, they can see and experience a positive way to engage in the challenges we face. Experiencing government shows students how to make things happen, and there are local opportunities to have a say. Many elections are won by a handful of votes—or, as we saw earlier this year, the toss of a coin. Teaching young people civic skills will have an impact on how they take part in our democracy. It's a great job. ●

*Coen, a member of the Stafford Education Association, teaches government at Colonial Forge High School and is also an adjunct professor of political science at Virginia Commonwealth University and Randolph-Macon College.*

One of the most highly-touted reforms in our public schools, for many, has been the opportunity for low-income and other vulnerable children to use vouchers or other means to attend a private school. Supporters back such programs with the assumption that private schools are more effective, that they produce higher achievement, foster positive social adjustment and citizenship, and decrease risky behavior.

To learn more and to examine the accuracy of such thinking, we did a unique longitudinal study of a large and diverse sample of children to find out how much being in private schools was an accurate predictor of achievement, social, and personal outcomes at age 15.

Some background for our research: First, studies show overwhelming evidence that factors such as income and parent education drive enrollment in private schools. Higher income families can afford private schools and choose ones that match goals for their children. Further, family factors (income, education, expectations) are also important in the stimulation and opportunity that drive children's learning and achievement. In

our study, we wanted to separate the effects of private schooling from the family background factors that play such a large role in children's achievement.

A second consideration is the exceptionally wide variation in private schooling, reflecting religious denominations, specialized curricula (e.g., Montessori, Waldorf),

and how they're run, ranging from institutionalized (e.g. the Archdiocese of New York) to localized. Leadership, staff qualifications, and school size also vary among private schools. Thus, it is important to keep in mind the significant differences in such schools, which is often seen as desirable by



## Are Private Schools Superior to Public Ones?

Private schools are no better at closing achievement gaps than public schools are, UVA research shows.

By Robert Pianta and Arya Ansari

reformers, advocates, and parents, but can also lead to highly variable results with students.

Third, most well-controlled evaluations of voucher programs or private school enrollment tend to use state math and language arts standardized test scores. Such results don't reflect other desirable student outcomes, such as motivation, social adjustment, and behavior, often given as reasons for private school enrollment, which have not been addressed in research.

In our study, we used the NICHD\* Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (SECCYD). SECCYD is a unique opportunity to study the effects of private schools because of its more comprehensive assessment of student outcomes, time frame longer than typical studies of private schooling, and detailed and wide-ranging assessment of family background and context. Its sample also reflects a broad range of the economic conditions, cultural beliefs, and child-rearing practices of the U.S.

In our initial analyses, based on test scores alone, children with a history of enrollment in private schools did better than children in public schools. However, those differences were completely eliminated when we took into account family income.

We did further analyses to test the idea that private schooling might have a particular benefit for poor children, and found no evidence to support it.

We studied not only achievement, the sole focus of evaluations of private schooling reported to date, but also students' social adjustment, attitudes, and motivation, and even risky behavior, all of which one assumes might be influenced by a private school education, and found no impacts. In short,

despite the pronounced arguments in favor of policies and finances to support enrollment in private schools as a solution for vulnerable children, our study found no evidence that private schools, when family background (particularly income) is considered, are more effective for promoting student success than public ones.

While some studies have suggested that if a low-income student stays in a private school for at least four years, he or she increases the likelihood of gaining substantial benefits, we found that length of enrollment (on average 6 years) did not predict student

To sum up our findings, we found no evidence to support the idea that widespread enrollment in private schools is a solution for achievement gaps associated with income or race.

When educational opportunities are discussed, people often assume that poor children attend low-quality schools and that their families, given resources and flexibility, would choose among a supply of private schools for their children because those schools are more effective. Our results do not show that this logic holds in the real world of a limited supply of effective schools, both private and public,

“ TO SUM UP OUR FINDINGS, WE FOUND NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE IDEA THAT WIDESPREAD ENROLLMENT IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS IS A SOLUTION FOR ACHIEVEMENT GAPS ASSOCIATED WITH INCOME OR RACE.”

outcomes, again, once family income was considered. Thus, even for students who remained in private school for almost half of their K-12 experience, there was no discernable effect on the wide range of outcomes we assessed at age 15.

