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JOURNAL 2021

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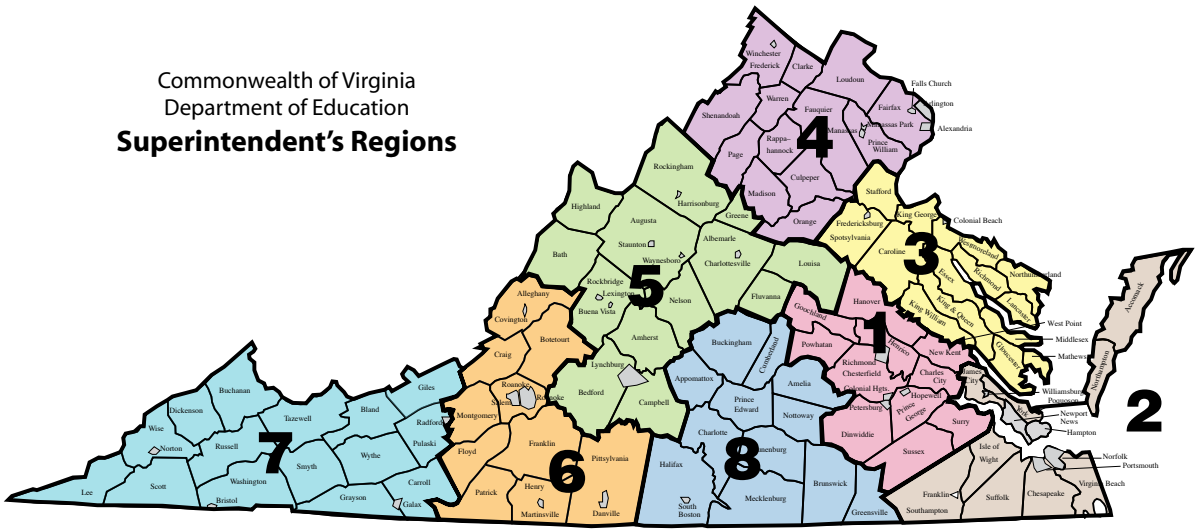
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From the Editor's Desk



Eric Carbaugh, Ph.D.
Professor in the Department of Middle, Secondary and Math Education, James Madison University



Click to hear from Editor, Eric Carbaugh.

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VIRTUAL EDITION
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Both educators and students are facing challenges unlike any they have navigated before. Attend our 2021 Virtual Conference, December 8-9 to connect with colleagues who have ideas, innovation, and inspiration for you and your school.*

What do teachers and students do differently in "deeper learning" classrooms?

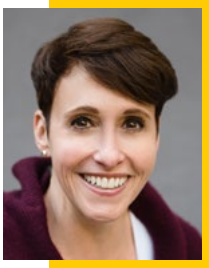
How do we use the 5 C's with explicit skill and content instruction?

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What professional learning and support do educators need in order to thrive and give their best to students?

Keynotes by:



Jennifer Abrams on Stretching Your Learning Edges. Learn more about Jennifer **HERE.**



Chase Mielke on Creating Change Through Small Action. View Chase's video **HERE.**



Dave Stuart on More Learning, Less Stress. Learn more about Dave **HERE.**



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From the VASCD Executive Director



Laurie McCullough,
Executive Director
Virginia ASCD

This year, our journal contains a President's Message from Alan Seibert. Alan retired this year from a career in Salem City Schools that began when he did his student teaching there during his undergraduate program at Virginia Tech. Thirty years later, Alan has served the Salem community as a teacher, administrator at both the high school and elementary levels, and as Superintendent for the past 15 years. His leadership is a gift not only to Salem, but to VASCD as well. Alan's message in this issue suggests using what we've learned during the difficult days of the pandemic to improve teaching and learning for our children. I would suggest that there are also COVID-inspired lessons for us as adult learners, and that we can grow from this experience - not just as educators but in all aspects of our lives.

