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April 2026



**You and AI: From 'Technoshame' to 'Technoagency'**





## COVER STORY

8

Educators are dealing with both the shame and pride of using AI to create educational materials.

## UPFRONT

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

Good reads, sinking your teeth into learning, long-distance relationships, Touching Base With Bristol's Danielle Riffe Sheppard, and more.

## FEATURES

### 13 **Less Hate, More Frank**

The power of the personal story: Instead of calling people out, let's invite them in.

### 16 **Redesigning the Ride?**

How to help your students get off the math anxiety rollercoaster.

### 19 **A Brief Guide to Worksite Representation**

Concerted activity, mutual aid or protection, and Weingarten rights.

## DEPARTMENTS

### 20 **Membership Matters**

Talking face-to-face at Lobby Day; Convention delegates will elect VEA president.

### 25 **Insight on Instruction**

Seven ways to cut down on the chatter in your classroom.

### 30 **First Person**

What and who is stressing our students.

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"I'm going to need a little more from you about your day—not just 'The first rule of third grade is we don't talk about third grade.'"



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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.



"I'll just go ahead and put some money in the swear jar."

NOT TO BRAG BUT  
MY TEACHER VOICE IS  
GOOD ENOUGH TO MAKE  
THE CLASS NEXT DOOR  
QUIET DOWN.

BORED  
TEACHERS



"Logan, do you have anything we can list under Honors and Awards besides getting a hall pass during your junior year?"

## Can Your Students Sink Their Teeth into Learning?

Paula Izvernari is a practicing dentist in Montclair, California, and often treats children whose ability to learn she describes as "undermined by untreated dental disease." She points out that a child suffering from mouth pain and the lost sleep that results is often unable to concentrate and too embarrassed to smile or speak.

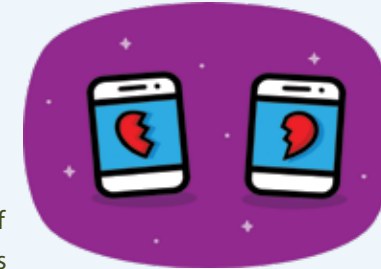


Research shows that dental problems are associated with lower grades, homework completion rates, and psychosocial well-being. "Education begins with a child who is healthy, comfortable, and able to focus," she says. "If we truly care about learning, we must start treating children's oral health as what it really is: a foundation for academic success, not an afterthought."



## The Beauty of a Long-Distance Relationship

"In psychology, there is a principle that could be summarized as physical distance creates psychological distance. When you are in the presence of temptation, the closer it is to you, the more tempting it is."



— Angela Duckworth, psychology professor, University of Pennsylvania, on why school policies that require students to stash their cell phones in pouches or lockers, as well as bell-to-bell policies, are linked to more focused classrooms.

## What Kids Need to Know When They Log On

Two tips from Diana E. Graber, author of *Raising Humans in a Digital World*, about preparing young people for online life:



**What kids need most is our wisdom.** Rest assured, they don't need us to show them how to upload a video to YouTube. What they do need is the wisdom we've earned through lived experience. Sharing this with children helps them make thoughtful choices in an online world full of easy wrong turns.

**Empathy is still the most important digital skill.** Nearly every expert I interviewed while writing my book told me that if they could grant kids one digital superpower, it would be empathy. The anonymity of the internet can make it easy to be cruel, cutting, and thoughtless, but empathy—the ability to understand and share another's feelings—is the best antidote.

**Source:** 15 Lessons from 15 Years of Teaching Digital Literacy, *Psychology Today*



## TOUCHING BASE WITH...

**DANIELLE RIFFE SHEPPARD**  
BRISTOL VIRGINIA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION  
HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER

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

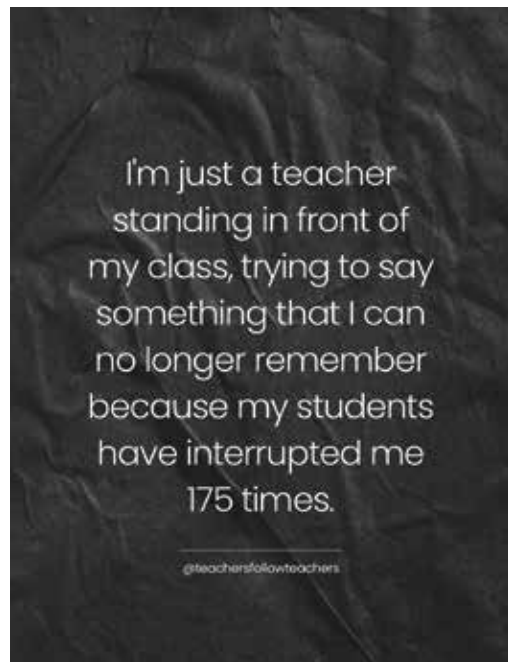
I love the Eureka Effect (aha moments!) when students make real-world connections in history and U.S. Government. Each day in social studies presents opportunities to teach humanity and citizenship! The greatest reward for a teacher is seeing former students apply those lessons by voting, participating in political movements, volunteering in the community, pursuing dream careers, demonstrating compassion, and committing to lifelong learning. I love seeing who my kids become!

### How has being a VEA member helped you?

VEA is a community of incredible educators who have mentored me to be a more effective teacher. The resources, training, collective efforts, leadership opportunities, guidance, and member relationships have positively impacted my teaching experience beyond measure.



"My teacher is so rude. She talks in class while I'm on my phone."



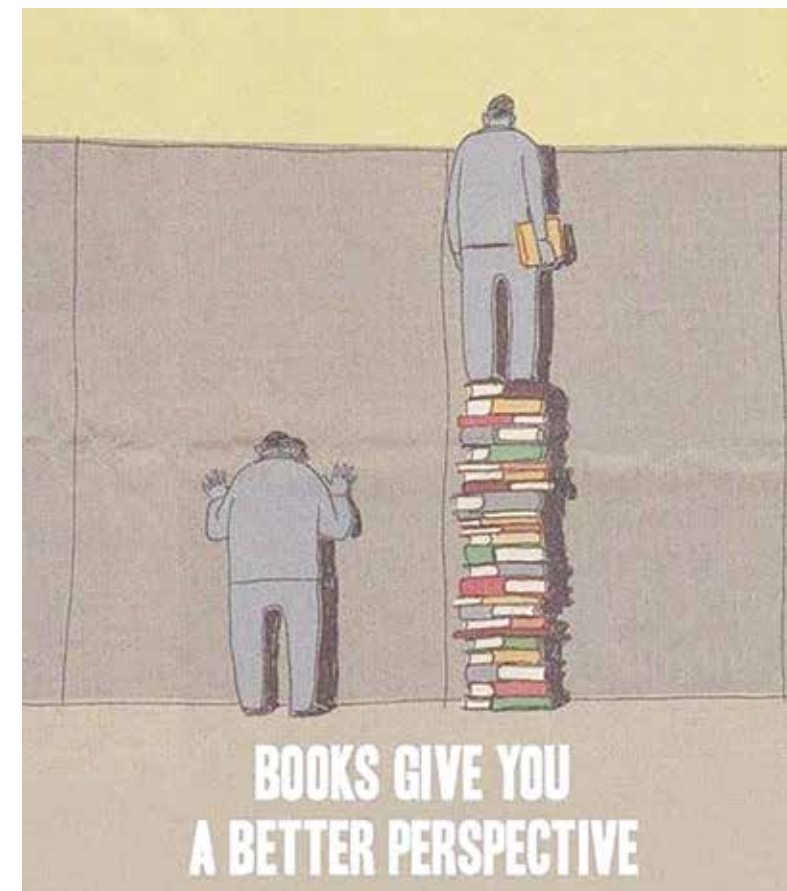
"You wouldn't think someone as organized as Mrs. Killen would run out of A's and B's at the same time."

