

VIRGINIA
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School suspensions are on the rise

THE CHALLENGES OF STUDENT MISBEHAVIOR





COVER STORY

8

Student misbehavior, on the upswing since COVID, is making life in the classroom miserable for many Virginia educators.

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Cover and photo above by Brian Hubble



"How about we go to my house and stare at our phones?"



Editor

Tom Allen

VEA President

Dr. James J. Fedderman

VEA Executive Director

Dr. Brenda Pike

Communications Director

Kevin J. Rogers

Graphic Designer

Lisa Sale

Editorial Assistant/Advertising Representative

Kate O'Grady

Contributors

Benjamin Sizemore

Heather Binkley

Matthew McCarty

Bill Pike

Bruce Ingram

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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.



"Her tests are totally biased against kids who don't study."

The Rich Get Richer?

If you give money to an organization that provides free or reduced-price private school tuition vouchers, you can be reimbursed for it through a voucher tax credit. In Virginia, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, more than half of voucher tax credits are going to families with incomes of more than \$200,000.●



"That's it? You just press 'delete'? You kids have it so easy! When I was your age, we had to eat the homework!"

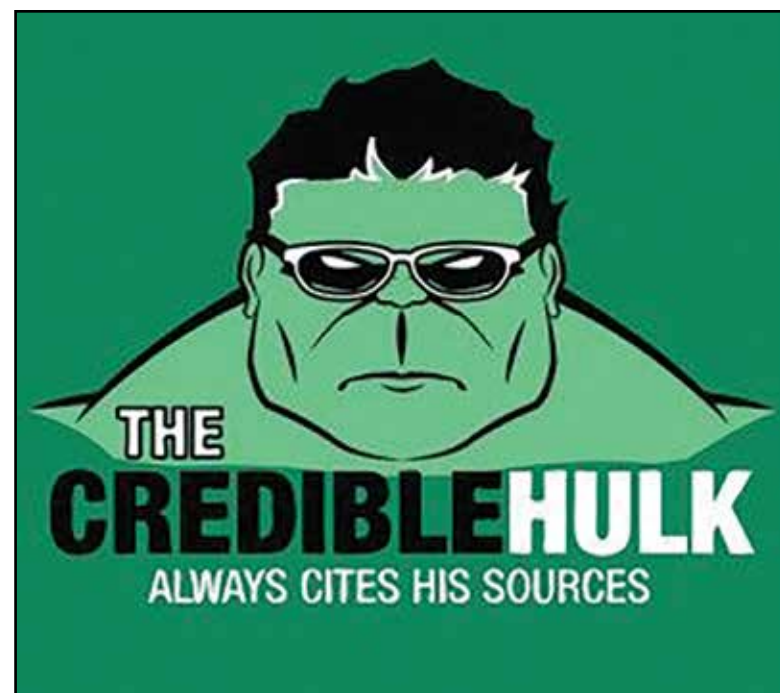
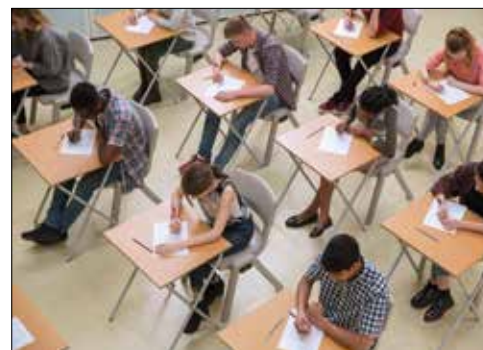
To Solve a Problem, You Must Name It

If your school division's superintendent is named Michael, John, David or James, it's not unusual—those four names make up 10 percent of all district superintendents in the U.S.

If you add the names Jeff, Robert, Chris, Brian and Steven, you're now up to 20 percent.

In the current school year, women account for just 28 percent of American K-12 superintendents. You can get a similar percentage of men from just 15 men's names: The ones already mentioned plus Scott, Mark, Kevin, Jason, Matthew and Daniel.

It's all from research done by Rachel S. White, an assistant professor at the University of Tennessee, who's been looking into gender gaps in the American superintendency. "Once you start getting into [the data], it just becomes so evident how male-dominated the field is," she notes.●



Honest Abe...

"Upon the subject of education ... I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people may be engaged in."●

— Abraham Lincoln



Scary Numbers; Scared Parents

Around 16 million people—which translates to about 1 in every 20 U.S. adults—now own at least one AR-15 assault rifle, which was originally developed as a military weapon. AR-15s have been involved in 10 of the 17 deadliest mass shootings in the nation since 2012.

Is it any wonder that about a third of U.S. parents say they're either "very worried" or "extremely worried" about an active shooter threat at their child's school?●



Sources: *The Washington Post*, *Pew Research*

As Seen On Twitter



TOUCHING BASE WITH...

BENJAMIN SIZEMORE
MECKLENBURG EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHER

What do you like about your job?

History has been an absolute passion of mine, and I want my students to develop an understanding of it. Teaching teenagers world history is a challenge, but what I love about it is sharing information with them they never knew, and not having them just memorize it but challenging them to think about past events in our world and how they relate to our everyday lives.

How has being in the union helped you?

It's been a super asset to me. First, to be allowed to work with many great educators around the state is a true blessing. I've learned so much from these top professionals and I appreciate the networking opportunity. Also, MEA/VEA has given me insight and resources to become a better teacher and a better advocate for my fellow educators. Seeing decisions being made firsthand has given me a unique perspective, and I give much credit to the VEA/MEA for this. The advantages and assistance from MEA/VEA have been immeasurable.●

84

Percent of people consider it at least somewhat important that public schools “have a mix of students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds.” (Just under half found it “extremely” or “very” important.)●

Source: *The Century Foundation*

“

A kid said something funny in class today and the entire room, myself included, burst out laughing and could not stop for several very long, very joyous minutes. I was in tears.

That won't show up in any data sheet, but it matters too.

—MARCUS LUTHER
Teacher

edutopia



“My show-and-tell is head lice.”

Why We Have Fifth-Graders Proofread for Us

Earlier this school year, Fauquier County fifth-grader Liam Squires was hard at work studying, science textbook in hand. As he went over an illustration of the rock cycle, something seemed not quite right.



That’s because something was, indeed, not right. The labels for igneous rock and sedimentary rock had been reversed in the book. Liam pointed this out to his teacher, who passed the information along to an instructional supervisor at the school, who let the textbook publisher know of the error.

Evidently, it will be corrected in future editions as the company has now sent Liam a letter, thanking him for “paying such close attention in class.”●

Source: *Fauquier Times*



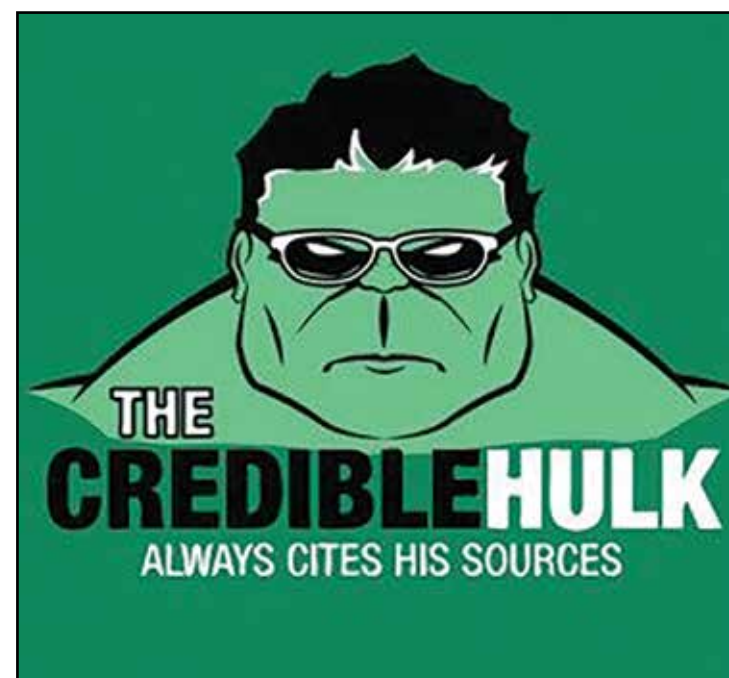
A Little Kindness Goes a Long, Long Way

Mother Teresa said that words of kindness can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless. One New Jersey high school has taken those words to heart. Wayne Valley High School students and staff have been doing “Third Party Compliments” for six years, passing along some 2,500-3,000 anonymous kind, upbeat messages every school year.