As I interact with friends and colleagues in multiple life situations and across age groups, I hear things like these:

> *COVID has helped me see how beneficial it is for me to slow down and appreciate relaxing with my family.*
>
> *My new Zoom skills enabled me to check in with friends I otherwise couldn't have seen, and now we're staying in touch more than before before the pandemic.*
>
> *I thought the isolation would be hard (and at times it was) but I've learned that time by myself can also be rejuvenating.*

COVID has been a reminder of how truly fragile we are, and I'm really looking at each day as a gift now rather than as a harried schedule and a to-do list to complete.

Spending so much time at home with my own children helped me look differently at the demands I place on my students for completing work at home.

As students come back to school this fall and we realize even more fully how pronounced and deep their needs are, I'm reminded of VASCD's commitment to serving the whole child- academically, socially, emotionally, and with attention to equity. Perhaps you are embracing new tools to help you differentiate instruction, designing authentic project-based experiences for your students, or reflecting on your own background and values as you create a more culturally responsive classroom. I'm sure you're working to ensure a sense of belonging, a strong support system, and the best learning experiences for your students.

Let's commit ourselves to our own growth as well, expecting ourselves to learn and supporting each other as we strive to become whole educators. What do you need now as a learner yourself ? As a member of a team? A faculty? A community?

I'm thrilled that Jennifer Abrams will be one of four amazing keynote speakers at our conference this year (I hope you're registered already!). Jennifer's recent book, Stretching Your Learning Edges: Growing Up at Work, calls us to ask ourselves important questions about how and who we want to be, both at work and as humans. We continue to roll up our sleeves each day, working tirelessly on behalf of our students and challenging them to achieve even more than they thought they could. Can we do the same for ourselves? Decide to stretch ourselves at the edges? As another of our 2021 keynote speakers, Chase Mielke, likes to say: We give our best when we are at our best.

In our fall conference and moving into 2022, you will see VASCD's work reflect a focus not only on elevating the teaching profession as a whole, but on whole teachers. Our kids need them. We need them. We need to be them.



COVID in the Side View

Alan Seibert, Superintendent,
Salem City Schools
President, Virginia ASCD (2020-2022)

As much as we all want to put the pandemic fully behind us, we just aren't there yet. The harsh reality is that it isn't fully in our rear view mirror. We are indeed making progress and moving past it, but it is still in our side view mirror and, if we aren't careful, in our blindspot. Most have started the school year with in-person instruction everyday, all day, which is a HUGE win for students and families! At the same time, we have layered mitigation strategies in place, keeping an eye on COVID in the side view as we continue to drive forward into the school year.

Few members of the public understand how schools function. In fact, many people think that because they went to school they know how schools work. (These are the same people who think they know how a microwave works because they can press the popcorn button). We know that schools are complex systems that require a huge number of very talented people, specialized skills, and a wealth of experience to run smoothly. Educators' roles and responsibilities are generally grouped into two categories: operations and instruction.

Operationally, SY 21-22 is not normal, at least at the start. No matter how much we wanted it to be, no matter how loudly some people proclaimed that it should

be, this year is not starting with an operational "return to normal." We could pout, complain, and protest this if we want to or, we can celebrate, highlight, and tell the world about what we are accomplishing instructionally! Our core business, afterall, is teaching and learning. Yes, the core business absolutely relies on operations - transportation, food services, custodial service, physical plant operations, etc.—*but our core business is teaching and learning.*

In that core business, a truly amazing transformation is underway and we have a shared responsibility to see it through to full fruition. Last year, in the crucible of the pandemic, teachers innovated, discovered new tools, and invented new strategies and techniques to meet the needs of individual students whether they were learning online, hybrid, in-person, etc. It was exhausting at times, but the toolbox for personalizing instruction for all students is now fully loaded with best practices. Our next challenge is to intentionally and strategically leveraging those tools to serve students as they return to our schools, where they will benefit daily from being in the presence of caring and committed educators who are truly differentiating instruction using a myriad of strategies.