## The Mental Health of Kids is Not a Political Issue

"We've got to remember this is not a red or blue thing. Providing mental health support is not a Democrat or Republican thing. It's a basic support for students in order for them to reach their God-given potential... What good is a reading program if children are anxious or dealing with trauma from homelessness or other trauma in their life? We have to continue to advocate to make sure people understand how important this is."●



— Former U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona



## Some Outstanding Reads?

The education team at the Greater Good Science Center has come out with its list of Favorite Books for Educators in 2025, calling them "some of the most thought-provoking, practical, and inspirational" ones of the year. If you haven't had a chance to give any of these titles a look, you may want to check them out:

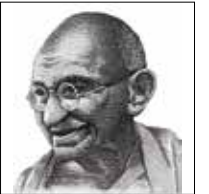


- *Happy Schools: Placing Happiness at the Heart of Schools*, by Romesh Kumar
- *Pedagogies of Voice: Street Data and the Path to Student Agency*, by Shane Safir, Marlo Bagsik, Sawsan Jaber, and Crystal M. Watson
- *The Words That Shape Us: The Science-Based Power of Teacher Language*, by Lily Howard Scott
- *Love to Learn: The Transformative Power of Care and Connection in Early Education*, by Isabelle C. Hau
- *Neurodiversity-Affirming Schools: Transforming Practices So All Students Feel Accepted and Supported*, by Emily Kircher-Morris and Amanda Morin
- *Nature and Spirituality During the Early Years*, by Ruth Wilson
- *Just Shine! How to Be a Better You* by Sonia Sotomayor, illustrated by Jacqueline Alcantara
- *Reinvigorating Classroom Climate: Everyday Strategies to Inspire Teachers and Students*, by Maurice J. Elias

The GGSC, founded at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2001, conducts research on the science of a meaningful life by exploring what helps create happy and compassionate individuals, strong social bonds, and altruistic behavior.●

## Seven Deadly Sins, as Defined by Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi's created "Seven Social Sins" as guiding principles for ethical living, emphasizing the importance of moral duty, upright character, and social responsibility:



- Wealth without Work
- Pleasure without Conscience
- Knowledge without Character
- Commerce without Morality
- Science without Humanity
- Religion without Sacrifice
- Politics without Principle●

## You Live, You Learn...

"We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience."●

— John Dewey, American educational reformer and psychologist



Photos and illustration by iStock



## From ‘Technoshame’ to ‘Technoagency’

*Educators are dealing with both the shame and pride of using AI to create educational materials.*

By Gayle T. Dow and Susan P. Antaramian

**A**rtificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping K-12 teaching, not simply by influencing what students can do (or are not doing), but by transforming how teachers themselves approach instruction. Increasingly, educators are using AI to design lessons, generate classroom materials, differentiate instruction, and provide individualized

feedback.

This is raising fundamental questions about professional identity, instructional judgment, and the evolving definition of teaching itself. Today, teachers might type a prompt into ChatGPT, watch the text appear across the screen, and think, “This is really good!” as they experience the thrill of producing something polished in a fraction of the usual time. Yet for many

educators, that excitement is quickly followed by a quiet unease: “Is this work really mine?” This emotional tension between pride in efficiency and discomfort about authorship or originality is becoming increasingly common. The feeling now has a name we introduce here into educational discussions: **technoshame**. It is not a clinical term, but it captures a very real psychological and cultural tension facing modern educators.

### What Is Technoshame?

We define technoshame as the conflicted emotional response that arises when educators use AI tools to produce instructional materials such as lesson plans, rubrics, worksheets, quizzes, or discussion prompts, and feel both pride in the result and shame about how it was created. Unlike traditional forms of plagiarism or academic dishonesty, technoshame does not typically involve deception or even cryptomnesia, (which occurs when someone unintentionally mistakes an external idea for their own). Educators are aware of their AI use and are pursuing it for legitimate reasons, such as saving time, merging ideas, or enhancing creativity. The discomfort does not stem from wrongdoing, but from a *perceived disruption of professional identity and authorship*.

Historically, teaching has been closely tied to notions of authentic expertise, a theme reflected throughout Virginia’s professional teaching standards. Creating lesson plans, assessments, and instructional materials has long been viewed as evidence of a teacher’s mastery of content knowledge, instructional planning, and professional responsibility. These materials were not just

documents; they were demonstrations of a teacher’s ability to interpret standards, scaffold learning, and differentiate for diverse students. When AI can now generate in seconds what once required hours of thoughtful alignment to the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs), it can feel simultaneously empowering and unsettling. It may function as a welcome support but can also challenge long-held assumptions about what it means to be a highly qualified educator in the Commonwealth.

### Why Teachers Feel Pride

It is important to recognize some of AI’s clear benefits. Teachers are almost always pressed for time, juggling lesson preparation, grading student work, attending meetings, and taking care of countless unseen tasks. AI tools can ease these demands in several ways. They increase **efficiency**, since a worksheet or quiz that might take 45 minutes to create can often be generated in under five. AI can provide **polish** by producing text that is grammatically clean, well-structured, and ready for classroom use. It also offers **inspiration**, as a well-crafted prompt can spark new ways of presenting a concept or organizing a lesson. Finally, it allows rapid **customization** by tailoring content to different reading levels, learning needs, or subject areas. In many classrooms, technoshame begins with pride rather than doubt. When a teacher uses AI to design a differentiated reading comprehension passage or a creative debate prompt, the resulting material can genuinely enhance learning.

### Why Teachers Feel Shame

It’s important to recognize why the shame side of technoshame feels

more complex. For many educators, it’s rooted in long-standing beliefs about **authorship, authenticity, and professional identity**. Teachers may quietly question whether they truly earned the praise a lesson receives if AI assisted in its creation. Others worry that AI use undermines originality or devalues the expertise they have spent years cultivating. Many educators also believe that authentic instruction requires personally crafted materials, since teachers are expected to model academic integrity for their students. This creates tension when educators struggle to define meaningful standards for originality in their own AI assisted work. There is also fear of misinterpretation. Some teachers hesitate to disclose AI use, concerned that colleagues, administrators, or students may view it as cutting corners or even >>>

## Digging Deeper

Here are a couple places to turn to learn more about issues surrounding the use of AI in the classroom:

- The “**Report of the NEA Task-force on Artificial Intelligence in Education**.” NEA President Becky Pringle created this group, which spent seven months investigating current and future roles of artificial intelligence in Pre-K–12 and higher education. You can read and download the report at <https://vea.link/jga>.
- **EDSAFE AI**. The EDSAFE AI Alliance is an organization dedicated to using a safe AI framework to “achieve equitable outcomes for learners and enhance the professional experience of educators.” NEA is a member of EDSAFE AI’s steering committee. Learn more at [www.edsafeai.org](http://www.edsafeai.org).



cheating, despite the fact that many applications are thoughtful, intentional, and pedagogically sound. These concerns are intensified by public debates about AI in schools, where fears about plagiarism and job loss often overshadow nuanced discussions of ethical and transparent use.

It is also important to recognize that technoshame is not only about using a tool, but about shifts in professional identity. Lesson design, instructional language, and scaffolding reflect a teacher's voice and expertise. When AI can replicate or accelerate these tasks, it raises unsettling questions about what it means to be a good teacher, whether authorship defines legitimacy, and where the boundary lies between support and substitution. These questions reflect a profession in transition, often accompanied by

**technoreplacement anxiety**, or fears of being devalued or replaced as AI performs certain instructional tasks efficiently. In this context, the central message matters. AI should not replace a teacher's voice. Professional expertise extends far beyond producing materials. It includes judgment, context, relationships, and the human insight that allows instruction to be meaningful for individual learners.

#### Reframing Technoshame: From Guilt to Empowerment

Technoshame does not have to remain a source of guilt. When examined intentionally, it can serve as a catalyst for professional growth and redefinition. With reflection, it can become an entry point for rethinking pedagogy, authorship, and professional identity. This reframing marks the shift from

technoshame toward technoagency. Here are a few ways to support that transition.

#### Acknowledge AI as a Tool.

A power drill does not make a carpenter less skilled, nor does a microwave (and now an air fryer) make a cook any less capable; both simply speed up part of the process. In the same way, AI use does not diminish an **author's voice** or undermine a teacher's expertise; it enhances their work when used thoughtfully. As educators, we still decide what is pedagogically sound. In Virginia, this responsibility is firmly rooted in the state's professional teaching standards, which emphasize thoughtful instructional planning, alignment to the SOLs, and the use of materials that support diverse learners. Even when AI assists with drafting or brainstorming, it is the teacher who evaluates whether the content meets state expectations, reflects accurate subject knowledge, and aligns with developmentally appropriate practice. It is also the teacher who knows that Olivia learns best when she can read in the quiet corner of the room or that Benjamin loves horses and will be more motivated to write an essay on *Black Beauty*. Ultimately, the teacher, not the tool, determines what strengthens instruction, supports student growth, and upholds professional standards.

#### Emphasize Curation Over

**Creation.** Educators have always curated and shared materials, such as lesson plans, open educational resources, and textbooks, and AI can be understood as an extension of this practice. Professional expertise includes discerning what to use, adapt, and discard. Now, it also includes recognizing that **AI tools may reflect cultural biases** embedded in their

training data, particularly when that data privileges Western, English-speaking perspectives. Therefore, thoughtful review and modification remain essential. Teachers exercise technoagency by reshaping generic outputs into culturally responsive, inclusive, and differentiated instruction. This includes adjusting reading levels, modifying questions, adding scaffolds, or creating alternative pathways for learning. In this way, AI generated materials become meaningful only through the teacher's professional judgment.

**Practice Transparent Authorship.** As the education landscape transitions, transparency becomes increasingly important. If part of the guilt associated with technoshame stems from secrecy, openness can serve as a corrective. Sharing prompts, drafts, and revision processes with colleagues helps normalize AI use and reframes it as a professional practice rather than a hidden shortcut. Transparency shifts the narrative from "I did not write this" to "I intentionally designed and refined this learning experience." When educators articulate how and why they use AI, they reinforce that responsible AI use is a skill rooted in expertise, ethics, and reflection.

#### Practical Strategies for Responsible AI Use

For teachers navigating technoshame, several structured practices can reduce anxiety and support the development of technoagency.