According to Assistant Principal Scott Wisniewski, Third Party Compliments makes a big difference. “The impact that this program has had on our school climate has been undeniable,” he says. “Staff and students consistently share with me that this is their favorite activity of the year.” He goes on to describe message recipient reactions as “pure joy and happiness.”●

Source: Edutopia



“This is Logan, Mom. He’s here to seek asylum.”

Bargaining a Boost

Though most people think of collective bargaining as dealing with salary and compensation, it also applies to working conditions. Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions. Smaller class sizes, less standardized testing, and even protected planning time are things that educators want for students as much as for themselves. Providing a comprehensive collective bargaining resolution that gives educators a real voice in policymaking gives the people who have the most face time with students a chance to advocate for them and their needs.

Though collective bargaining won’t stop the culture war evident at school board meetings, it is a step we can take to help improve our schools, and that’s a start. Educators know students. We know their names, we know their needs, and we will fight for them. Help us advance our schools by supporting collective bargaining movements across the state.●

Loudoun Education Association Vice President Heather Binkley, in a letter to the editor published in The Washington Post.

Photos and illustrations by iStock

DISRESPECT, DEFIANCE, AND FEAR

Student misbehavior, on the upswing since COVID, is making life in the classroom miserable for many Virginia educators.

By Tom Allen



Blatant disrespect for authority, outright defiance, failure to heed class rules, not doing assignments: Some degree of student misbehavior has probably been part of the classroom experience since the dawn of schooling. However, since the return to post-pandemic in-person instruction, Virginia educators say, the issue has become an increasingly difficult and dangerous one that's costing our schools and students some excellent educators.

It feels a bit like a catch-22. We needed to close schools to protect health and save lives, but the ensuing disruption in routines continues to reverberate in our classrooms, perhaps most of all in the areas of social skills and behavior. The result is a sometimes-scary work environment for teachers and school staff, complicated by the fact that many don't feel supported in a crisis by either school administrators or parents.

None of this is a strictly Virginia problem. A nationwide survey released in February by education research firm EAB (eab.com), found that 84 percent of teachers believe their students are "developmentally behind in self-regulation and relationship building compared to students prior to the pandemic," and that violent classroom incidents have more than doubled since COVID.

"Teachers today find themselves in the midst of chaos, fueled by declining trust in and respect for teachers in general," says Hope Chapel, a longtime Henrico County middle school teacher who decided to leave the classroom after last

school year. "Perhaps most concerning is the attitude that many students bring to school, influenced by the media and community attitudes. They feel justified engaging in rude and disrespectful behavior."

Educators routinely experience that disrespect, along with refusal to do classwork, students on cell phones during instruction, disruptive behaviors, and threats—threats that must be taken seriously in light of the violent events at Richneck Elementary School in Newport News earlier this year and in other schools in and beyond Virginia.



Amanda Lambert

Chesapeake Education Association member Amanda Lambert, a high school English teacher, recently told a student to get off his phone while she was trying to teach. He refused, so she told him to come speak with her, only to have him refuse again. When she told him to step out into the hall, he repeated his

refusal before finally ending his call by explaining to the person on the other end of the conversation, "Gotta go. My teacher's tripping."

And that's pretty minor compared to this incident related by Fairfax Education Association member and special education teacher Nevine Youssef: "A student with a disability hit her teacher on the head while taking a test because she didn't want to complete the test. The teacher suffered a concussion, was out of work for a month, and endured headaches, nausea, and difficulty with walking. She continues to suffer from severe headaches at least three times a week and is so traumatized she's thinking of switching her career to a safer one."

Other teachers report that students routinely leave class without permission, destroy school property

and items that belong to other students, that online bullying and conflicts spill over into classrooms—the list goes on. There are stories like these happening in schools across the state. Today.

Is It Just COVID?

While not the sole culprit, two years of pandemic-related upheaval in schools has certainly ratcheted up behavior issues. "Students were not in a 'normal' structured environment for over 18 months," says Education Association of Suffolk member Claudette Pierre. "While not having to follow any classroom rules, they were setting their own schedules, engaging in online classes at their leisure, having little to no accountability in any area related to school, and having excuses made for their failure to engage, remain on task, come to class regularly and on time, and be prepared with an emphasis on learning."

Youssef agrees, noting that with virtual instruction, many students lacked supervision at home: "They did what they wanted, had no class rules, and didn't interact with peers and staff. There was no real social interaction for about two years. Now that they are back in school buildings, they have to follow class rules, re-learn social skills, and follow a schedule."

Another factor in today's hard-to-manage classrooms, as described by Joy Gavin, a Chesapeake Education Association member, is the aftermath of unfettered internet use by students at home all day, every day while schools were closed. They weren't spending that time on education- ➤➤➤



al sites, she says, but “on social media and other sites where everyone can say anything—and most children don’t put effort into fact-checking. Constantly hearing their own thoughts and opinions voiced back to them has resulted in an uptick in absolute thinking. Their viewpoint on any given issue is the only one that’s valid, and they can point to all these people who agree with them. Different sites have different algorithms, but most keep exposing you to content similar to what you already like, so they’re not really being exposed to different viewpoints. Now we have a group of children with fixed ideas about a variety of issues and they’re so used to a homogenous experience that they feel threatened by anyone who doesn’t agree with them. Many students seem to have completely lost their ability to allow other people to just exist if they’re doing something they don’t agree with.”



Where are the Grownups?

Educators have long looked to parents and administrators to be allies when behavior issues arise, but they’re often finding that support less and less available in today’s climate. Many feel they’re no longer given the benefit of the doubt by either party.

“Respect is a key element in any relationship,” says former Henrico teacher Chapel. “As a new teacher, I was trusted to manage a classroom full of students while providing effective and engaging lessons. We were respected as professionals by our administrators and the parents of our students. Today there’s a growing lack of respect for teachers in our communities—gone are the days when we were the trained, experienced professionals trusted to conduct the classroom with integrity, enthusiasm and love for our craft and our students. The profession I knew and loved has become almost unrecognizable.”

Teachers encounter this lack of respect in different ways. “I’ve asked students what their moms would think of their behavior, and I’ve been told either, ‘She won’t care’ or ‘She ain’t gonna do (bleep).’ Sadly, many aren’t wrong,” says Chesapeake’s Lambert. “Right now, I’m dealing with a parent who’s angry because their child turned in work two weeks after it was due, and it wasn’t graded in two days.”

Many children now feel free to speak to adults as if they were peers. “I had a student that told me to get off his ‘meat,’” says Mary Beth Shelar of the Charlottesville Education Asso-

ciation. When she brought this to his parent’s attention, the response was “a list of excuses as long as my arm.”

Teachers can handle difficult classroom situations exponentially more effectively when they’re confident they’ve got administrators standing behind them. “I’ve heard administrators blame teachers if their students misbehave,” says Shelar. “The first thing some do is ask, ‘Did you establish a relationship with the student?’ Really? I’ve been doing that for 33 years of teaching. We can have a positive relationship with our students and those students can still make wrong choices—they still need to be held accountable.”