We all hope that the pandemic will be in our rear view mirror soon, but it is more likely in our side view for the foreseeable future. While keeping it there (and not in our blind spot), we can maintain a focus on the road ahead by continuing to strengthen our skills, use the full range of tools we have, and serve students even more effectively than before.

Our profession is truly ready to pivot from teaching classrooms full of students to teaching the uniquely wonderful individual students who come to our classrooms. So operationally, no return to normal yet, but instructionally, we truly are able to "return to better"!

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Equity Gaps Widen During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Using Equity Audits to Uncover and Remedy Inequitable Outcomes of K-12 Students

Translating and transforming leaders to foster equitable opportunities for all students establishes an expectation of focus on the whole learner. In order to ensure equity and excellence for black, brown, low socio-economic, and vulnerable students, school districts must strategically adjust and focus their lens on equity. Recognizing that inequities existed prior to the pandemic and have been exacerbated since, leaders must commit to addressing inequities and changing practices, policies, and procedures, which impede diversity, equity, and inclusion for all.



Monica B. Smith-Woofter, Ed. D.

Dr. Monica B. Smith-Woofter is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at James Madison University. Smith-Woofter has research interests that align to leadership and induction supports for teachers and principals, diversity, equity and inclusion practices in P-16 education, and navigating microaggressions. She has been a lifetime educator, serving in roles of bus driver, substitute teacher, high school teacher, coach, assistant principal, numerous central office director positions, chief academic officer, and finally retiring as a superintendent. Smith-Woofter continues to serve as an executive coach for school districts regarding effective leadership practices, equity, diversity, access and inclusion, microaggressions awareness, and provides mentoring support to school executives and central office administrators.

Acknowledgement

Smith-Woofter acknowledges two of her JMU Educational Leadership graduate students, Brad Saylor and Luke Roadcap, who gave permission to use the teacher quality data set and graduation track data set as examples for practitioners.

Mark A. Rumley, Ed. D.



Dr. Mark A. Rumley serves as a faculty member for and the Assistant Director of the Principal Preparation for Excellence and Equity in Rural Schools (PPEERS), an innovative school leadership preparation program within the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Dr. Rumley has been a lifetime educator, serving in the roles of teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, assistant professor, and a state-based educational consultant for superintendents and boards of education. He continues to serve as an executive coach for school districts regarding teacher retention, equity, excellence, and effective leadership.

Introduction

Historically, schools in the United States have not served ALL students well. Wide-ranging gaps in student performance have existed for far too long and can be attributed to a variety of reasons. Such reasons include, but certainly are not limited to, differential treatment of selected student groups based upon race, class, socio-economic status, and disabilities. Additionally, failing to allocate highly effective teachers to students who possess some of the greatest disadvantages as well as significant learning challenges has often resulted in an inequitable distribution of highly effective teachers for all students, which speaks both to teacher quality and teaching quality (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Because schools were initially and intentionally designed to educate primarily a white population as well as those from wealthy families, students of color were long denied formal educational opportunities, and, only after legal rulings were issued to allow all non-whites to attend legally sanctioned schools in post-slavery/reconstruction eras, the quality of such an education for students of color paled severely when compared to schools educating only white students. This

finding continued to be true following the decision in *Brown vs. Board* (1954), including its delayed implementation in several Southern states.

These and other historically entrenched ways paved a pathway that led to inequities and resulting gaps between white and non-white students and between economically disadvantaged and wealthier students' schooling experiences, ultimately resulting in starkly different levels of academic performance and achievement. Unfortunately, these inequities and gaps have persisted for decades; indeed, they still exist, despite numerous attempts to bring issues of equity into sharp focus and to eradicate inequities by way of social justice platforms (equity conferences and articles from educational journals); legislation (ESEA and the reauthorization of both NCLB and ESSA); numerous educational reports (*Hanover Research, EdWeek*); and through both educational policy revisions and school reform initiatives. Efforts remain underway to further illuminate and attempt to eliminate inequitable practices and gaps that exist between white students and their non-white counterparts as well as among differing economic classes of students.