First, use **AI as an assistant rather than an authority.** AI is most effective as a starting point for brainstorming, drafting, or offering alternative representations of content. Teachers then review, revise, and adapt materials to meet instructional goals and student needs. Because AI-generated materials

may contain errors or cultural assumptions, educators retain responsibility for accuracy, bias correction, and appropriateness.

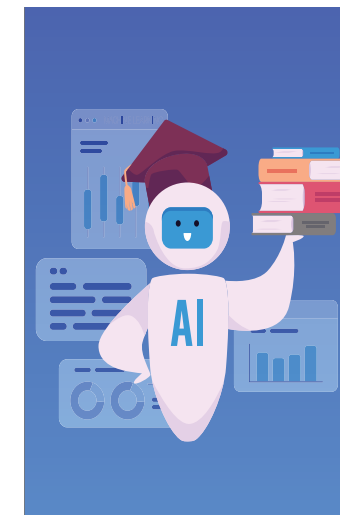
Second, **layer in expertise** by adding classroom context, pacing decisions, differentiation strategies, or accommodations. This transforms AI output into instruction that reflects professional judgment and deep knowledge of learners. In this process, the material becomes an expression of the teacher's pedagogy rather than the technology's output.

Third, **set clear expectations for student AI use.** Modeling transparent and ethical practices reinforces academic integrity and helps students develop critical digital literacy skills. Discussing how and why AI is used in class encourages students to practice essential 21st-century thinking skills such as critical evaluation of information, digital literacy, and ethical reasoning about technology. This conversation also helps students recognize the limitations of AI, including accuracy, bias, and privacy issues, encouraging them to engage with emerging technologies thoughtfully rather than rely on them unquestioningly. Throughout

these discussions, equity must remain central so that AI expands, rather than narrows, learning opportunities.

#### From Technoshame to Technoagency

Looking forward, technoshame may be a transitional feeling, much like the early unease some educators experienced when adopting online gradebooks or flipped classrooms. Over time, the conversation will likely shift from whether teachers use AI to how they use it. Schools and school divisions play a central role in this shift by providing professional development, creating clear policies that encourage transparency rather than punishment, and celebrating innovation rather than policing technology use. As these cultural norms evolve, the sense of shame may dissipate and be replaced by widely accepted, transparent practices that support educator technoagency, which we define as the confident, ethical, and intentional use of digital tools in service of pedagogy rather than in place of it. In this sense, technoshame reflects the collision of old values with new tools, while technoagency represents the >>>



#### AI Classroom Use Rising Quickly

According to a survey by the EdWeek Research Center, teacher use of AI tools in the classroom almost doubled between 2023 and 2025. In 2023, 34 percent of teachers responding to the survey said they were using artificial intelligence in their work "a little," "some," or "a lot." By 2025, that figure had reached 61 percent. Experts point to the growing availability of professional development as a primary factor, as more teachers learn a range of ways AI can be put to work in their classroom.

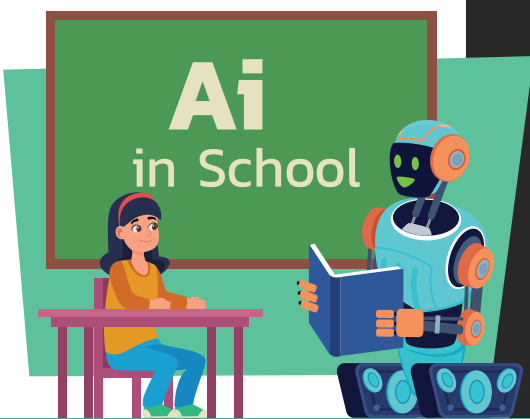
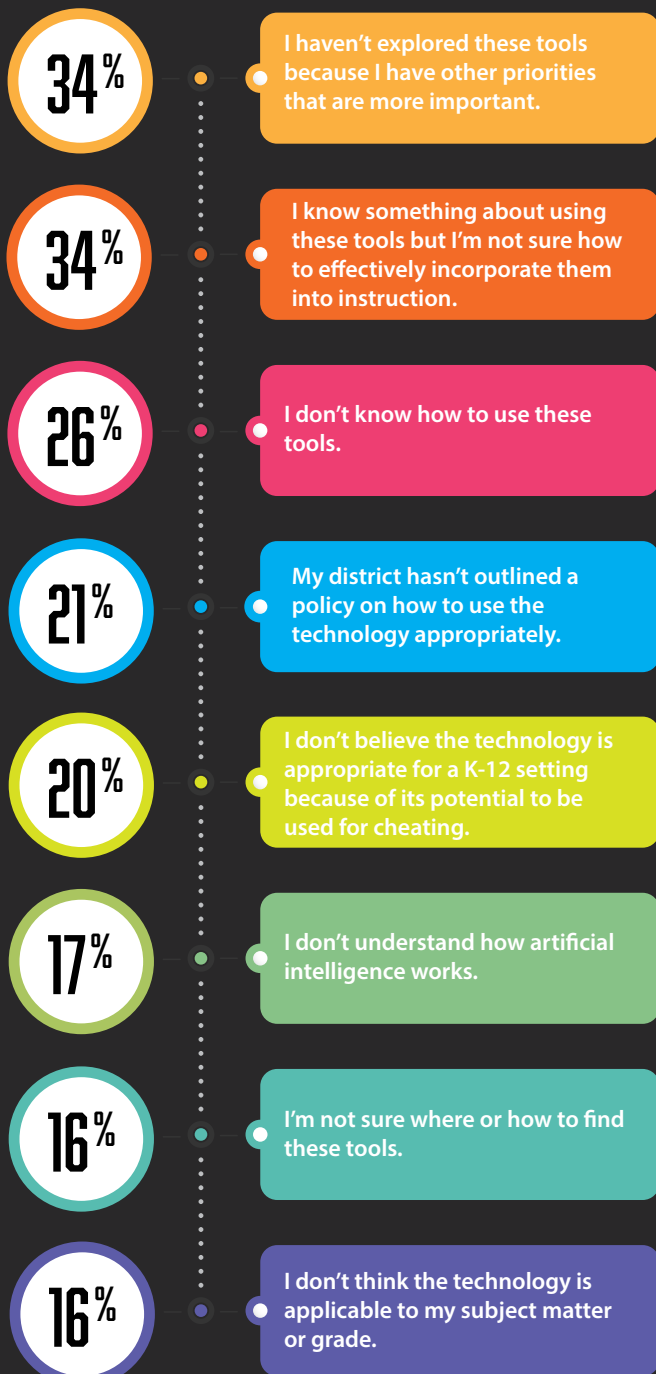
reclamation of professional control and purpose. Pride in using AI does not need to be tempered by guilt. Teachers remain the architects of pedagogy, using every available tool to meet the needs of their students. As technoagency strengthens, tech-noshame will fade, much like past debates about using spell checkers, learning management systems, and digital instructional platforms, reaffirming that the talent of a great teacher never resided in the tool itself but in how it is used. ●

— Gayle Dow, PhD, is an educational psychologist and associate professor at Christopher Newport University whose work focuses on creative and critical thinking. Susan Antaramian, PhD, is a school psychologist and associate professor at Christopher Newport University whose work focuses on student engagement.

**Acknowledgment:** Portions of this article were edited with assistance from ChatGPT, a large language model developed by OpenAI, which was used to support grammar and clarity. All substantive ideas, content, and examples were written by the authors.

## AI: The Resistance

In 2025, the Edweek Research Center surveyed teachers who said they don't currently use AI tools in their instruction, asking them why they had made that decision at the time. Here are their top reasons (teachers were allowed to choose more than one):



Frank Cohn visited Heritage High School to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day, speaking to 130 students in person in the library and reaching all of the school's 1,200 students via livestream. Contact your local Jewish Community Relations Council for help booking a survivor or second generation speaker.

## Less Hate, More Frank

The power of the personal story: Instead of calling people out, let's invite them in.

By Nicole Korsen

The cupcakes were ready and the birthday card was being passed around, hidden under notebooks and behind water bottles. It was slow going though, because every time one of the 25 teachers participating in this human rights seminar raised the pen to add their wishes, they stopped short. No one wanted to miss a minute of Frank's story.

With a remarkably sharp memory, this Holocaust survivor who had just turned 100 (hence the card and cupcakes) was telling the group about his third-grade teacher back in Breslau, Germany. It was 1934. Seven years prior, Frank Cohn's Uncle Max had been brutally beaten and killed (just for being Jewish, said Frank) by a group of street Nazis, so Frank had grown up with a deep-rooted fear that he didn't

really understand.

This teacher was Frank's favorite, having looped with his class from second grade, and according to Frank, "I was sure he liked me too." Then one day, this important role model in Frank's life came to school wearing full Nazi regalia including a swastika armband. With a sad shake of his head, Frank displayed his third-grade class picture, with this teacher proudly posing among his young students. Frank had circled his own small face so we could tell him apart from his classmates—former friends who, taking the teacher's lead in being cruel to Frank, had begun chasing him home after school each day. But Frank reassured us that it was okay because he was a fast runner so "they never caught me." His calm tone conveyed disappointment

and loneliness (this outcast Jewish kid was not very popular), but not anger. Frank told us so much more that day—and none of it would have been as impactful if we had just read about his experience. His gratitude was obvious when he recounted his great luck in being able to immigrate to the U.S. with his parents in 1938. His pride overflowed when he told us about joining the Army, becoming a U.S. citizen, and going back to Germany to fight against the same people that had destroyed his world.