That accountability will only come with support from the top. “Administrators need to be trained and supportive,” says Fairfax’s Youssef, “and a behavior plan should be in place. When a student is misbehaving how will administration support us?”

How Do We Fix This?

Teachers definitely have some thoughts on how we might make headway on all this. Alisa Downey of the Roanoke County Education Association offers a short but powerful list: smaller class sizes, less pre- and post-testing, more social and emotional instruction and, perhaps most important, increased mental health staff and resources for both students and staff.

Suffolk’s Pierre agrees with that last point. “Some school administrators, both in the building and in central office, are unaware of what’s happening inside their buildings,” she says. “We need more school psychologists and social workers on hand and accessible.”

She’s aware of the increased emphasis on educator self-care that has grown out of pandemic fallout, but >>>

There Oughta be a Law: Scary Classroom Experiences Lead Virginia Beach Members to Seek Legislative Protection

Kelley Green and Rebekah Butler Cagle’s teaching careers both got off to the same flying start—less than two weeks into their first year in the classroom, both were punched in the stomach by an angry elementary school student.

That’s not all the Virginia Beach Education Association members, who teach in different schools, have in common, either. This year, Green’s fourth and Butler Cagle’s first, both have had students threaten to bring guns to school. Both have felt that the danger they’re in, and rising student misbehavior, have been downplayed by school administrators. Both have driven to school in the morning with sinking, anxious feelings in the pit of their stomachs.

And why wouldn’t they? This year, Green was also verbally abused during a phone call with a parent who showed up soon after at an open house and physically assaulted her. Butler Cagle had a student do hundreds of dollars in damage to her classroom when he was sent to the “calm down corner.”

Enough was more than enough, so Green and Butler Cagle took their plight, one shared by teachers across Virginia, to the floor of the 2023 VEA convention. There, they proposed a New Business Item calling for VEA’s Legislative Committee, members, and staff to push for a new law at next year’s General Assembly called the Educator Protection Act. The Act would include:

- An established, mandated protocol when teachers are threatened by students.



Kelley Green (left) and Rebekah Butler Cagle at the VEA convention.

- The banning from school property of parents who threaten school staff members.
- Financial responsibility for parents whose children destroy classroom property.
- Personal leave for educators to recover their physical and mental health when they’ve been assaulted by students or others.

- Mandatory school threat assessment.
- Mandatory staffing of an in-school suspension room.

Convention delegates enthusiastically embraced the proposal, not only adopting it but doing so unanimously, prompting a tearful, emotional reaction from both Green and Butler Cagle.

“For four years, I’ve been told I’m being overreactive and too dramatic,” says Green, “To be told by educators from all over the state, ‘We validate your experience’ was so hopeful.”

Butler Cagle wants the impact of such a law, if created, to “make everyone feel like they belong, and that they have the safe learning environment all our school documents say we’re entitled to.” After Abby Zwerner was shot at Richneck Elementary School in Newport News in January, Butler Cagle shared her thoughts in a TikTok video. You can see it at <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTR3oFTxH/>.

“We deserve to be protected, too,” Green says. “We’re also someone’s kid, and we deserve to go home and see our families at the end of the day, too.”

Already, at least one legislator in the Virginia Beach area who learned of Green and Butler Cagle’s proposed law has volunteered to sponsor it in next year’s General Assembly session. ●

Doing the Math

Here are some numbers related to student behavior in our public schools, from the Virginia Department of Education's "School Climate Reports" for the 2021-22 school year, the most recent data available (bear in mind that these are only the numbers officially reported):

VDOE breaks its figures down into six categories: behaviors that impede academic progress; behaviors related to school operations; relationship behaviors; behaviors of a safety concern; behaviors that endanger self or others; and behaviors to determine persistently dangerous schools. Here are a few examples:

- There were 84,242 reported behaviors that impede academic progress, which include, among others, excessive noise, interrupting a class, being off-task, being out of seat, cheating, unexcused tardiness to school, and possessing items that distract.
- 101,807 incidents of behaviors related to school operations were reported, including, among others, failure to be in one's assigned place, possession of stolen items, refusing to comply with staff requests, unauthorized use of school equipment, and giving false information.
- 106,452 behaviors of a safety concern were reported. These include actions such as physical contact of a sexual nature, stalking, stealing money or property using physical force, leaving school grounds without

permission, possessing a weapon other than a firearm, endangering the safety of others on the bus, and cyber or other bullying that continues after intervention.

- None of these three categories includes items such as possessing a firearm, assaulting a fellow student or a staff member, illegal drug possession, fighting, or threatening, intimidating, or instigating violence, injury, or harm to a staff member.
- Chronic absenteeism, defined as having missed at least 10 percent of days in a school year, is a clear factor in student misbehavior.
- One-fifth of Virginia's public school students (20.1 percent; 245,002 total) fell into this category. For students from economically disadvantaged homes, the percentage chronically absent was 29.8.●



also sees an important need for school administrators to provide "continuous support—emotionally, socially, and in the classroom—to teachers, as well."

Teachers know they must play a critically important role, too, if headway is going to be made

in improving student behavior. "We have to make sure our expectations of students and their responsibilities are clearly laid out and explicitly stated," says Chesapeake's Gavin. "Some students no longer know what we think they know in terms of behavior, so we

have to tell them what we're looking for. This goes to work ethic, as well. We must have firm, naturally occurring consequences that make sense. You can show grace and still hold people accountable."

Her Chesapeake colleague Lambert agrees. "When there's



Joy Gavin

says. "If teacher or assistant principal A allows a rule to slide but teacher B holds the line, the kids will make life miserable for teacher B, which isn't fair."

For Lambert and teachers across the state, though, some quality backing from parents would certainly be appreciated: "Review school and classroom expectations with your children. Read the syllabus. Be familiar with the student handbook."

Gavin adds, "Monitor your child's access to the internet and have conversations about how to evaluate information."

The general public doesn't really seem to understand how much the situation has deteriorated in many schools. Lambert recently spent an hour with a first-year teacher she mentors. "She spent half of the time in tears because the behavior issues she's dealing with have her ready to quit," she says. "She's dreamed of doing this her entire life and has stellar evaluations. Eighty percent of her first block class is failing because they refuse to do work and are constantly giving her hell. Sending them to administration does no good, referrals go nowhere, and the parents just shrug and say, 'What am I supposed to do?' She is suffering, and I'm doing everything I can to help her. Things are awful right now."●

Allen is editor of the Virginia Journal of Education.

a standard, it needs to be enforced consistently between classrooms as well as between teachers and administration," she

How Can We Make our Reams of Data Helpful?

Disruptive students create fear, affect morale, and can lead to injuries, adding up to another level of trauma for their peers, teachers, administrators, and communities.

School systems in Virginia are required to report student discipline infractions and subsequent dispensations to the Virginia Department of Education. We have lots of data about our public schools, but I wonder how we are using that data to make our



school environments safer and more conducive for learning.

Unruly behaviors do not help the morale of teachers and staffs, nor the recruitment of new teachers. How many teachers resign at the end of each school year because of these ongoing discipline challenges, and how many prospective

education majors rethink their career choice for the same reasons?

For too long, our public schools have been asked to solve our societal problems. I'm sorry, but schools can't solve malignant cycles related to poverty, employment, housing, nutrition, mental and physical health, and the erosion of our families.

That erosion and the instability of our families can no longer be ignored. An August 2022 report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation points out that "nearly 24 million children live in a single-parent family in the United States, or about one in every three kids across America."

Parenting in the best of circumstances is challenging work. Yet, how many of our aggressive disruptive behaviors can be attributed to an unstable home or ineffective parenting? The erosion of our families can also be seen from another angle in the staffing of our schools. Many schools now employ a family advocate.