The Importance of Focusing on Equity

Fully embracing a philosophy of continuous improvement, it is appropriate, therefore, to endorse and encourage the use of promising efforts that aim to undo educational inequities and remove achievement and opportunity gaps that exist between various student groups. Edmonds (1979) underscored the importance of such work and issued a call to educators more than forty years ago that continues to provide a compelling motivation to educate every student at a high level:

> *We can, whenever we choose, successfully teach all students whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do*

> *that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far* (p. 23).

Thus, the time for choosing to address inequities and to eliminate gaps that continue to plague the educational landscape is now, despite the current challenges associated with a pandemic. Failing to continually confront these challenges, even as unprecedented concerns loom, only promotes the status quo and, consequently, allows space and time for such issues to be exacerbated, thereby further negatively affecting numerous students in a myriad of consequential ways.

There is little if any dispute that the current COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc upon our society and our previous notions of "normal" living; the education of students in the United States has also been severely disrupted as documented in a variety of first-hand accounts and numerous educational reports. As school systems prioritize their current resources and strategically target funds towards efforts to mitigate what appears as almost unfathomable but certainly daunting challenges, we suggest that using **Equity Audits** (Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009; McKenzie & Skrla, 2011) provides an effective vehicle by which both schools and school districts can use an equity-based lens to unearth pre-pandemic and pandemic-intensified inequities and gaps that persist and have grown ever wider among challenged student populations in the United States.

Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009; 2011) note that undertaking an in-depth analysis of teacher quality (credentialing, expertise, and patterns of distribution); inspecting programmatic offerings (access, participation and overrepresentation rates); and engaging in deep data-dives to make meaning of informal and formal student achievement provide educational leaders with innumerable and

indisputable data, from which strategic planning and response-oriented action steps can be employed to tackle both currently widening and long-standing inequities and gaps. Without engaging in intentional analytical techniques, such as equity audits, to yield accurate findings, age-old inequities and currently widening gaps may escape the consciousness of district and school leaders and misdirect the specific leadership moves that they might undertake now to improve student outcomes.

Operationalizing Equity Audits

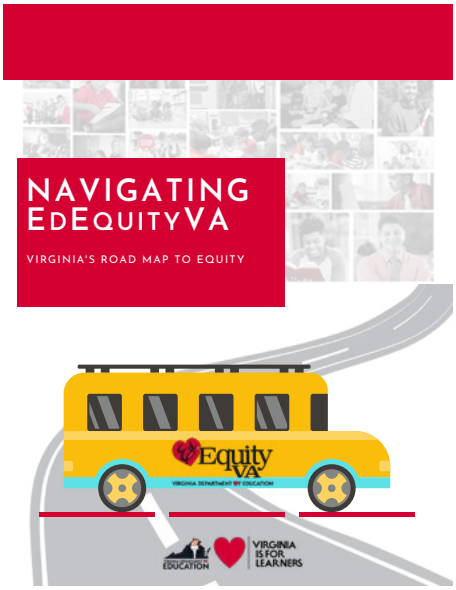
Perhaps leaders are wondering how and where to start an equity audit. One suggestion is to determine the problem areas that schools have experienced with demonstrated student performance, whether using ongoing diagnostic or benchmark results, absenteeism, or access to remote learning for identified students, all of which have been affected by the pandemic. It is time for educational leaders to collect data and begin an analysis to determine gaps, ensure access, and inform practices, procedures, and policies that may need to be modified or changed due to the inequities discovered among specific student subgroups. Examples of three types of equity audits, which align to the work of Sklra, et al. (2009), are explained here and demonstrated in the appendices.