We were about to stop him because we worried that he might be tired, but we decided not to. We couldn't have known that the birthday treat we were about to give him would make his eyes sparkle the way they did when he described the table tennis game where he met his wife. He and his buddy had only known >>>

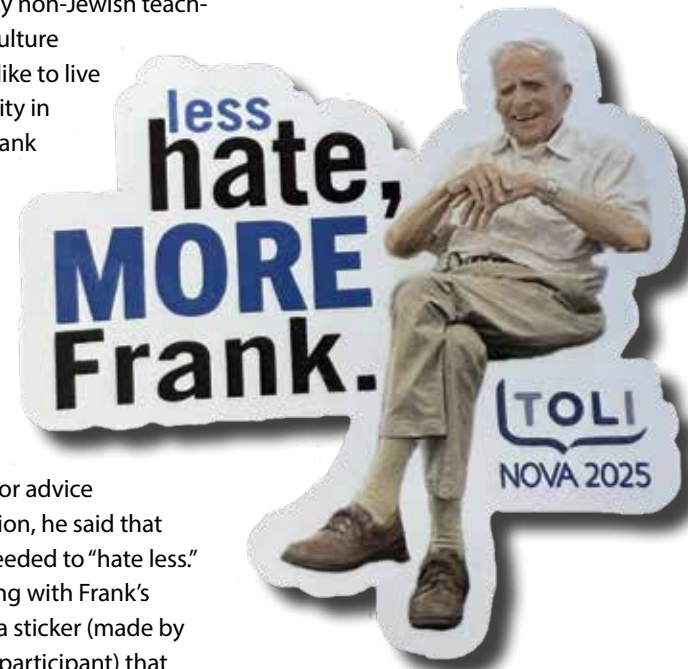
their two female opponents as “ping” and “pong” and with a mischievous grin, Frank told us that he had married pong. I’m not sure he ever even told us her real name, but he lit up when talking about her.

He eventually did need a break from speaking, but after refueling with pizza, the cupcake, and a rousing rendition of “Happy Birthday,” it was clear that he was not going anywhere. Three local Jewish teens had begun our next session, sharing with these mostly non-Jewish teachers about their culture and what it was like to live it as a tiny minority in the DMV area. Frank stayed put—literally, his chair stayed front and center as the teens presented around him—and listened attentively. When they asked him for advice for their generation, he said that our world just needed to “hate less.” That simple saying with Frank’s picture became a sticker (made by a crafty seminar participant) that now adorns many a laptop and water bottle throughout Loudoun County and beyond. It says it all in just four words, “Less hate, MORE Frank.”

### The Power of Story

Personal testimony is powerful. Of course, it isn’t every day that you are able to get a speaker like Frank. But you never know until you ask. Being a 2G (second generation/daughter of a Holocaust survivor), I have been fortunate to work in schools that support me in bringing in speakers like Frank and my own father for as

long as I’ve been teaching. Before Covid, my high school backed me on an Adopt-a-Survivor\* program, where multiple Holocaust survivors would come and speak with small groups of students, who would pledge to “adopt” them by telling their stories every year on Remembrance Days. To this day, when I see students from that program, which ran for three years, they are quick to tell me how they have made those stories their own and never miss a chance to tell them.



Holocaust survivors are dwindling every day, but they aren’t the only ones fighting time with a story to tell.

During the seminar with Frank, a different day focused on local African American history. While touring historical landmarks including the Douglass School in Leesburg, which was once Loudoun County’s only Black high school, alum James Roberts joined us. He was a student there in 1968 when the school shut its doors and the black students were sent to the other LCPS high schools. When asked how he felt then, he struggled to answer

because “No one had ever asked him that before.” Conversations have a way of surfacing the things we don’t even realize we are hiding. We could have just read the mural on the walls inside Douglass (now a recreation center) to learn about that history. But if we had, we never would have learned how confused and conflicted James was about this move toward equality that felt like anything but that.

Likewise, if I had just printed off my father’s story instead of inviting him into my classrooms, I never would have realized what parts of his story were the most impactful and to whom. I was surprised to learn that the group he resonated with the most was the English Learner population, who connected with his experience of coming to a new country without knowing the language. He would espouse the benefits of staying in school by telling them how he wished he could have done that. But as a 15-year-old immigrant helping his family pay the bills, he had to work just like many of our students. Unlike them however, he was unable to balance both so took himself to the movies to learn English (he sounded a lot like Humprey Bogart) and devoured newspapers and books to fill the gaps in his learning. So it was no surprise when after every session, it was the newcomer students who would shyly crowd around him to talk more.

Finding the right speaker for the right occasion can be tough, but a little outside thinking and networking goes a long way. There are many unique ways to bring a personal perspective to an academic topic. Your students can be a great source with backgrounds and connections that we may not know about. Once during a song analysis unit, a student men-



James Roberts, Douglass School alum, telling his story during Leesburg Historical Tour. (2025)

tioned that his father’s cousin was a former pop star (Shaun Cassidy!). Sadly, I was unable to make that visit happen. But it doesn’t have to be a big name. Because our students have so little life experience, hearing how people have gotten to where they are is always intriguing to them. Nor does the connection have to be direct. I once watched a man without arms and legs show a gym full of high schoolers how to draw by holding the marker in his mouth. That message was not about art, but resilience and inspiration.

### Getting Creative to Get Speakers

We have come a long way towards including a variety of voices into what we teach, but we can go further. Even if an in-person visit is not possible, Zoom is an easy substitute. Many schools offer help in coordinating Zoom calls or in-person visits. TED Talks are also a wonderful way to elevate a voice. Bryan Stevenson, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, America Ferrara, and 9/11 “Red Bandana” hero Welles Crowther have all come to life in my classroom. Adichie in particular talks about “The Danger of the Single

Story” highlighting the importance of people being seen as more than just one thing. She reminds us that many prejudices come from a singular view of a person, a group, or even a race of people.

One of the best ways to combat hate and antisemitism is to learn about individuals and the unique lives they lead. If we knew less about Frank, he would just be another Jewish Holocaust survivor. But after hearing his story, which was about much more than just what happened during the war, we learned about who he is as a person. As one wise colleague once told me, instead of calling people out, we need to invite them in. It is in the conversations around these stories where curiosity begins and the dialogue happens. Understanding each other on a personal level is the best way to combat othering, bullying, and other detriments to the well-being of our students and selves.

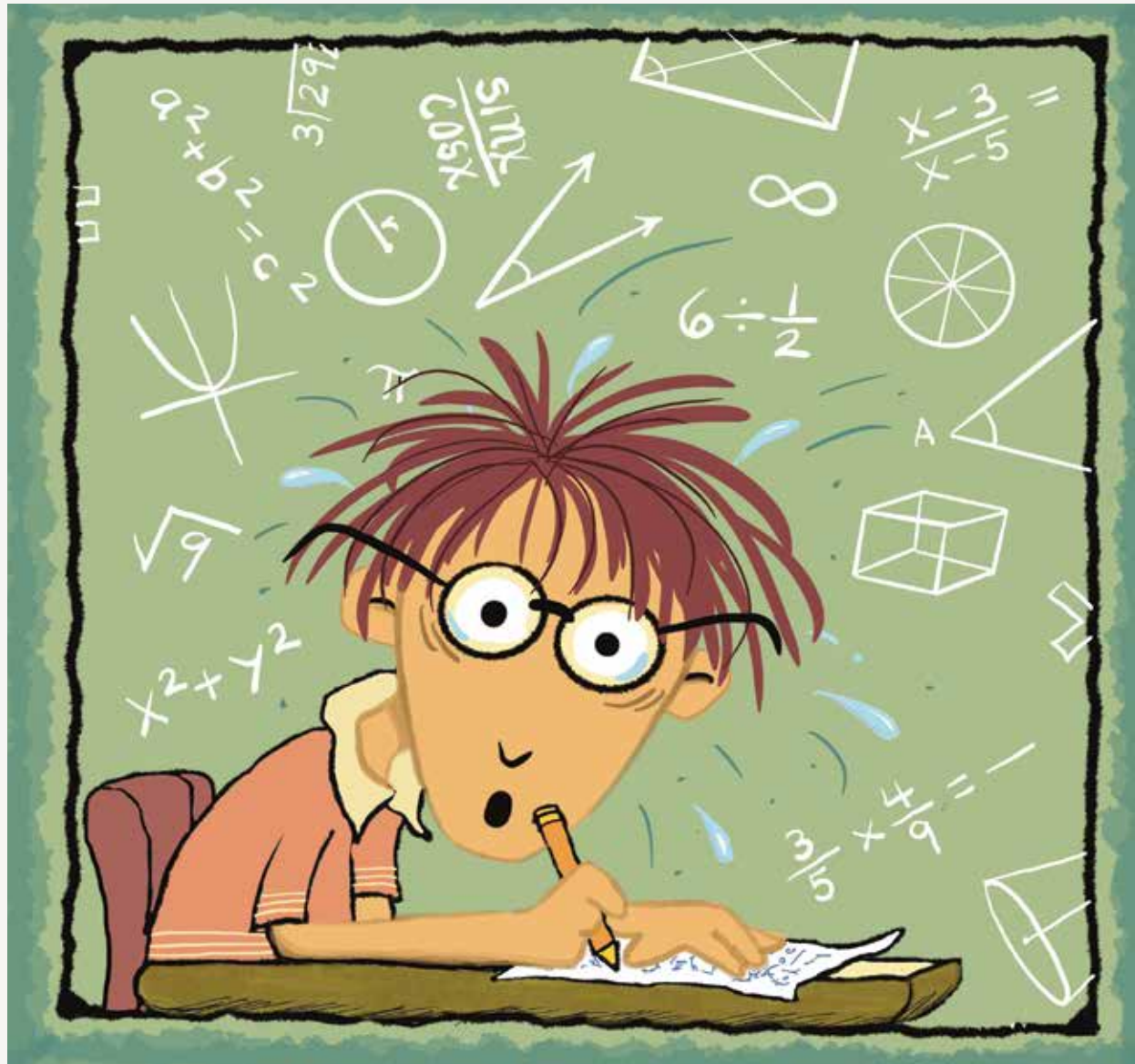
Once the connection and contact are made, there is still the challenge of gaining approval for the visit. In Virginia schools today, teachers are inundated with standards that must be covered, skills that must be mastered,