We must also ask: Are our current education templates working? Can our present education models meet the extreme needs of disruptive students who have not found success in school? How can we use our unlimited data to develop more effective models of curriculum and instruction for unruly students?

— By Bill Pike, a retired educator who spent 31 years in Virginia's public schools as a teacher, coach, and administrator.●

Growing Our Own

A Virginia special educator offers suggestions for developing special education teacher leaders.

By Matthew McCarty



"A leader who produces other leaders multiplies their influences."
— John C. Maxwell

Many school divisions, here in Virginia and across the country, are struggling to fill record numbers of special education teaching vacancies. We've perennially filled such openings in our state with folks who have four-year degrees but may not have the required training needed for full licensure. This creates situations where schools find themselves pulling general education teachers out of already strained classrooms, hiring folks without proper training, and working with inclusion classrooms that may not have a fully licensed special education teacher. These practices can lead to drastic turnover rates among special education staff, which aren't good for schools, students, or anyone else.

We need teachers who are still in the classroom to step into roles with greater leadership, and I've written

here before about the difficulties rural school divisions have in training teacher leaders. I'd like to address the same issue in the special education world.

What I mean by teacher leaders is not those who go through administrator preparation programs, but take on roles in school improvement, school and community relations, and building positive and productive relationships among all stakeholders.

Here are some steps school and division leaders can take to support burgeoning special education teacher leaders. They're not all-inclusive but rather meant to be an outline for how we can approach growing leaders who have a level of expertise in special education laws and regulations, federal, state, and local policies, ethical considerations, and other facets of retaining quality special education teacher leaders.

FIRST STEPS

- Identify special educators interested in pursuing leadership training. This can be done through assigning roles in meetings, asking a teacher to present their work to colleagues, or other means of identification.
- As a division or building leader, have conversations with teachers who demonstrate the character and ability to lead. Talk to them about why they teach and what they are looking for as their career progresses. Conversations like that, which center around career

goals and expectations, should always be positive, never evaluative or punitive. Strong leadership candidates will emerge during the course of the school year, and it's the job of administrators to harness that ability and character. Teachers who are interested in enhancing their leadership skills will gravitate towards opportunities offered by the school and school division to travel along a leadership pathway.

SECOND STEPS

- Work with partner agencies, such as James Madison University or other local higher learning institutions, to identify leadership programs that not only provide an academic leadership background but will also provide prospective leaders with training in building relationships, school and community relations, decision-making skills, and professionalism and collegiality.
- Provide financial support for those teachers who are willing to become involved in leadership. Also consider providing allotted amounts of time for data analysis, discussion, and professional conversations >>>

and presentations.

THIRD STEPS

- Allow the newly minted teacher leaders time to reflect on their practices in the classroom and as leaders. This can be done through allowing them opportunities to watch their colleagues in action, to participate in the evaluation process, and also to present cutting edge research in best practices, pedagogy, and content.
- School leaders and division staff should work with these educators to identify leadership roles and opportunities within the school and area, including being a department chair, leading a professional learning community, providing support for novice teachers, and being a voice for positive change in meetings and other required activities.

Effective building and division leaders can

identify possible special education teacher leaders early in the school year. They should remember that great teacher leaders come in all different shapes and sizes, and there should not be a mold created in an attempt to alter personalities or maintain a negative vision of control. Quality special education teacher leaders will emerge just as quality general education teacher leaders emerge. It is also important to keep in mind that these candidates may not always be 30-year veterans, but will nonetheless bring the qualities of a leader to the table.

Putting the above-mentioned suggestions into action should be part of a program for growing teacher leaders, part of the vision and mission of a school division, and a great step in building even more successful schools.●

Matthew McCarty (matthew.mccarty@wythek12.org) is a member of the Wythe County Education Association.

It's Going to be EPIC!

VEA's first-ever EPIC (Education Professionals in Collaboration) Conference was a smash last year! Don't miss the 2023 edition, set for **July 21** at the **National Conference Center in Leesburg**. EPIC brings together research and practice information for all educators—teachers, counselors, administrators, ESPs, and aspiring educators.

Register today on VEA's website, veanea.org!



**For Our Students:
Daring to Be Bold**

ABOVE BOARD

New organization to seek, equip, and support qualified local school board candidates.



Tired of the shouting, grandstanding, and rancor that’s come to dominate many local school board meetings? Had enough of small but very vocal minorities pushing extreme agendas? Wishing that school board meetings could be about what’s best for kids instead of culture war battlefields?

You’re not alone. That’s why a new organization is now part of the Virginia education landscape: It’s called We the People for Education (WTPFE), and its vision is to work with educators and families across the state to help elect school board members representative of the students, schools, and their communities. And, perhaps, to restore a certain level of sanity to the overseeing of our schools.

WTPFE aims to help equip school board candidates by offering key assistance in the form of, among others, campaign services, data management, guidance on policy,

communications advice, training, and coalition-building. The organization can also serve as a bridge between being elected and learning to govern effectively as a new leader.

Momentum began to create WTPFE early last year as education organizations, including the VEA, some former Virginia Secretaries of Education and former members of the Virginia Board of Education, and other advocates and leaders passionate about public schools decided to do something to support well-qualified candidates in school board elections, which often found themselves as overlooked local contests. And, while there is a robust political ecosystem for finding and supporting candidates for the General Assembly and other offices in our state, it doesn’t usually extend to school board positions. So, an exploratory group began meeting to combine expertise and raise funds,



and WTPFE launched in March 2023. We the People is a fully Virginia-funded nonprofit, underwritten by organizational and individual donations. If you’re interested in

supporting the group’s mission, there are a number of ways you can help out:

- Follow WTPFE on Instagram at [Instagram.com/wethepeopleforeducation](https://www.instagram.com/wethepeopleforeducation) and on Twitter at twitter.com/WeThePeople4Ed.
- Sign up for updates at the WTPFE website, www.wethepeopleforeducation.org.
- Make a financial contribution through the website.
- Contact WTPFE, also through the website, to let them know about excellent potential school board candidates in your area. ●

THIS Summer's TOP 10



Summer is typically a time for teachers to slow down, take a deep breath, and do some much-needed self-care, but also to refocus as they prepare for a new group of students. Here are 10 suggestions for spending some of that summer time, courtesy of [ThoughtCo.com](https://www.thoughtco.com), and Melissa Kelly, author of *The Everything New Teacher Book: A Survival Guide for the First Year and Beyond*:

- 1. Get Away from It All**
A teacher must be “on” every day of the school year. In fact, as a teacher you often find it necessary to be “on” even outside of the school setting. It is essential to take the summer vacation and do something away from school.
- 2. Try Something New**
Take up a hobby or enroll in a course away from your teaching subject matter. You will be surprised how this can enhance your teaching. Your new interest may be the thing that connects with one of your new students.
- 3. Do Something Just for Yourself**
Get a massage. Go to the beach. Go on a cruise. Do something to pamper and take care of yourself. Taking care of body, mind, and soul is so important to having a fulfilling life and will help you recharge and restart for next year.
- 4. Reflect on Last Year’s Teaching Experiences**
Think back over the previous year and identify your successes and your challenges. While you should spend some time thinking about both, concentrate on the successes. You will have

greater success improving upon what you do well than focusing on what you did poorly.