Our study was not a purely experimental one in which students were enrolled in public or private school at random, thus eliminating family background factors as explanations for any benefits. Instead, we used statistical models to adjust for family, student, and contextual variables. And because our SECCYD sample was recruited from 10 sites across the country, reflecting more than 600 public and private schools and numerous school systems, differences among those schools might also reduce the likelihood of finding differences.

or that once you account for family background, private schools result in a superior education. Actually, several studies suggest that to the extent that schooling benefits poor children, it results from enrollment in public schools, which are subject to greater oversight and more explicitly articulated standards for achievement than are private schools. It seems most important to better understand and use the mechanisms, in schools of any type and in families, that support student success and to do all we can to strengthen those resources. ●

\*National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

*Dr. Pianta is dean of the University of Virginia Curry School of Education and Human Development. Dr. Ansari is a postdoctoral research associate there.*



**Laying the Groundwork.** Members from locals including Stafford, Spotsylvania, Fauquier, and Fredericksburg gathered for one of VEA's Pre-Legislative Workshops, prepping for the 2019 session of the General Assembly. "We're crafting some action plans for our locals," said Fredericksburg Education Association President Samantha Killion (bottom row, second from left). "We're going to be more politically active."

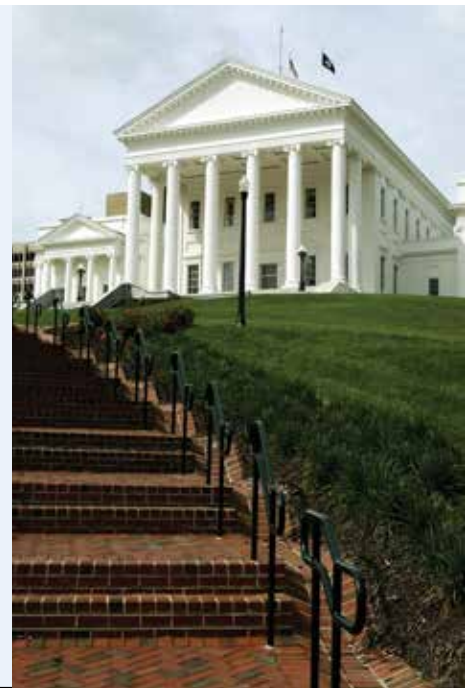
## Gearing Up for 2019's General Assembly

VEA's Office of Government Relations and Research will hold a series of regional pre-legislative workshops this fall to help educators prepare for the important work ahead in the 2019 session of the General Assembly. Each session will include an election overview and VEA's Legislative Agenda, along with information on issues, legislators, and lobbying.

At press time, here are the remaining workshops. Contact your local UniServ office for location and time details.

- Oct. 22** Abingdon
- Oct. 23** Roanoke
- Oct. 24** Staunton
- Nov. 8** Danville

- Nov. 12** Brunswick
- Nov. 15** Richmond



## Your Association's Legal Team Has Your Back

As a VEA member, you're not alone in your school or classroom—you're protected. No one anticipates needing some of the Association's legal protections, but they're a lifesaver when unexpected situations arise. In today's litigation-happy world, it's more important than ever to understand the variety of ways VEA's Office of Legal Services has your back.

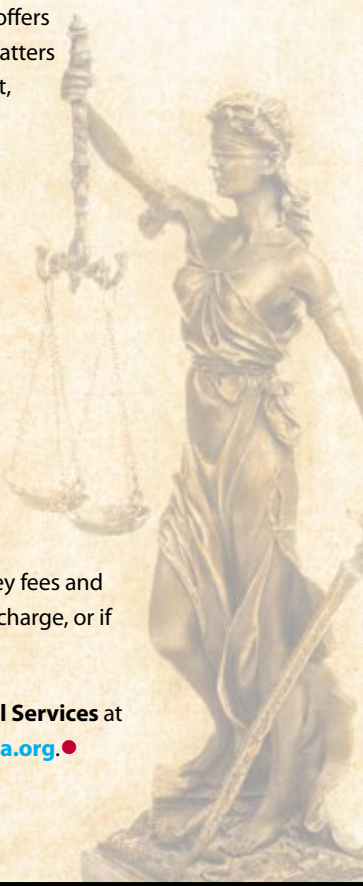
Here are a few pieces of the safety net you've got on the job:

- Staff assistance and access to legal consultation if you're injured in the course of your work or need leave for health or personal reasons.
- Legal representation if you face dismissal for cause.
- Legal representation if you are accused of abusing a student and, therefore, investigated by social workers.
- Legal representation if you are accused of committing a crime during the course of your school duties.
- The Attorney Referral Program, which offers discounts for legal representation in matters not related to your school employment, such as wills, real estate, and traffic court matters.