and strict parameters around how to teach any given curriculum. There are parents to answer to and legislators who dictate what can and can’t happen in our classrooms. Bringing in a speaker can be seen as a luxury or even a risk. What topic would I have to skip to fit this in? What uncomfortable truths might they reveal? Considerations like these are necessary to acknowledge in today’s classrooms, but if treated as just obstacles to overcome on the way to deeper student understanding, they can be managed.

It isn’t easy to justify a break in day-to-day routines and methodology, but the rewards can be palpable and lead to a set of different, more important questions. What conversations will they spark? Who will they inspire? What can we learn from a living history? How can we afford to not hear these voices? What positive changes can come from opening up the gates of conversation and understanding? Every teacher in that seminar I mentioned earlier will remember Frank, the person, not just Frank, the Holocaust survivor. His legacy will live on not just because his story will continue to be told, but because he showed us how much can be gained from letting people in. ●

—Nicole Korsen, a member of the Loudoun Education Association, teaches English at Heritage High School and a Regional Seminar Leader for TOLI, the Olga Lengyel Institute for Holocaust and Human Rights.

\*View the 10-minute, Regional Emmy Award-winning short film “Journey of Education and Remembrance,” produced by Loudoun County Public Schools, at <https://vea.link/TOa>.



# Redesigning the Ride?

*How to help your students get off the math anxiety rollercoaster.*

By Jennifer Feehan

For many students, math class feels like a rollercoaster they're forced to ride. There's the slow, shaky climb as they first try to understand concepts and then the sudden drop: quizzes, tests, word problems, homework. Their stomachs lurch, confidence plummets, and before they know it, they are bracing for every class like it is a thrill ride gone wrong.

What if teachers could redesign the ride? What if we can swap fear for fun, confusion for curiosity, and help move from clinging to the safety bar to throwing hands up in victory? Here are a few powerful shifts that can start that transformation:

**Acknowledge the fear.** Many students will openly say that they don't like math, but what many of them mean is that they're anxious about their ability to understand it. We should recognize and validate their feelings, which will help build trust and open the door for progress. Let students know that it's okay to be nervous about math class; it's a normal reaction to be frustrated when a topic is difficult. Share that anxiety is common and that it doesn't mean that they can't understand math. Actively questioning students struggling with a concept will help, as well. Instead of saying, "What's wrong?," ask, "What part feels confusing?" or "Where do you think you are getting side-tracked?" Acknowledging fear will make students feel seen and, as we build these relationships, they'll be more likely to engage. As teachers, we can also openly share our own struggles in math. I often tell my students that geometry was a struggle for me and that I found the diagrams very confusing. In

calculus, when a student doesn't understand how to find the area between two curves, I like to tell them how I overcame my own struggle. Sharing our stories can encourage students to join in on how they think through their problems. It's important to normalize struggles and reward them. Students who are struggling are trying, and their efforts should be noted.

**Create a safe and supportive environment.** A student who feels safe making mistakes without judgment in class will feel comfortable taking risks. It's important that they know our classrooms are places where effort leads to results and mistakes happen along the way. Establishing ground rules for respectful collaboration and discussion is a must. I've had students confidently give wrong answers in class, leading other students to laugh or say something like, "You wrong, girl!" These became learning moments for myself and my students. We've talked about how to respectfully disagree without hurting their peers' feelings. At the same time, I celebrated that wrong answer. She was able to explain why that was her answer, and her thinking was correct, but she made a simple arithmetic mistake. This validates for your students that you value the process rather than just the final answer, and they don't feel bad if they get an incorrect answer because of a small mistake.

**Model calm and curiosity, and don't be perfect.** Students will often mirror our attitudes in the classroom, so when we model a healthy relationship with the subject we teach, it can have a powerful impact. Think aloud when you are working out problems, and show what persistence looks like. Better

yet, when you make a mistake, acknowledge it. This should not be in the form of "I was just making sure you were paying attention." Step back and let students see how you correct your mistakes, rather than just erasing and replacing them with the correct answer. See if they can help you point out where you went wrong. This helps them learn how to manage and correct their own work. When students see their teacher making mistakes, it normalizes it for them. When one gets frustrated that they made a mistake, I say "So what? I do too!" Be honest about your mistakes. Our students think of us as experts in our field, so seeing the "expert" make mistakes and overcome them helps them realize that it's okay for them to make mistakes as well.

**Offer low-stress practice.** As a student, being called on unexpectedly in class was my largest source of anxiety. I'm not saying that calling on a student should be eliminated, but we need to be mindful of how we do so. When I give my students a problem, I walk around the room to see who's on the right track and who's struggling. If I want to choose a student who does not raise their hand because they feel intimidated or scared, I will pick one who I know has the right answer and process. Don't grade practice on correctness; not many kids get things correct the first time they try them. They shouldn't be penalized for trying to learn and shouldn't be worried about their grade going down when they are learning how to process new information.

**Make class fun.** Many students don't see math as a fun class, but it doesn't have to be this way. Get students interacting >>>

with each other, and don't be afraid to try new methods. My students love going to the board to work out problems. This allows me to see right away which students are understanding concepts and which students need extra support. It also allows peer mentoring, having students work together to solve a problem, which promotes rich mathematical discourse that would not happen if students were forced to sit at a desk with a worksheet. Also, don't be afraid to try gamification and activities. Taking practice and making it into a matching activity or a scavenger hunt is not as difficult as it seems. Gamification can be as simple as a group working out a problem and taking a sticky note off the board to earn points, but only if they get a question correct.

**Let them know what assessments will look like.** When I asked my students their number one reason for being anxious about math, tests and quizzes took the lead. The first test or quiz in your class is foreign to them. It's important they know what to expect on their first assessment from you. I use the same test format for all my assessments, so my students know what they can expect every test or quiz day, and I give them a mock exam for the first test that we take in class. I tell them that the questions will not be the same, but the topics and difficulty levels will match. After the initial test or quiz, this turns into review questions to help students prepare for their assessment.

**Don't let assessments destroy the grade.** This doesn't mean that assessments are not important, or that they shouldn't be counted. If we're telling students that it's okay to make mistakes, just not in assessments, we are then saying that

understanding the material after the test isn't worth it. Students should be allowed to retake assessments or, at the very least, correct the assessment that they were given. There are many ways that this can be done. You can have students do a remediation assignment to earn the right to do the assessment, or tell them their original assessment should be corrected before they take a new one. You can meet with them to go over any misconceptions and then have them retake. You can have them earn points back by correcting their assignment, so long as they are justifying how they did so. If our students know that they can be given a second chance, this often alleviates some of the pressure and anxiety going into the test.

**Grade fairly.** Grades are another source of anxiety for many of our students. Our grades must reflect what our students know how to do, not compliance for completing tasks. Grading is important, but not every assignment needs to be graded. Assessment pieces, like exit tickets, warm-ups, quizzes, tests, and assignments students complete without assistance should make up a majority of their grades, since that is what they can do on their own. If you give homework, consider not taking it for a grade, or taking it for a very minor grade. There are students who don't have support at home to help with homework, and many have outside responsibilities with jobs, sports, and families. It's also important to be clear about how grades are going to be calculated; let them know the first day how they are going to be graded and where their grades will come from.