- 5. Be Informed About Your Profession**
Read the news (and keep up with the information being put out by your union) and know what’s happening in education. Today’s legislative acts could mean a big change in tomorrow’s classroom environment.
- 6. Maintain Your Expertise**
You can always learn more about your topic. Check out the latest publications. You might find the seed for an excellent new lesson.
- 7. Choose a Few Lessons to Improve**
Pick 3-5 lessons that you feel need improvement. Maybe they just need enhanced materials or maybe they just need to be rewritten. Spend a week rewriting and rethinking these lesson plans.
- 8. Assess Your Classroom Procedures**
Do you have an effective tardy policy? What about your late work policy? Look at these and other classroom procedures to see where you can increase your effectiveness.
- 9. Inspire Yourself**
Spend some quality time with a child, your own or someone else’s. Read about famous educators and inspirational leaders. Remember why you got into this profession.
- 10. Take a Colleague to Lunch**
It’s better to give than to receive. Think of a fellow teacher who inspires you and, as the school year approaches, let them know how important they are to students and to you. ●

'General' Knowledge

U.S. Surgeon General issues advisory to call attention to youth mental health issues, offers advice on how to help.



When the U.S. Surgeon General issues an “advisory,” it’s a rare public statement meant to call attention to “an urgent public health issue” and to offer recommendations for immediate action to address it.

That’s why it was notable when Surgeon General Dr. Vivek H. Murthy released such an advisory just over a year ago called “Protecting Youth Mental Health.” In his introduction, he noted that with a pandemic and the increasing use of technology and social media, “the challenges today’s generation of young people face are unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate. And the effect these challenges have had on their mental health is devastating.”

Mental health issues don’t lend themselves to one-size-fits-all solutions, either, he added: “Every child’s path to adulthood—reaching developmental and emotional

milestones, learning healthy social skills, and dealing with problems—is different and difficult. There’s no map, and the road is never straight.”

The road does, however, include lots of time spent in classrooms, so the advisory offers some insight about what both educators and caregivers can do to help create a strong foundation for the mental health of the young people in their charge. Here’s a sample:

- **Be the best role model you can be for young people by taking care of your own mental and physical health.** Young people often learn behaviors and habits from what they see around them. You can model good habits by talking to children about the importance of mental health, seeking help when you need it, and showing positive ways you deal with stress so children learn from you.

- **Create positive, safe, and affirming school environments.** This could include developing and enforcing anti-bullying policies, training students and staff on how to prevent harm (e.g., implementing bystander interventions for staff and students—see page 24), being proactive about talking to students and families about mental health, and using inclusive language and behaviors.
- **Help children and youth develop strong, safe, and stable relationships with you and other supportive adults.** Research shows that the most important thing a child needs to be resilient is a stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult. Show children love and acceptance, praise them for the things they do well, listen to them, and communicate openly about their feelings. Encourage them to ask for help and connect them with other adults who can serve as mentors.
- **Protect and prioritize students with higher needs and those at higher risk of mental health challenges,** such as students with disabilities, personal or family mental health challenges, or other risk factors (e.g., adverse childhood experiences, trauma, poverty).
- **Expand social and emotional learning programs and other evidence-based approaches that promote healthy development.** Examples of social, emotional, and behavioral learning programs include Sources of Strength, The Good Behavior Game, Life Skills Training, Check-

In/Check-Out, and PATHS. Examples of other approaches include positive behavioral interventions and supports and digital media literacy education.

- **Learn how to recognize signs of changes in mental and physical health among students, including trauma and behavior changes.** Educators are often the first to notice if a student is struggling or behaving differently than usual (for example, withdrawing from normal activities or acting out). And educators are well-positioned to connect students to school counselors, nurses, or administrators who can further support students, including by providing or connecting students with services.
- **Provide a continuum of supports to meet student mental health needs, including evidence-based prevention practices and trauma-informed mental health care.** For example, the Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education) program provides funds for state, local, and tribal governments to build school-provider partnerships and coordinate resources to support prevention, screening, early intervention, and mental health treatment for youth in school-based settings. Districts could also implement mental health literacy training for school personnel (e.g., Mental Health Awareness Training, QPR training).
- **Promote enrolling and retaining eligible children in Medicaid, CHIP, or a Marketplace plan, so that children have health**

coverage that includes behavioral health services. The Connecting Kids to Coverage National Campaign also has outreach resources for schools, providers, and community-based organizations to use to encourage parents and caregivers to enroll in Medicaid and CHIP to access important mental health benefits. Families can be directed to [HealthCare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov)

Another Source of Help

The National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH) at the University of Maryland School of Medicine is a technical assistance and training center with a focus on advancing research, training, policy, and practice in school mental health. NSCMH offers resources including publication, Webinars, newsletters, and conferences. You can learn more at www.school-mentalhealth.org.



or [InsureKidsNow.gov](https://www.insurekidsnow.gov). Schools can use Medicaid funds to support enrollment activities and mental health services.

- **Try to minimize negative influences and behaviors in young people’s lives.** Talk about the risks of alcohol and other drugs, both short-term (such as car crashes and other accidents) and long-term (such as reduced cognitive abilities). The earlier a child or adolescent begins

using substances, the greater their chances of developing substance use problems. Mental health and substance use problems can also occur at the same time—some young people struggling with stress or difficult feelings turn to alcohol or drug use. And alcohol and other drugs can also affect mental health, for example by altering mood or energy levels.

- **Support the mental health of all school personnel.** Opportunities include establishing realistic workloads and student-to-staff ratios, providing competitive wages and benefits (including health insurance with affordable mental health coverage), regularly assessing staff well-being, and integrating wellness into professional development. In addition to directly benefitting school staff, these measures will also help school personnel maintain their own ability to create positive environments for students.
- **Be a voice for mental health in your community.** There are many ways to do this, from talking openly with friends and family about the importance of mental health, to going to school board meetings or a town hall, to volunteering with an advocacy group, to promoting greater funding and awareness of mental health programs. You can read the Surgeon General’s Advisory in its entirety here: [vea.link/SurgeonGeneral](https://www.vea.link/SurgeonGeneral).

Convention Delegates Vow Fight to Restore Respect for Schools, Educators

“Reclaiming Our Profession” was the theme for VEA’s 2023 convention and, in the face of book-banning efforts and misinformation leading to a growing criticism of educators, it couldn’t have been a more appropriate choice.

“It’s time to draw a line in the sand,” said VEA President James J. Fedderman in his address to convention delegates. “It is past time for us to raise our heads high, speak truth to power, and reclaim our profession not just for ourselves, but for the students we love.”

Earning a response that rattled the venerable Hotel Roanoke, site of this year’s meeting, Fedderman issued a call to action for educators across the state and beyond to stand strongly for what everyone but a vocal minority already knows—that our public schools are foundational to our children, our families, our communities, and our very future.

Delegates also passed New



VEA President James J. Fedderman at the podium during VEA’s 2023 convention. Below, educator-delegates from around the state bring issues before the delegation.

Business Items calling for legislation building more school safety measures into the Code of Virginia, demanding measures to ensure healthy indoor air quality in our school buildings, directing VEA to hold at least one meeting or training annually at a Virginia college or university with a teacher preparation program, advocating for higher-quality professional development for career-switchers, adopting a Student-Parent-Educator Bill of Rights, and having VEA’s Legislative Committee pursue amendments to state law to strengthen educator protections from workplace bullying or abuse.

Other proposed changes to Virginia law were referred to the Legislative Committee for further consideration

and possible lobbying efforts, including compensation for school employees for unused personal and sick days when they leave the school division’s employment, and codifying unencumbered planning time for elementary school teachers.

Another convention highlight was the appearance of Jim Livingston, VEA’s immediate past president, and his wife, Jo Ellen, also a longtime VEA leader. They announced they were kicking off the new VEA Foundation with a personal donation of \$5,000 now and then their entire estates later, with the money designated to support work on behalf of underprivileged children and to help alleviate our severe shortage of educators of color.