In addition, you're covered by NEA's Employment Liability Program, so an unwarranted situation doesn't devastate your finances. It offers:

- Liability insurance coverage to pay for the defense of civil suits brought against you in the course of your work and to cover damages assessed against you in such suits.
- Liability insurance coverage for attorney fees and costs if you are acquitted of a criminal charge, or if those charges are dismissed.

To learn more, contact **VEA's Office of Legal Services** at **800-552-9554** or visit VEA's website, [veanea.org](http://veanea.org).



# CALENDAR

## conferences

**VEA Instruction and Professional Development Conference**

**November 16-17**  
**Richmond**

## Social Justice: 'Somebody' Should Do Something.

Often, when we hear about something wrong or unjust, one of our first reactions is, "Somebody should do something about that." The truth is, however, what we often really mean is, "Somebody else should do something about that."

Social justice is at the heart of public education and is one of the core values of our Association. Here's why, from the National Education Association:

- Social justice activists will tell you that activism gives their life additional meaning. People still hunger for a higher purpose.
- "We work for justice, I've come to believe, when our hearts are stirred by specific lives and situations," says Paul Rogat Loeb, author of *Soul of A Citizen*.
- Many educators who have become social justice activists will tell you it dawned on them one day that however hard they worked in their classroom or school workplace, it wasn't enough—children still came to school hungry or sleep-deprived, children were still homeless, children still dropped out of school.●

Photos by **Reilly Bradshaw**, photo illustration by **iStock**

# Red: That's How We Roll

Spearheaded by VEA, educators sport red every Wednesday as part of the Association's #Red4Ed campaign, showing their support for public schools, students, and educators.



**REMEMBER TO WEAR #RED4ED EVERY WEDNESDAY!**

PRESIDENT'S  
MESSAGE

## VEA's Influence is Growing. Jump In!

As a VEA member, you can and should be rightfully proud of the influence our organization currently wields as education policy is made and debated in our state. No other group representing educators has come close to building the power VEA has, or consistently uses it for the benefit of our public schools and public school employees.

Virginia's Secretary of Education, Atif Qarni, is a VEA member who taught middle school civics, economics, U.S History, and math in Prince William County until Governor Northam appointed him to his Cabinet last year. He's the only teacher in memory to have come directly from the classroom to serve as Secretary (something VEA recommended to Gov. Northam), and we're delighted to have him represent us at such a high level in our state's government.

We've also got members at just about all levels of education decision-making in the commonwealth. As you can read in the Kudos Kolumn just to the right, two Association members are newly appointed to Virginia's Standards of Learning Innovation Committee, again by the governor. They are Pamela Davis of the Bristol Virginia Education Association and Charles Ronco of the Prince William Education Association, who join VEA-Retired member Ting-Yi Oei and myself, who are returning members of



the committee. This is important work that will affect instructional life in the years ahead.

Another group doing important work is the Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure (ABTEL), and VEA has a host of members serving on it.

Elsewhere in this issue, you'll find an article written by Tom Coen, a member of the Stafford Education Association and one of several VEA members around the state who's serving on a county Board of Supervisors or City Council. We've also got active and retired members who serve on school boards in localities around Virginia. Any educator with a few years of classroom experience understands how important a role government plays in the day-to-day life of our schools, and many are choosing to become actively involved.

I invite you to join them. Get involved, on behalf of your students and yourself! Our power comes from the growing participation and service of our members. We stand ready to help equip and support educators who want to step up and make an important difference.

Are you next? ●



### Wythe County's Younger Earns Teaching Honor

**L.E. Younger**, a member of the Wythe County Education Association, has been named the Walter L. Shell Business Teacher of the Year for Virginia by the Virginia Business Education Association.

Younger, who teaches at George Wythe High School and the Wythe County Technology Center, has taught in the county for nearly two decades and is a former Wythe Teacher of the Year.