Appendices **B** and **C** provide examples of programmatic and student achievement equity audit data, respectively. The aforementioned appendices and the detailed illustrations that follow serve as an examination of school related information, such as **School Quality Profiles,** which educational leaders can leverage to begin their equity analyses. The teacher quality audit data organized in Appendix **A** indicates, for example, that at least 50 percent of the core teachers have master's degrees compared to the fine arts and career and technical education (CTE) teachers. In addition, 50 percent of the science teachers are teaching subjects that they are not licensed to teach. Based on

these two facts, educational leaders should be thinking about the teacher quality implications for the students enrolled in fine arts, CTE, and science courses. Additionally, Environmental Science is the course that science teachers at "Somewhere VA" High School are not licensed to teach. Within this specific state, science teachers are required to have an endorsement to teach a specific area of science. A few years ago, this particular state required Environmental Science as one of the sciences students must take to meet graduation requirements and complete a state assessment at the end of the course. Consequently, one question that an educational leader concerned about equity for all students should be considering is whether or not student achievement is affected by non-licensed teachers.

Often, equity audit categories are interconnected and impact results in other audit categories, especially in student achievement. Appendix **D** reports the science, mathematics, and reading assessment results of students at "Somewhere VA" High School. Students performed best in reading and better in mathematics than science. When correlating the teacher quality data in Appendix **A** with student achievement results in Appendix **D**, it is not surprising to see the impacts on student achievement. With half of the science teachers not licensed in one of the assessed areas of science and one of the mathematics teachers not licensed in one of the assessed areas of math, deductive reasoning confirms the decrease noted in student achievement. Appendix **C** provides a breakdown of the graduating class for the 2020-21 school year. Questions resulting from a preliminary analysis of this graduation track data include: Were there no African American or Asian students in this graduation cohort? Are there fewer students pursuing the advanced diplomas due to remote learning environments as a result of COVID? Are there differences in graduation track pursuits among various student demographic groups compared to previous years?

As a simpler means to determine if inequities exist, investigating audit categories is made easier when utilizing equity audit tools, protocols, and reflective questions to provide guidance, reflective thinking, and direct next steps. Many states and agencies have begun providing equity resources as tool kits for educational leaders. Three examples of audit tools that are congruent with recommendations made by Skrla, et al. (2009) and McKenzie and Skrla (2011) are briefly described below, which have been used by the authors and shared with the educators whom they teach within their respective graduate level educational leadership preparation programs.



The first audit tool was developed by the Virginia Department of Education through the commissioned efforts of an established equity committee assigned to create the **Navigating EdEquityVA Audit Tool** (2020) and provides accompanying resources to serve as a road map for districts and schools to follow. The Navigating EdEquityVA Audit Tool consists of reflective questions that educators should ask in order to take notes and determine next steps. The Navigating EdEquityVA Tool is organized into these six sections: Centering Equity, Continuous Reflection, Courageous Leadership, Curriculum Reframing, Compassionate Student and Family Engagement, and Culturally Responsive (p. 29).

The second audit tool was developed by the **Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC)** (2021) as a set of questionnaires serving as their equity audit tool to assist "school leaders, educators, and staff to assess if their schools and classrooms are equitable across various criteria" (p. 1). MAEC's (2021) questionnaires provide a rating scale aligned to a series of questions and

statements. Additionally, the questionnaires focus on these three specific areas of inclusivity for students: 1) classroom environments, whether physical or remote, are encouraging to all students; 2) leadership ensures access to professional development opportunities to support staff as they focus on equitable learning for all students; and 3) overall school community climate and culture embrace all students' identities, promoting collaborative and reflective work among everyone (p. 4).

Many educators were not aware of how massive a problem students were going to have with connectivity.