**Celebrate!** Celebrate success and effort whenever you can. My favorite tradition in my classroom is

the use of stars. When a student receives an A on a test, he or she gets a die-cut star with their name on it. They get to hang their star in my classroom, and it stays there until they take it or it no longer stays on the wall. Because of this, I have stars in my room from five-plus years ago. It motivates students to do well, and I have had students tell me that seeing stars makes them want to work hard to finally earn one. They also realize that if other students can see that level of success, so can they. You don't have to celebrate just grades—celebrate everyone getting the same question right, celebrate a grade going from a D to a B on a reassessment, celebrate getting a difficult question correct after working on it for a long time. Better yet, celebrate the students in your classroom for their accomplishments, not tied to their mathematical ability, but to their personal interests, like sports, college acceptances, and birthdays!

While it's not something that may completely go away, we can help alleviate some of the anxiety our students are feeling. They shouldn't be afraid to ride the math rollercoaster. If we can provide them with a fun, clear, goal-driven, celebratory, and supportive environment, they can feel safe to make mistakes, take risks, and be successful. That could leave them more willing and excited to ride the rollercoaster again the following year. ●

—Jennifer Feehan, a member of the Fauquier Education Association and a mathematics teacher at Fauquier High School, was a Virginia state finalist for the 2025 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

# A Brief Guide to Worksite Representation

Under U.S. labor law, workers have the right to engage in concerted activity for mutual aid or protection. This concept has been woven into every collective bargaining resolution adopted by a Virginia school board. It confers significant rights on employees, and it's critical for employees and Union representatives to understand what it means.

**Concerted activity**  
Two or more individuals acting together, or one individual seeking to engage others in collective action.

**Mutual aid or protection**  
Standing up for one another; working toward a common goal; protecting rights, values, interests that are shared across a workplace.

## 3 Examples

Multiple employees in an office feel their supervisor has created a hostile work environment. They summarize their experiences in writing, compile their statements into one document, and send them in an email to the superintendent and school board. Each employee is sharing their individual experience, but the workplace concern is shared by them all, and they are acting as a collective. **This is concerted activity for mutual aid or protection.**

A teacher is concerned when a colleague is placed on administrative leave, seemingly unjustly. She sends an email to other colleagues at her school letting them know what she's observed and why she is concerned. Though this email was sent by a single individual, it went to a group of employees and sought to raise awareness of a worksite issue concerning to all. **This is concerted activity for mutual aid or protection.**

A counselor who is also the volleyball coach is not offered a coaching contract in the new school year. He complains during a staff meeting. **This is NOT concerted activity for mutual aid or protection.** The counselor's complaint, though voiced in a group setting, is purely individual.

## WEINGARTEN RIGHTS

Concerted activity for mutual and or protection encompasses an employee's right to request representation by their union in a meeting they believe could lead to discipline.

The right to representation is considered concerted activity for mutual aid or protection because **it is the role of the union to advocate for employees, and it is the union's duty to fairly represent the interests of the collective.** Further, where there is a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) that covers disciplinary actions and procedures, it is the union that has expertise in the CBA. An employer violates this right when it refuses an employee's request for representation and proceeds with the meeting.

Because Building Representatives are on site, have ideally worked to develop open communication and mutual respect with administrators and supervisors, and have their finger on the pulse of issues at their worksite, they are ideal for serving as Weingarten representatives.

## BUILDING REPRESENTATIVES SHOULD...

- First, get the word out. Weingarten rights are not a familiar concept. Make sure all employees at your worksite – not just members – know their rights. Employers do not have to tell employees they may request union representation. Employees must ask.
- Make sure administrators and supervisors know who the union reps are at their worksite.
- Know that you are NOT a silent witness. Weingarten rights entitle employees to representation, not observation. You may speak, ask questions, offer suggestions. However, you may not be unduly disruptive.
- Fairly represent everyone, members and non-members alike. All bargaining unit employees in a workplace that has elected an exclusive bargaining representative enjoy Weingarten rights, and the union that is certified as the exclusive bargaining representative has an obligation to advocate for, represent, and bargain on behalf of the entire bargaining unit. When you represent a non-member at a disciplinary meeting, encourage them to join their union!



## Members Speak Out on Lobby Day, are Joined by Gov. Spanberger

On a gray February Monday, the eve of Crossover Day at the General Assembly, when House bills go to the Senate for consideration and vice versa, some 250 VEA members walked the halls of power in Richmond, telling their stories to state policymakers.

It was VEA's 2026 Lobby Day, and in Delegate Nicole Cole's office, Spotsylvania Education Association members Stephanie Lilly, Melissa Brace, and Fern Hales were talking about the needs of public schools with the newly-elected member of the House. It was an especially enjoyable conversation, as SEA members played an important role in helping Del. Cole, a former member of the county's school board, win election to the General Assembly.

Elsewhere in the state's legislative headquarters building, Fairfax Education Association members Kimberly Adams and Joanne Walton were in Del. Dan Helmer's office, emphasizing the importance of Virginia reaching the national average salary for teachers, something the General Assembly has pledged to do, and how vital it is for educators to have strong collective bargaining rights.

In Del. Virgil Thornton's office, York Education Association member Deb Wesley, Hampton Education Association member Andrea Lonzaga, and Williamsburg-James City member Andy Cason were pointing out funding shortfalls and disparities, as well as discussing the risks of rushing under-qualified teachers into the classroom.

Similar encounters were happening throughout the 14-story tower next to the State Capitol, as VEA members from across the Commonwealth took advantage of the opportunity to put faces to some of the education issues legislators would be voting on this session.

"Throughout the Capitol, VEA members could be seen and heard advocating for their students, supporting their colleagues, and standing up for public education" says VEA President Carol Bauer. "Our stories are powerful!"

As lobbying efforts wrapped up, Governor Abigail Spanberger joined the VEA crowd outside the General Assembly Building to encourage their efforts and thank them for their work, getting a rousing cheer as she talked about the positive experiences her three daughters were having in Virginia public schools. ●



## VEA President to be Elected at Convention

There are two candidates for the office of VEA President, and convention delegates will hold an election at the 2026 VEA Delegate Assembly in Norfolk. They'll be choosing between incumbent Carol Bauer, NBCT, of York County, and Dr. James Graves, president of the Newport News Education Association. Here are brief statements from each candidate, listed in alphabetical order:



Carol Bauer

Dear Union Family,

I am honored to seek re-election as President of VEA. Together we have expanded collective bargaining, deepened union solidarity, and lifted educators' voices across the Commonwealth.

United, we have defended public education with courage and resolve. We are committed to every educator's right to dignity. That progress and collaboration reflects your advocacy and your belief in the power of collective action. I am proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with you in this work.

With three decades of union and education experience, I bring steady leadership and a clear commitment to protecting members, supporting students, and strengthening our profession.

There is still important work ahead. Together—ESPs and licensed staff—we will build on our momentum, grow our power, and secure a strong future for public education in Virginia. I would be honored and proud to continue serving as your VEA President.

In Solidarity,  
Carol Bauer



Dr. James Graves

Stronger schools. United educators. Accountable leadership. As your new VEA President, my mission would be to lead with vision, integrity, and action, bringing educators together to build a stronger, more equitable public education system. I believe that when we move forward together, we can transform our schools into places where students thrive, educators are respected, and communities feel empowered.

For too long, critical decisions about our schools have been made without the input of the people who know them best—teachers, staff, and students. I am committed to ensuring that our union speaks with one unified voice and that leadership is transparent, responsive, and accountable to the members it serves.

My campaign is about having our members' voices, decisions, ideas, and well-being come first. To listen to their voices for change in our union together.

Because when we stand united, we can make change happen in our community.

Dr. James Graves

## Jones Re-Elected to VEA Vice Presidency



Dr. Jessica M. Jones

Dr. Jessica M. Jones, VEA's incumbent vice president, has been re-elected by acclamation by the VEA Board of Directors for another two-year term in that office after no candidates emerged to run against her. Her second term will begin August 1, 2026.

A veteran high school agricultural/agriculture and environmental science teacher, as well as a longtime FFA advisor, Dr. Jones is an honors graduate of Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences.

Her VEA resume includes stints as president of the Pittsylvania Education Association, the Piedmont UniServ Unit, and VEA District I/13. ●

## How a Previous Job Can Boost Your Retirement Benefit

If you taught in another state or stepped away for graduate school, family leave or military service, you may be able to count that time toward your Virginia Retirement System benefit through a process called purchasing prior service.

Full-time salaried employees of Virginia school divisions are eligible to make service purchases while actively employed as a VRS member; Retirees, deferred VRS members and part-time employees without benefits are not eligible.

### What You Can Purchase

Eligible service types include:

- Teaching or other full-time public service with another state's school system or public employer.
- Approved educational leave from a VRS-participating employer.
- Unpaid leave for the birth or adoption of a child.
- Family and Medical Leave Act leave for serious health conditions.
- Active duty military service.
- Full-time civilian federal government service.
- Previous VRS service for which you took a refund.

Most service types have a combined four-year purchase limit. Active duty military service has a separate four-year limit, allowing you to purchase up to eight years total when combined with other eligible service types. Some service types, such as refunded VRS service, have unlimited purchase amounts.

### Why It Matters

Purchased service credit counts toward:

- Your monthly retirement benefit calculation.
- The five years of service credit needed to become vested and qualify for a future retirement benefit.
- Eligibility for retirement under your plan.
- The 15 years of service credit required to qualify for the health insurance credit in retirement, if applicable, and the amount of that credit.