Two Association members are among new appointees to Virginia's Standards of Learning Innovation Committee, a group that studies the SOLs and recommends way to improve assessments, student growth measures, and other aspects of the program. **Pamela Davis** of the Bristol Virginia Education Association and **Charles Ronco** of the Prince William Education Association were appointed by Governor Ralph Northam and will join VEA President **Jim Livingston** and VEA-Retired member **Ting-Yi Oei** on the committee.

Richmond Education Association member **Sarah Anzelmo-Steele**, a history teacher at Lucille M. Brown Middle School, received the John Marshall Foundation 2018 Teacher Award, given for outstanding knowledge and teaching of the U.S. Constitution.

Student VEA Vice President **Morgan Brown**, a student at Old Dominion University, has been named to the NEA's Advisory Committee for Aspiring Educators.

**Phillip Hawkins**, president of the Education Association of Norfolk, has been appointed to Virginia's School Readiness Committee, a statewide group created in 2016 to focus on early childhood education. Hawkins teaches at P.B. Young, Sr. Elementary School. ●



## A Weekly Prescription for Teachers: Just What the Doctor Ordered?

It's not selfish, it's just true: If you're going to be at your best for your students, you need to take care of yourself first. Here's a week's worth of teacher self-care tips from Gail Kinman, a psychologist, associate fellow of the British Psychological Society and director of the Research Centre for Applied Psychology at the University of Bedfordshire:

**MONDAYS** can be a drag for lots of folks, as they try to find their stride for the work week.

- Take two minutes to relax and visualize a successful day before your students get to your classroom.
- Take a stroll alone after lunch or after the school day just to clear your head and enjoy your surroundings. Don't plan lessons or go over difficulties.

**TUESDAYS** are a good time to make sure you aren't letting stress build up early in the week.

- Review the first two days of the school week to spot any stress triggers starting to kick in. If you can name them, you can take action against them. Take some deep breaths.
- Let go of any negative emotions you may be feeling. If you need to forgive yourself or others, do it.

**WEDNESDAYS** come right in the middle of the week—stay refreshed and rested.

- Have a sleep schedule and relaxing bedtime routine.
- Schedule in some exercise (a walk around the block counts).
- Take a five-minute vacation by imaging yourself in your favorite relaxation spot. You'll feel refreshed afterward.

**THURSDAYS** are good days to laugh and take yourself and life just a little less seriously.

- Chuckle with your colleagues or listen to some comedy on the way to school. Laughing will help you connect with others, and is good for your health, too.
- Challenge your negative self-talk by reducing "should/shouldn't/must" statements.

**FRIDAYS** mean it's almost time for the weekend. Think about relaxing and how you'll wind down from work.

- Eat regularly and stay hydrated, especially when stressed and busy. Be positive.
- Keep a list of things you do that you find relaxing. Then choose one and plan to do it without feeling guilty.●



# A Meal That Could Change Your School

Mix It Up at Lunch Day is an international campaign that helps bring kids together across typical social boundaries. It was created by Teaching Tolerance, an organization dedicated to helping form inclusive school communities. Because a school's cafeteria is often one of the areas of the building where differences and separation can be most evident, when students can move beyond their comfort zones there, new friendships begin, confidence grows, and horizons broaden.

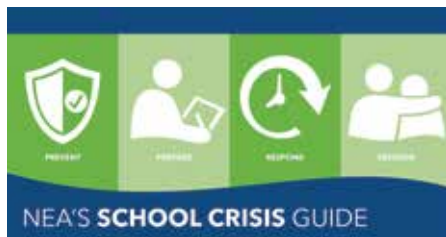


Schools are encouraged to hold a Mix It Up event at any time during the year, and help is available on the Teaching Tolerance website to help you pull one together. There, you'll find everything from information on how to get started to potential activities to printable materials. It could be a day you and your school will never forget.

To learn more, visit [www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up](http://www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up).

# NEA School Crisis Guide Can Help Both Prevent an Emergency and Respond to One

Two P's and two R's form the basis for helping your school get through hard times, according to the NEA School Crisis Guide. School staff must first focus on prevention and preparation and then, when necessary, response and recovery.



There's a long list of topics under each of those four sections in the guide, including such areas of attention as fostering a positive school climate, conducting a comprehensive needs assessment, using social media in a crisis, training crisis teams, and coming together as a community.