In addition, VEA members held an Awards Dinner to salute educators and organizations for their outstanding work on behalf of public schools and the students and professionals who learn and work in them. For a complete list of honorees, see the facing page. ●



VEA Honors Educators, Groups with Annual Awards

At the 2023 convention, members saluted the following individuals and groups for their excellent work in support of public education:

Legislator of the Year. The highest honor VEA has for General Assembly members was presented to three elected officials this year: **Delegate Sam Rasoul**, for his steadfast support of better pay for educators, improved school funding, teacher loan forgiveness programs, and early childhood education; **Senator George Barker**, for his leadership in prioritizing budget items for lifting the state support cap, scaling up the National Board Teacher Certification Program, and expanding English Language Learner services; and **Senator Janet Howell**, for supporting legislation and budget amendments to fully fund Virginia’s Standards of Learning and improve early literacy, and for her years of support on women’s rights issues.

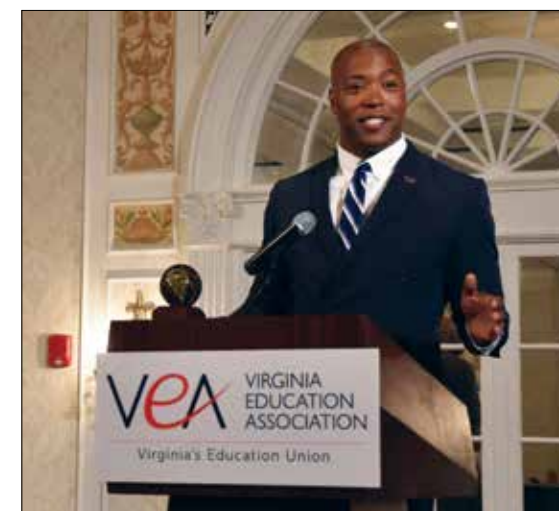
Legislative Rookie of the Year. There were two honorees here, **Senator Aaron Rouse** and **Delegate Holly Siebold**, who both hit the ground running in their first General Assembly terms, standing up for public schools and supporting several key VEA initiatives.

Legislative Champions. VEA also recognizes legislators whose support for public education stood out, often under adverse circumstances. This year we salute **Delegates John Avoli, Jeffrey Bourne, Carrie Coyner, and Sam Rasoul, and Senators Ghazala Hashmi, Louise Lucas, and Jennifer McClellan** (now a member of the U. S. House of Representatives).

Barbara Johns Youth Award for Human Relations and Civil Rights. This was presented to the **Alexandria City High School Black Student Union, Theatre Department and Television Remembrance Project**, high school students and their advisors who participated in a city-wide initiative to help residents and others understand the local history of racial injustice and to work toward a community of equity and inclusion.

VEA-Retired Martha Wood Distinguished Service Award. **Ralph G. Booher, Jr.**, is this year’s winner, in recognition of his decades of service to VEA members as, among other roles, Washington County Education Association president, VEA and NEA Board of Directors member, part of numerous VEA state committees, and a representative on the VEA-Retired Council.

VEA Fund Award for Political Activism. There were two honorees this year, the **Virginia Beach Education Association** for its campaign and lobbying efforts on both the local and state levels; and the **Chesapeake Education Association**, for its active endorsements and campaign activity in Chesapeake’s school board and



State Senator Aaron Rouse accepted his Legislative Rookie of the Year Award in Roanoke at VEA’s convention.

city council elections.

Robley S. Jones Political Activist Award. Two awards were given here, one to **Dr. Amy Tiller-Brown**, dean of the School of Education at Virginia Union University, in honor of her work in educational equity, school reform, and teacher education; and one to **Robert N. Barnette, Jr.**, president of the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP, for his tireless advocacy for civil rights and social justice.

VEA A+ Awards for Membership Growth. Three UniServ units and two local associations were honored for growing their membership and for successes in their collective bargaining campaigns: **Southside, Central RVA, and Blue Ridge UniServs and the Petersburg and Falls Church City Education Associations.** ●

VEA Welcomes Three New Staff Members



Natalie Cole, is a new Government Relations Specialist based at our HQ building. Most recently, she served as Director of Government Relations at the Colorado Education Association and has also served in that capacity at the Mississippi Education Association.



Gregory Marcellus is VEA's new Information Systems Specialist in our Technology and Data Department, and brings 15 years of technology management experience in both nonprofit and for-profit organizations. He will oversee all technology used by VEA staff and manage the Help Desk.



Alicia Smith is now a UniServ Director working out of the Mountain View office. She has worked as a VEA UD before, leading the Elizabeth River UniServ Unit. Since then, she's earned a law degree and has been working on a temporary basis in Fairfax. ●

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It Won't be Easy. But We Must Do This.

— Dr. James J. Fedderman

Our jobs have never been easy. Easy is not why we decided to go into education and easy is not why we stay.

Unfortunately, it's now getting more difficult. Not only must we educate students, we must educate lawmakers, parents, and the public about what we do and how we do it. We have to justify every single second of our day, inside and outside of school, and prove our worth, while keeping our mouth shut and doing our job. It's all too much.

That's why I say it's time to draw a line in the sand. It is past time for us to raise our heads high, speak truth to power, and reclaim our profession not just for ourselves, but for the students we love.

As educators, this is our right and our duty. We need to take back control from the privatizers who see our students as a profit center and from the politicians who seek to use public education as a tool of repression, rather than enlightenment. We need to re-establish public education as the common foundation of our democracy upon which everything else is built.

Of course, this will not be easy.

It is no secret that we face some serious challenges, but change is never easy. It takes courage to fight for what is right. But that is *exactly what we must* do if we hope to reclaim the profession.

First and foremost, we must speak the truth. We must be honest about the



problems we face, and we must be willing to admit our own mistakes. The first step to solving a problem is admitting that one exists.

Second, we must take back our power. We must stop being passive, and start being active. We must stop waiting for others to make the changes we need and start making them ourselves.

And lastly, we must have the courage to take risks. We must be willing to step out of our comfort zones, to challenge the status quo, and to put ourselves on the line for the sake of the profession.

This will require sacrifice and hard work. It is worth it. Because in the end, reclaiming the profession is not about us as individuals, it's about the future of our profession.

Don't think for a *single minute* that you're not strong enough for this. Every day, students walk into classrooms with every manner of hope and hardship. And no matter who they are or where they come from, you fight for them. You fight for their freedom to learn—and your freedom to teach. You fight for all of us. You are fighters. Every. Single. Day.

Join me in this fight. Let us speak the truth, take back our power, and have the courage to make the changes we need. Together, we can reclaim our profession. For our schools, for our students, and most importantly, for ourselves. ●

MCEA Members Latest to Gain Seats at the Table

The latest in a string of collective bargaining breakthroughs in Virginia has happened in Montgomery County, where the school board voted 5-2 for a resolution to begin negotiations, making the county the first school division in southwest Virginia to do so. Following the vote, one board member told local media, "To me, to do what's best for students is to do what's best for teachers, bus drivers, custodians, and cafeteria workers."



Elsewhere in the state:

- Members of the **Harrisonburg Education Association** collected a majority of authorization cards from teachers in only two weeks.
- The **Loudoun Education Association** won a school board vote to establish a timeline for the board to pass a bargaining resolution.
- **Arlington Education Association** has won an election to represent county educators at the table! ●

A Glimpse of the Future



Your future colleagues gather, prepare for the classroom. Pre-service teachers representing nine Virginia colleges and universities met in Virginia Beach in March for the 2023 SVEA-Aspiring Educators Conference, gaining insight into classroom management, hands-on math, reading remediation, assessment design, and other topics. In addition, delegates elected a new slate of officers, led by Delaney Spiker of Randolph-Macon College. ●



NAEP is hiring

In-school data collectors are needed for national assessments of grades 4, 8, and 12, January 29–March 8, 2024.