### Why Act Now

You can purchase eligible prior service at any time while you are an active VRS member. However, timing affects the cost.

For most service types, you have a two-year window from the start of VRS-covered employment or following an eligible period of leave to purchase at approximate normal cost, a rate based on a percentage of your salary.

After two years, the cost shifts to an actuarial equivalent, or the amount of money this will cost in today's dollars. The actuarial cost is generally higher than the approximate normal cost.

Some exceptions to the cost window apply. For example, VRS-refunded service can be purchased anytime for the refund amount plus compounded annual interest.

### How to Start Your Purchase

Your online myVRS account includes tips to guide you through each step of the purchase process. You can also calculate costs, see the impact on your future retirement benefit and evaluate how long it will take to recover the purchase cost in retirement. Former non-VRS participating employers will need to certify your prior service before you can complete the purchase.

Your payment options include a lump sum, after-tax payroll deduction or pretax salary reduction if your employer offers it. Payment agreements run from six to 12 months, allowing you to spread the cost over time.

For more information, visit [varetire.org/pps](http://varetire.org/pps) or call VRS at 888-827-3847. ●



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## No One Handles Change Better Than Educators Do!

— Carol Bauer

If there's anything in life more futile than hoping everything will just stay the same, I can't think of it at the moment. As much as we sometimes resist change, nothing is more certain than that change will happen: Relationships, jobs, people, organizations, technology—they all change, sometimes very rapidly.

It's a great thing that educators are about the most adaptable people I know. We don't always love change, either, but we have always been good at learning to adjust to change and to use it to our communities' advantage.

No one really saw the COVID-19 pandemic coming, and it very quickly rocked our worlds. But in the midst of massive uncertainty, we adapted, changing the way we taught, served, and cared for our students. It wasn't perfect, but I'm very, very proud of the way VEA members responded and helped everyone get through a very tough time.

Today, there are at least two enormous changes that will certainly be rocking our worlds again. One is an excellent development—the increasing growth of collective bargaining rights. Thanks largely to the efforts of VEA members, the ability of educators to have a real say in the way our schools are run is back (after decades of being denied) and growing. When school employees can negotiate contracts with school systems, all the parties are at the table, top-down leadership decreases,



and progress happens for all. I've loved seeing the ways our local associations have already seized this opportunity and look forward to seeing more of our members stepping into bargaining leadership roles. VEA staff and leadership stand ready to support and encourage you throughout that process.

Another world-rocker entering our classrooms is the emergence of artificial intelligence. AI has the potential to revolutionize instruction and presents a whole lineup of both opportunities and challenges. We're really just on the cusp of AI's impact, and VEA will do everything we can to help you prepare for the changes it brings. We can be certain that all our jobs, from custodians and bus drivers to classroom educators, will be impacted by AI and that your Union will be there with you navigating the changes.

That's the thing about change: Sure, it can be unsettling, but it can also lead to personal growth, new avenues of knowledge, and innovation and improvement in the way we work.

I look forward to working beside you as new things come to our Union and our schools, adapting in the ways that we must and moving ahead to making change positive for all of us. ●



## Chesapeake Member Hammers Honored by Virginia VFW

**Kimberly M. Hammers**, a member of the Chesapeake Education Association who teaches government and social studies at Grassfield High School, has been named the 2025-26 winner of the Smart/Maher Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year Award.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Virginia presents the honor, which recognizes excellence in citizenship education across four key areas: citizenship, resourcefulness, innovation and passion.

**Essie Jones**, a member of the Education Association of Alexandria and a math teacher at Alexandria City High School, has received the Teaching America250 Award from educational nonprofit the Jack Miller Center for Teaching America's Founding Principles and History.

The award is presented to one teacher in each state and the District of Columbia, and comes with a \$5,000 grant to develop and implement an educational project centered around the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Two VEA members were recently chosen as the Teacher of the Year in their school divisions. The honorees are **Stephanie Alston** of the Education Association of Suffolk, a reading specialist at King's Fork Middle School; and **Rachelle Pohlman** of the King & Queen Education Association, a fifth grade teacher at King and Queen Elementary School. ●

## VEA Staff Updates



After a previous stint in VEA's Accounting Department, **Teiji Epling** returned to our organization as Director of Financial Resources in January. He brings experience in mission-driven, strategic environments, most recently as a Senior Accounting Manager, building and implementing accounting policies, strengthening internal controls, and managing a team.



**Pat Hill** has been promoted to Director of Organizing and Affiliate Support (OAS) beginning May 1. She joined VEA 10 years ago as a UniServ Director and was promoted to Associate Director of OAS four years ago. Prior to that, Pat worked in both the corporate and public education sectors as a field auditor, human resources consultant, program manager, and high school educator. ●

## A Bargaining Snapshot: Just the Beginning!

Some quick Virginia bargaining facts in Virginia public schools:

- 52 percent of public school employees in Virginia work in a school division with at least an organizing campaign underway for collective bargaining. That's 88,000 public school employees.
- There are now 16 collective bargaining agreements in place in Virginia school divisions. Some 46,000 public school employees started this school year with a negotiated contract in place. ●



Source: VEA research

## VEA Joins Groups Applauding Saving Federal Education Funds

VEA President Carol Bauer was among the leaders of more than 30 education organizations that signed on to a joint statement in February. The statement came after Congress passed a bipartisan spending package that preserved funding for some important federal education programs, which the Trump administration had proposed cutting.

Among the other organizations that backed the statement were The Arc of the United States, All4Ed, the National Center for Learning Disabilities, Families in Schools, EdTrust, and the Center for Learner Equity.

"As teachers, families, students, and advocates have made clear, education deserves to be a national priority, not an afterthought," the statement read, in part. "By maintaining education funding, this bill keeps vital investments in teaching and learning; makes clear the federal role in protecting students' civil rights; and affirms a shared responsibility to building schools that are equitable, innovative, and prepared for the future." ●

**2026 VEA DELEGATE ASSEMBLY  
APRIL 16-18  
NORFOLK WATERSIDE MARRIOTT**



## Seven Ways to Reduce Classroom Noise and Chatter

How are you doing with the challenge of managing the noise in your classroom? Got it down to a dull roar? Keeping the side conversations to a minimum? Is it an ongoing project? Or have you achieved nirvana—a roomful of students paying rapt attention all the time? (If you said yes to that last question, we'll wait for your book to come out and the speaking tour that follows.)

Here, from the National Education Association, is some advice on how to get closer to reaching consistent quiet and attention:

- 1. Build relationships with students.** Spend time getting to know them. Figure out what they like and don't like and what kind of learners they are. This can help you to understand your students' individual needs. If certain students are more introverted and work better alone, consider giving them a chance to work on their own during a group activity.
- 2. Set classroom rules and expectations.** Be consistent with applying the classroom rules you set at the beginning of the year. Students stand a better chance of thriving when they know what's expected of them.
- 3. Explain what will happen in class that day.** What topics will be covered? What activities will students do? Will there be time for discussion? What assignments will they have? This way your students will know what's coming.
- 4. Make lessons engaging.** Plan exercises to keep



students focused. These can relate to the lesson and help foster discussion and communication among the students. They'll have the chance to connect with each other while also diving deeper into the topic.

- 5. Start class with an activity.** Have a few ideas in your back pocket and use the one that suits the mood of the class that day.
- 6. Set discussion times.** Let students know in advance when they will be able to talk to each other. This structure encourages them to hold their conversations for the appropriate time.
- 7. Reward a class if they are on track.** If the group is staying focused and listening respectfully while others are talking, reward them with a movie day, or dedicate one class to a study period. Pick whatever works best for you and your students. ●

## A 'Dear John' Letter Teaches History

South Carolina teacher Dani Jesmonth told her fourth-graders that she'd found a breakup note in their classroom and was going to read it to them—and then tell them who'd written it. What she read, as her students listened in open-mouthed wonder, included this:

*Darling, this is hard for me to write, but we need to talk... You always tell me what to do, and I am sick of it. I don't know how else to say this to you, but we're done, and it's all because of you. I've tried to talk about my feelings before, but you never really listened. So, this is goodbye. Peace out!*

Jesmonth then revealed to her stunned students that the letter was a "prank," her way of demonstrating how the U.S. felt as the founding fathers planned the Declaration of Independence, their "breakup letter" to England.

She says her students' reaction was "just the best ever." ●





## Helping It All Make 'Cents'

The Virginia Council on Economic Education is a nonprofit focused on providing professional development and high-quality resources for teachers to equip students with the financial skills they'll need in today's economy.



Among VCEE's materials are lesson plans, guidance on teaching personal finance, a Life After High School packet, performance assessment materials, free institutes, and information on how to get your students involved in the Personal Finance Challenge. The resources are broken down into elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Learn more at [vcee.org](http://vcee.org).

## Why Teachers Need Joy

When we ask teachers what they need, the answer is almost always "time." But energy doesn't come from more hours in the day; it comes from doing things that replenish us. And those sources of renewal can be found both inside and outside the classroom.