The guide is free and can be downloaded at <https://actionnetwork.org/forms/nea-crisis-guide>.

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6a. Paid or Mailed (Sum of 6a1 and 6a2)	0	0
6a1. Paid or Mailed (Sum of 6a11 and 6a12)	0	0
6a2. Paid or Mailed (Sum of 6a21 and 6a22)	0	0
6b. Paid or Mailed (Sum of 6b1 and 6b2)	0	0
6c. Paid or Mailed (Sum of 6c1 and 6c2)	0	0
6d. Paid or Mailed (Sum of 6d1 and 6d2)	0	0
7. Total Distribution (Sum of 6 and 7a)	42,943	43,006
8. Copies not Distributed (Sum of 8a and 8b)	175	494
8a. Total (Sum of 8a1 and 8a2)	42,768	43,500
8b. Incomplete Mailing	175	494
9. Total (Sum of 7 and 8)	43,118	43,500

Illustration and photo by iStock

## More Teens Unplug Than You Might Think

Teens actually do step away from their electronic devices from time to time. A study by The Associated Press and NORC at the University of Chicago showed that they do so for a variety of reasons, some voluntary and some not.

Here's a part of what the study found:

Sixty-five percent of surveyed teens took self-imposed social media breaks. The top reasons:

- **38 percent** said it was getting in the way of work or school.
- **24 percent** were tired of the conflict and drama.
- **20 percent** were tired of having to always keep up with what was going on.
- **5 percent** wanted to get away from a friend or a current or past boyfriend or girlfriend.
- **4 percent** said they were tired of it, it is stupid, or it's boring.
- **3 percent** were being bullied and harassed.
- **3 percent** reported that their friends left the platform.
- Just about half (**49 percent**) took involuntary social media hiatuses. The top reasons:
  - **38 percent** said their parents took their phone, computer, or device.
  - **17 percent** said their phone was lost, broken, or stolen.
  - **4 percent** lost connectivity due to camp or vacation. ●

## Empty Desks...

More than 8 million children—or about 15 percent of all K-12 students—were chronically absent from school during the 2015-16 academic year, the latest federal data show. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 15 or more days of the school year. ●

**SOURCE:** *Attendance Works* ([attendanceworks.org](http://attendanceworks.org))



## Teens *Need* Some Stress

In talking with teenagers, I matter-of-factly point out that their teachers should be giving them hard academic workouts, because that's what will transform them from wobbly middle school colts into graduation-ready racehorses.

To be sure, some days will be light on challenge and others will feel overwhelming. But I try to reassure students by telling them this: If, on balance, they are feeling stretched at school and asked to step up to a new level once they've mastered an old one, then things are going exactly as they should. ●

*Lisa Damour, psychologist and author of Untangled: Guiding Teenage Girls Through the Seven Transitions Into Adulthood*

**American Education Week 2018 | November 12-16**  
Reach. Educate. Inspire.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>12</b> Kickoff Day Encourage students, staff and parents to celebrate great public schools.	<b>13</b> Parents Day Invite parents and family members to school for a first-hand look at a typical school day.	<b>14</b> Education Support Professionals Day Wear #RedForED to recognize and celebrate ESPs who meet the needs of the whole student.	<b>15</b> Educator for a Day Encourage elected officials and community leaders to serve as "educators for a day" for a hands-on school experience.	<b>16</b> Substitute Educators Day Honor and celebrate educators who are called on to substitute for regular classroom teachers in their absence for their services.

#aew2018 | [www.nea.org/aew](http://www.nea.org/aew) nea #REDFORED

## A Little Wording Change Can Go a Long Way

If you often begin class by saying, “Here’s what we did yesterday” and then proceed to review yesterday’s content, maybe you should ask, “What did we do yesterday?” instead, says Pooja K. Agarwal, author of the forthcoming book *Powerful Teaching: Unleash the Science of Learning*. She suggests then giving students one minute to write down what they remember. Research shows that this subtle shift from reviewing to retrieval transforms student learning without additional prep or classroom time. ●



**10 STRATEGIES**  
AND PRACTICES THAT CAN HELP ALL STUDENTS  
OVERCOME BARRIERS

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Build relationships

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Be intentional with your lesson planning

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Use a balanced data approach

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Have high and consistent expectations

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Scaffold instruction to grade level standards

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Teach vocabulary explicitly

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Get your students engaged and excited

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Reflect and reflect often

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Provide multiple opportunities.  
Strive to embed learning.