Enter your contact information at <http://www.WorkNAEP.com> to be notified once applications are available.





What to Do When Bullying Happens

Bullying is a scourge in our schools, both in person and in cyberspace. It's dangerous, damaging, and it has to stop. If you see an incident happening in your classroom or around your building, here's some advice on how to best respond, from the NEA:

Before an incident happens

- **Know your rights and responsibilities.** It's our responsibility to know how and what we're expected to do, and how laws and policies support our actions. For example, when you intervene in a bullying incident, you are not infringing on the bullying student's right to free speech. It is also important to be aware of what your legal protections are (e.g., contract language, liability insurance, and school policies).
- **Be consistent.** Ultimately, the steps to take to intervene should be trained and discussed as a part of a comprehensive school-wide bullying prevention program.
- **Be prepared.** Research local resources (e.g., counseling, anger management) so you're prepared to make any needed referrals.

During an incident

- **Stop the incident immediately.** Separate the student doing the bullying and their target. Stand between them in order to block eye contact, ensuring you can observe both.
- **Make sure everyone is safe.** Address any health needs or injuries. Get assistance from other school staff members

if necessary. Make sure to ask the bullied student, "Are ou okay?" Seek police or medical assistance immediately per your school policies if:

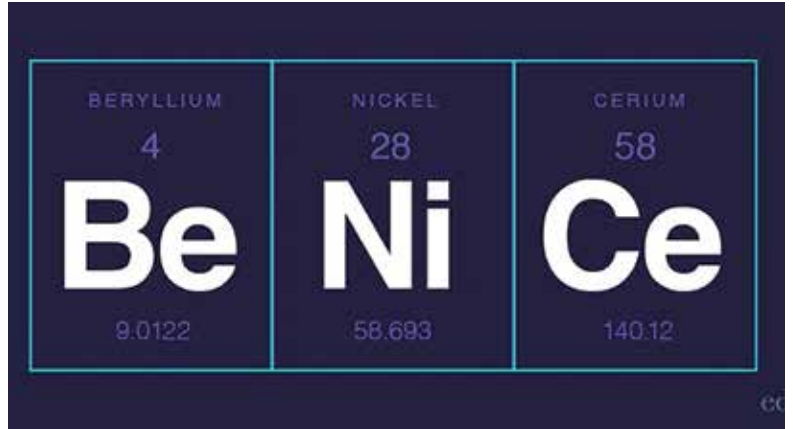
- o A weapon is involved
- o There are threats of serious physical injury
- o There are threats of hate-motivated violence (e.g., racism, homophobia)
- o There is serious bodily harm
- o There is sexual abuse
- o There is robbery or extortion

- **Give a clear message.** Bullying is unacceptable. Remain calm as you address the students. Label the behavior as bullying. Cite relevant school or classroom rules (e.g., "Name calling is bullying. Bullying and not respecting others are both against the rules in our school."). If anti-bullying rules or posters are on nearby walls, point them out. Students who bully must hear the message that their behavior is wrong and harms others. Bullied students must hear the message that caring adults will protect them.
- **Prepare to follow-up after the incident.** Don't send students away at this point, but do refrain from asking questions and trying to sort out the situation. This should be handled one-on-one, after the incident. Do not require students to apologize or make amends immediately when you stop the incident. Keep every one calm as you first focus on safety. Then advise all parties to the bullying that you will be following up.
- **Support the bullied student.** Make eye contact with the bullied student, demonstrate empathy, and reassure the student that what happened was not their fault. Never tell the student to ignore the bullying.
 - o Do not blame or punish the student for being bullied
 - o Do not tell the student to fight back
- **Encourage bystanders.** If the bystanders did stand-up, reinforce their efforts. Let the bystanders know that you admire their courage and thank them for speaking up, which helps themselves and other students. If the bystanders did not intervene, give them examples of how to intervene appropriately the next time that they see bullying (e.g., get help from an adult, tell the person to stop). Research points to the >>>

important role bystanders can play during a bullying incident and in changing the school climate.

After an incident

- **Investigate and document.** After a bullying incident, an investigation should be conducted. Remember to question all those involved individually. The incident also should be documented according to school procedures.
- **Consider consequences for those who bully.** If appropriate, impose immediate consequences for the student doing the bullying. Con sequences work best when they are logical and communicated in advance. After the incident, keep a close eye on the student who bullied to prevent any retaliatory attempts, and make sure he or she knows that you plan to do so. Be sure to provide the necessary support for those who bully, such as counseling or anger management classes.
- **Avoid a "working things out" approach.** Do not require the students to meet and "work things out." They don't know how. They need adult intervention. Because bullying involves a power imbalance, such a strategy will not work and can actually re-traumatize the student who was bullied.
- **Be a caring adult for bullied students.** Continue to make sure the bullied students are supported well beyond the incident. Make sure they have the resources they need. Reach out to other staff members who can provide guidance and emotional support to students. Advocate for bullied students by making a concerted effort to stop bullying at your school. Come together as a school by involving parents and the local community in your efforts. Addressing bullying cannot and should not be done by the school alone. The entire community must be involved so that students feel safe in both their school and their community.●



76%

Respondents in a December 2022 survey by Education Week who say they "have never received any professional training or education on climate change or how to teach it."●



Five Most Frequently Spoken-at-Home Languages in the U.S. (not counting English)

1. Spanish or Spanish Creole
2. Chinese
3. Tagalog
4. Vietnamese
5. Arabic



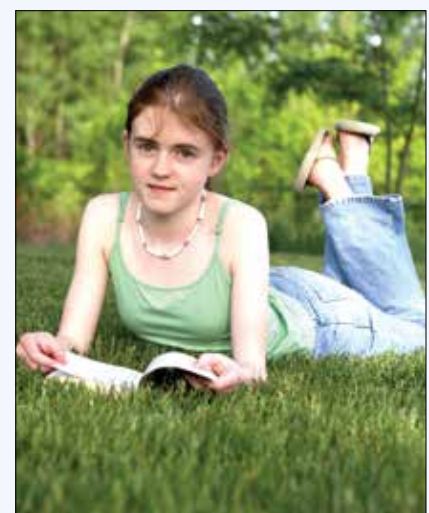
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

In Virginia, Mandarin and Cantonese are the most common languages spoken at home other than English.●

Source: visualcapitalist.com

Photos and graphic illustration by iStock

Young Readers Still Love Paperbacks



Despite what many believe, Gen Z has not abandoned books for screens. Defined as people born between 1997 and 2015 (which makes them anywhere from 8 to 26), Gen Z'ers may be a significant reason that book sales set records in 2021 in both the U.S. and U.K. Young adult fiction sales jumped 30.7 percent in the U.S. that year as teens took to books.

Social media may actually be a big driver in this trend, especially the hashtag #BookTok on TikTok, as teens have been posting reviews in large numbers.

Pew Research found, in a survey taken in 2021 and 2022, that nearly 70 percent of U.S. readers between 18 and 29 say they read books in print; 42 percent said they read e-books.●

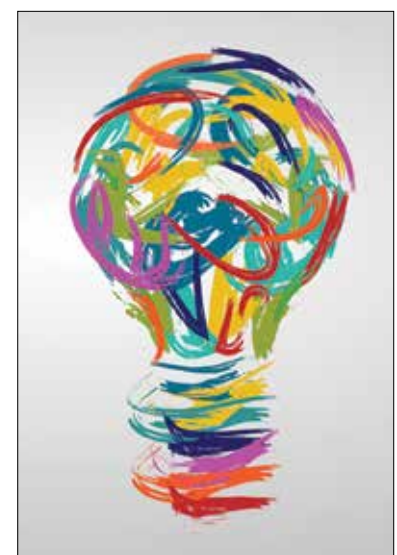
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You Can—But You Can't—Quantify Arts Education

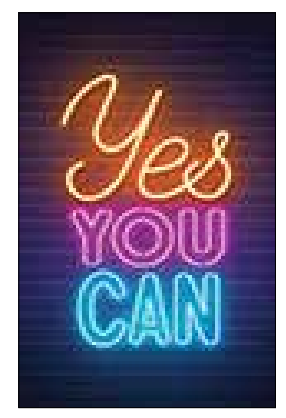
"Over the years, I've used research about how the arts increase math and reading comprehension to defend their existence in the public school curriculum. I've pointed out the social skills that band, orchestra and choir ensembles build. I've even made the case that for some students, a music, art, dance, or drama class might be the only thing bringing them to school each day.