Beyond the school walls, it's about carving out moments for whatever brings genuine joy—whether that's a favorite hobby, a quiet meditation practice, or simply time spent being fully oneself.

Inside the classroom, it's reconnecting with the heart of why we chose this work in the first place: witnessing a student persevere through a tough challenge, watching curiosity spark, or guiding learners as they open their minds to new ideas.

When teachers experience these moments, they tap into the kind of energy that fuels great teaching and allows them to differentiate instruction, design engaging lessons and make meaningful connections between their content and the real world. Joy is the engine that drives exceptional teaching.

*Terra Tarango is chief education officer at Van Andel Institute for Education.*

Source: SmartBrief

## Stay Tuned...

Lawsuits against social media companies are making their way through U.S. courts now, much like past ones against the tobacco and opioid industries, alleging that social media platforms are purposefully designed to be addictive and offer meager protection for children who use them. Should such lawsuits succeed, companies like Meta and TikTok could be forced to make significant changes in their products and in how they conduct business.



Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg was called to testify at one recent case, where, under questioning from a lawyer, stood by earlier statements that research has not yet proven that social media use causes mental health issues.

## Religion and Public Schools

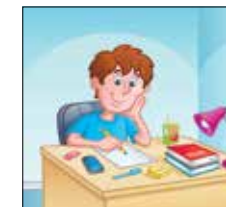
As required by federal law, the U.S. Department of Education recently updated its guidelines on constitutionally protected prayer and religious expression in public K-12 schools. Some highlights from the latest release:



- Students, staff, and other school officials have a right to pray in school as an expression of individual faith, as long as they're not doing so on behalf of the school.
- Public schools may not sponsor prayer nor coerce or pressure students to pray. For example, a school principal may not lead a prayer at a mandatory school assembly.
- Public schools can regulate student speech that "materially disrupts classwork or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of others." For example, a student can't pray out loud during math class in a way that prevents others from learning, provided such disruptions are handled consistently with other forms of speech.
- Religious speech should be treated the same as secular speech. For example, an essay with religious content should be graded by the same academic standards as a secular essay of similar quality.
- Religious student organizations should likewise be treated the same as secular student organizations. For example, if a school offers support or recognition to secular student clubs, it must provide the same support to religious student clubs.

## How Homework Can Mean More

New Jersey teacher Katelyn Carson offers these criteria for creating homework that's meaningful for students:



- It must be short and age-appropriate.
- It should promote autonomy.
- It should allow for students to connect to their individual interests.
- It should be designed in a way that encourages a positive home-school connection.

Source: Edutopia

## The Value of Writing it Down

Most students think note-taking is something they do *while* they learn. So [they think] if AI does it for me — cool! But they miss the point. Note-taking is the learning, not something that's happening in parallel to learning. That is the learning. Because that's where you're doing your transformation: Your teacher said it. I now have to analyze it, think about it, organize it, get it out.



That requires friction. Your brain is going much faster. So the handwriting is constraining the speed with which you can think, which in turn is forcing you to focus on ideas, which in turn is transforming those ideas as you're going along.

That is the definition of learning.

The act of handwriting is arguably the most complex thing we do. When it comes to motor skills, there might be nothing more complex than that.

—Jared Cooney Horvath, neuroscientist and author of *The Digital Delusion*



"Who does my teacher think she is? Autocorrect?"

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## What—and Who—is Stressing Our Students?



— Bruce Ingram

Last November, *The New York Times* published an article headlined “School Daze,” focusing on the stress that many young people experience at school. The article, written by Jia Lynn Yang, noted, “Almost 32 percent of adolescents have at some point been given a diagnosis of anxiety. More than one in ten have experienced a major depressive disorder.”

Concerned about those numbers, I asked my Creative Writing I-IV students at Lord Botetourt HS to write about what stresses them. These are very successful freshmen through seniors who regularly attain honor roll status; yet they experience numerous pressures...more than I was aware of.

### For example, a junior female wrote this:

*“A lot of the stress that comes from school comes not from school itself, but from the expectations schools place on children to do more outside of class. Now, simply making good grades isn’t enough. In addition, students also need to participate in a substantial number of extracurricular activities outside of school, and these extracurricular activities must pertain to their intended college major. This means I can’t even focus on dance or the things I would like to do, and instead have to devote my free time to activities I have little interest in.”*

### From a sophomore female:

*“The term ‘stress’ has burdened me for some years. I ascribe the severity of my stress to my middle school. In eighth grade, multiple students took advanced classes, just as they had in past years. That year, we handled advanced English, Spanish, STEM, and sophomore math in half the school day. This ruined me. Nowadays, I’m still learning to handle my anxiety.”*

### A junior male penned this:

*“I have a procrastination problem. I work just fine in the classroom, but that’s because I know that when I get home, I’ll lose the ability to do my schoolwork entirely. I just can’t focus, no matter what I try. I’ve tried turning off the phone, I’ve tried going somewhere quiet, I’ve begged my parents for medication, but nothing works. I’m beaten into the ground with assignments but given no time or proper place to do them.”*

### From a sophomore female:

*“The social anxiety and awkwardness caused by school is horrendous, especially with how immature and rude my peers can be. I’ve never been bullied continually, but some statements classmates have made stick with me years later. ‘Makeup isn’t gonna fix that,’ a boy stated as I applied lip gloss while I stood at my locker in eighth grade. I went back to English class crying. The lack of empathy and social awareness young people have is quite frankly concerning and that’s what makes me stressed at school.”*

### From a freshman female:

*“A lot of us are trying to do extracurricular activities, but the things we want to do ‘don’t matter,’ because those things won’t get you into college. None of us can be who we want to be, because someone decided that there was such a thing as a ‘perfect’ child.”*

### A sophomore female shared this:

*“Most of my stress derives from myself and my parents. When I first started middle school, I had no idea how to handle my workload. Now that I think about it, it was not an unmanageable workload. I had just never managed one myself. I learned that I was a procrastinator and often had to force myself, and sometimes had others force me, to focus on my work. I found that if I procrastinate less, I’m less stressed.”*

### A freshman female wrote this:

*“Some teachers just aren’t empathetic enough to students who are struggling. They only think about their courses, not whatever else the students have going on outside of that class. Not many teachers take into consideration the work students receive from other classes or the things they have going on at home and outside of school. For students, there’s a fine line between completing work and being overwhelmed.”*

### Last, from a senior male.

*“My sister’s a lawyer; my brother attained a 4.3 GPA. My mother has never failed to notice a point off an assignment. My junior year was especially strenuous; I took all college classes, and every single assignment, homework, or test felt like it was the difference maker of whether I was allowed to be happy for the day, or even the week.”*

Perhaps, the solution is for students, parents, and teachers to do a better job of listening to each other? ●

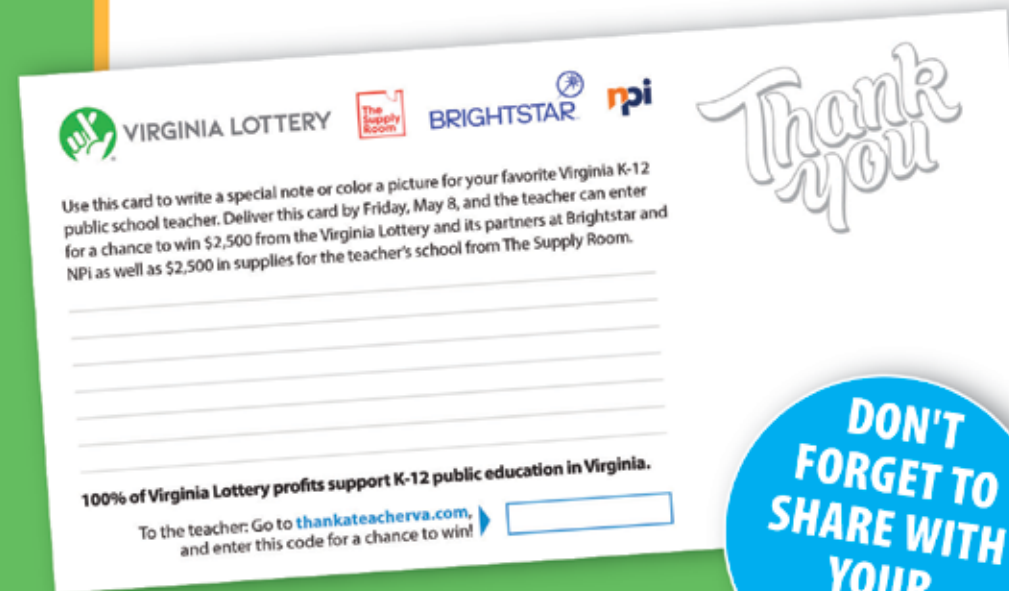


Bruce Ingram ([bruceingramoutdoors@gmail.com](mailto:bruceingramoutdoors@gmail.com)), a member of the Botetourt Education Association and a veteran educator, teaches English and Creative Writing at Lord Botetourt High School. He’s also the author of more than 2,700 magazine/web articles and 11 books.

# IT’S TIME TO THANK A TEACHER!

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