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Don't be afraid to be vulnerable

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**ASCD**  
LEARNING TO LEARN

## Suggestions for Collaborating with Your School Librarian

- Certified school librarians take courses in children’s and young adult materials, learning to build standards-based instructional units. Revisit your content standards and ask your school librarian how books and readings can be incorporated.
- Librarians can help you use award-winning books from across the curriculum.
- Classroom teachers can’t rely entirely on textbooks and PowerPoint presentations; school librarians can provide reliable online, real-world texts from databases and websites for a student-centered classroom.
- Collaborate with your school librarian to build a classroom library—she or he can supplement your collection. Ask about ebooks and digital audiobooks, books for displays, and mentor/anchor texts.
- Librarians learn how to teach research skills to students, how to retrieve information from all types of databases and web browsers, and how to choose appropriate tools for student use.
- Librarians also know how to build successful reading programs and can help set up reading and writing contests, book clubs, book giveaways, reading goals, Skype sessions with authors, and more.
- Librarians can help classroom teachers implement reading strategies, such as chunking and journaling during reading.
- Librarians can plan events using resources from local public libraries, museums, businesses, community leaders, and more.
- Using information ethically is one of the most important parts of digital literacy, and librarians teach students how to cite information appropriately, guard their privacy, and share information ethically. ●

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## My Career is Far From Over. How Do I Give My Students What They Deserve for Decades to Come?

— Courtney Cutright

This marks my fifth year of teaching and, in addition to having to renew my license, I find myself wondering if education really is where I see myself for the rest of my career. I'm also in the midst of that first semester slump in which the newness of back-to-school has waned and we teachers find ourselves looking for the light at the end of the tunnel, also known as winter break.

I am a career switcher. I left journalism in my early 30s to be a stay-at-home mom while I pursued a graduate degree in teaching. When I landed my first classroom, I was on the brink of celebrating 35 years. I'll be 64 years old when I'm eligible for retirement in my school division. More and more lately, I question whether I can continue this job at this pace for 25 more years.

My time management skills have improved each year, but I constantly find myself without enough time to get it all done. My to-do lists are never-ending. Most days I don't leave my desk or classroom to eat lunch. I spend every minute grading papers, planning lessons, making copies, collaborating with other teachers, or phoning parents.

Still, I regularly bring work home—data to analyze, SMART goals to set, more grading, reading about what's new in language arts instruction, and prepping for the next day.

To the world outside of education, it looks like teachers have it

made with school day hours and lots of holiday breaks. But in reality, I work at a pace 10 months out of the year that I could not sustain 52 weeks a year.

It's no wonder teachers burn out. A 2016 Learning Policy Institute report found that 19 to 30 percent of new educators leave the field during the first five years of teaching.

A 20-something colleague I became friends with last year decided to leave teaching after three years in the public school system. She left her teaching job without another job lined up or much of a plan. She is young, single, and without much tying her down.

After months of job searching, she's going to work in the floral department of a grocery store. There, she won't have to deal with the behaviors of rambunctious and sometimes disrespectful preteens. She will not have to enlist parental support in her day-to-day activities. She won't have to lug home papers and tests to grade. Her evenings and weekends won't be consumed by lesson plans or exploring new ways to reach today's students. She no longer has to shoulder the responsibility of her students achieving passing SOL scores.

At first, I thought she was crazy. But now I'm not so sure. She traded financial and professional stability for a job that is mentally less taxing. She chose happiness and her own well-being. When she punches the time clock at the end of her shift, she is done with all things related to her job until her next shift.

Times have changed, and we no longer live in an era in which you spend your entire career working for the same company or organization. In the private sector, it used to be that you put in your years with a company and that company took care of you into retirement. Then the declining economy took away pensions and other benefits. In public school divisions, that plays out through efforts to do more with less.

There is a shortage of teachers in Virginia and nationwide. And with the VEA's research showing that Virginia's average teacher salary is \$9,218 behind the national average, it's not surprising that fewer college students are pursuing careers in K-12 education in the commonwealth.

Tongue in cheek, I will keep wearing one of my favorite t-shirts, which states, "I became a teacher for the money and the fame." ●



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