All of these points are true, but they fall short of explaining why the arts truly belong in every student's K-12 curriculum. Instead, they rationalize the arts through a utilitarian lens that ties their existence to the way they can improve skills and understanding in other content areas. After 20 years teaching music, what I've learned is that the arts are essential because humans are inherently creative beings and must be given opportunities to develop their creativity in order to fully understand themselves and participate in a pluralistic society."●

— Jonathan Kurtz, coordinator for the Academy for the Fine Arts and instrumental music instructor at Governor Thomas Johnson High School in Maryland.



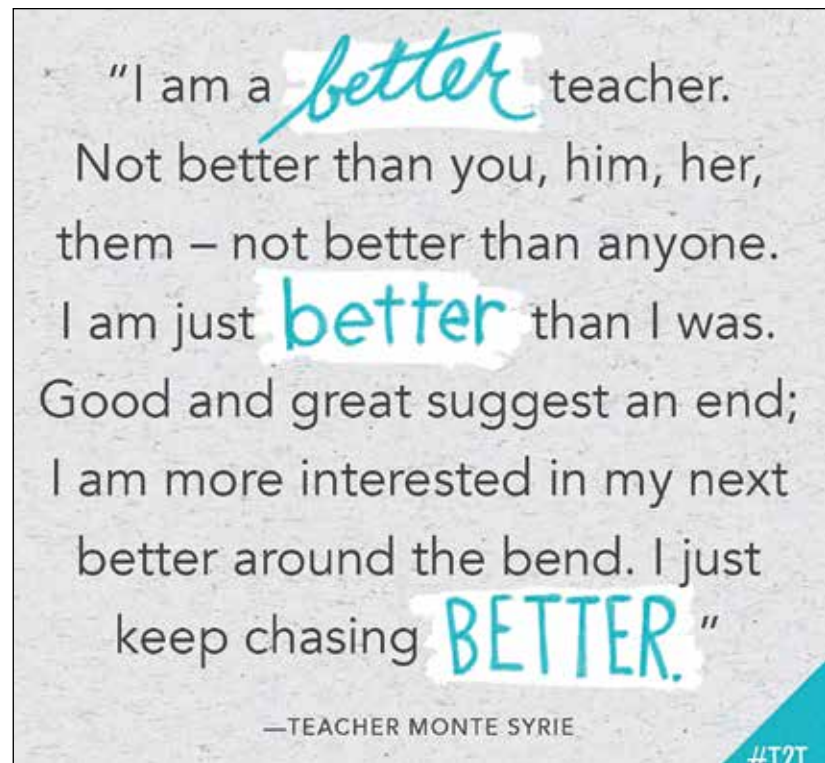
Encouraging Words...



"We've known about the power of encouraging young people for centuries:

"Instruction does much, but encouragement everything."
— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

"Nine tenths of education is encouragement."
— Anatole France (1844-1924)●



A Twitter Tip

Here's a technology-incorporating tip from Miriam Plotinsky, author of *Teach More, Hover Less: How to Stop Micro-managing Your Secondary Classroom* that you may want to try:

Your students are probably savvy Twitter users. Ask them to tweet a summary of the day's lesson on a shared class document or board. Their tweets can be both the basis of end-of-class discussion and the opening of the next day's instruction. You can also use them to check your students' understanding.●



The REAL Shortage

"There is no shortage of people who want to answer the call to love, guide, and teach the next generation. What we have is a shortage of professional pay, basic dignity, and respect for our nation's educators."●

— NEA President Becky Pringle



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Fun and Games: Students Can Learn and Have a Blast, Too



— Bruce Ingram

In 1985, I had been teaching for 10 years and was tired of drilling vocabulary words into my high school students' craniums. I wanted to improve my English students' vocabularies, but just telling them to memorize spellings and definitions was not an effective way to learn.

Pondering possibilities on making learning new words interesting, I came up with the concept of a game I eventually called Bonus Points. The premise has remained the same across the decades. In groups of four and five, my Lord Botetourt High School students compete to spell, define, and use in sentences 10 words from our current literary work. Every time a word is missed, whether it's spelled, defined, or in a sentence, the point value increases by one. Each group only has five seconds to give a response. The winning team receives 10 extra credit points for the vocabulary quiz, the second place group earns eight points, and so on.

By nature, Americans love to compete, and Round One of Bonus Points is replete with high drama, especially when one team conquers a challenging word. But in Round Two, the excitement and tension ratchet the students' intensity to a higher level; I select one letter of the alphabet, and every word must begin with that letter.

These words are much more difficult, so the point values typically run higher, ensuring that even groups that are far behind after Round One still have a chance to make a comeback and win. Also, I often include words that are related to history, geography, or are just amusing to say and define. For example, some Z words I choose include zaddik, zaftig, zaire, zanza, and zarf. In effect, I am teaching across the curriculum.

Recently, I created another game for my English and Creative Writing students. Or, rather, I gave them the idea for a game, and they devised and refined the rules and the concept of a tournament. My idea was to play Wordle in our Bonus Points groups with the individual teams being responsible for coming up with five, five-letter words. Also, I was in charge of approving those words to ensure they were ones that everyone knew.

But after a few rounds, my young people presented several demands. They desired an NCAA tournament style format with Final Four type matchups with the winners of one round playing in the next round, and the losing teams playing a consolation match for third place. Furthermore, they requested to be totally in charge of the vocabulary selections and wanted the option of selecting words that some students might not know. As one young lady said, "They should have to learn some harder words."

One of the goals of Botetourt County's school system is to create student- and project-based learning opportunities, where, in effect, the students are doing the teaching to their peers. So I cheerfully acquiesced to the students demands and soon five-letter gems like fetid and proxy began appearing on word lists. And I was reduced to a spectator in the tournament—which was wonderful.

One doesn't have to be an English teacher to devise word games for students. Five-, six-, or seven-letter Wordle-like games can be designed around events and people in history classes and geographic places in social studies classes, and scientific and health terms would be appropriate in their respective fields, as well. Of course, foreign language words are a natural choice for Wordle-type activities. The possibilities really are endless.

I realize that much of our teaching time must be spent preparing for the Standards of Learning. As I write this, for example, my English 10 A.S. students are preparing for their analytical paper and learning how to write counter arguments. But this semester, they will also play eight Bonus Point games, participate in Wordle and Word Jumble activities, and compete in a class Scrabble tournament. The students will also write for pleasure. These type of activities will hopefully foster a lifetime love for writing, words, and learning – something SOL-themed lessons are ill-equipped to accomplish.

Annually, in my English and Creative Writing classes, on the last day of school we play Cookie Bonus Points. The winning team enjoys first crack at the cookie tray, but every individual wins his or her share of treats. And during the game, anyone at any time can shout out, "Cookie Break!" and the proceedings immediately stop. Fun and games have their place in the classroom. ●



Bruce Ingram (bruceingramoutdoors@gmail.com), a member of the Botetourt Education Association and a veteran educator, teaches English and Creative Writing at Lord Botetourt High School.



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