The third audit tool for use was constructed by **The Education Trust and The Digital Promise** (2020); it provides a list of ten questions that equity advocates should ask related to challenges, struggles, access issues, and distance learning barriers when schools were closed due to the pandemic. Some schools realized the challenges and obstacles regarding student access immediately following school closure as they pivoted to remote learning. Many educators were not aware of how massive a problem students were going to have with connectivity. While grappling with the questions and addressing challenges, leaders are furthering their understandings about the widened gaps and spotlighted disparities that not only existed prior to the pandemic but also are more prevalent because of it. The ten questions comprise what educational leaders and advocates should certainly be asking and doing their best to address now during the pandemic. Schools need to continually revisit these intriguing questions.

Recommendations to Districts and Schools

Troubling and age-old academic performance of selected student subgroups was a problem before the pandemic, and we contend that gaps have now likely widened. A promising response by schools and districts is to use equity audits to understand deeply what their respective data reveal. While principals need to begin conducting equity audits within their schools, "there is also a role for district level leadership in conducting equity audits" to support schools (Skrla, et al., 2009, p. 57). Thus, district leaders' efforts to support schools may dictate teaching, leading, modeling, and coaching methods of inquiry through equity analyses and auditing procedures. Following such capacity-building efforts by district leaders, school leaders must schedule the time necessary to begin auditing for equity and to commit to the importance of such work, despite a variety of increased daily operational issues that must also be managed due to the pandemic. A recent report by *EdResearch* (September 2020) underscores the criticality of engaging in equity-based approaches now:

> *Districts will miss a major opportunity if they do not heed the call of the current racial and social justice movement and plan now for a return to in-person schooling with fundamentally new, equity-focused systems in place* (p. 7).

We recommend examining the available 2018-2019 or 2019-2020 baseline data for schools to get some idea of where they were with student learning when schools were closed and then to compare findings to what is now known about students' learning.

Will districts and schools use audit tools to guide inquiries? Three possible approaches have been provided herein for consideration. When and how should school leaders begin? We recommend examining the available 2018-2019 or 2019-2020 baseline data for schools to get some idea of where they were with student learning when schools were closed and then to compare findings to what is now known about students' learning. Doing so will provide answers to these four important questions: Are there regressions? How wide are the learning gaps now? What areas should we prioritize first? and What strategies should we implement to improve practice?

Conclusion

There is no debate that inequities existed prior to the pandemic; it is imperative, therefore, that districts and schools pay even more attention both to identifying and eradicating inequitable practices that are linked to undesirable student outcomes. We implore school districts to commit to investigating and dealing with ongoing teacher quality, programmatic, and student achievement issues, including access issues, to ensure equitable practices that lead to the success of all students. We wholeheartedly agree with McKenzie and Skrla (2011) when they note "…we consider equity in academic achievement to have been attained when all students, regardless of race, gender, economic level, and so forth, achieve at high levels" (p. 5). As educational leaders, we can no longer defer addressing inequities or ignoring them.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Teacher Quality for Somewhere VA High School

Subject Area Teacher	Years of Experience	Years at this School	Other Schools	Teacher Education	Courses Taught
English					
ENG 1	6 years	4 years	2 schools	Bachelors	English 11, English 12 Dual Enroll, English 11 AP
ENG 2	26 years	10 years	2 schools	Bachelors	English 9, English 12 Honors
ENG 3	15 Years	10 Years	2 schools	Bachelors	Theater, English 12
ENG 4	8 years	2 years	3 schools	Masters	English 11, English 9, Photojournalism
ENG 5	21 years	8 years	2 schools	Masters	English 10, English 11 Honors, English 12 AP
ENG 6	12 years	2 years	3 schools	Masters	English 10, English 10 advanced, Creative Writing
Math					
MATH 1	16 years	7 years	2 schools	Masters	Physics, Physics AP/Honors, Alg. 1 pt. 2, Alg. 2 adv., Analysis
*MATH 2**	8 years	2 years	3 schools	Bachelors	Algebra. 1, Algebra. 1 pt. 2, Computer math
MATH 3	16 years	10 years	2 schools	Masters	Geometry, Geometry advanced, Computer math
MATH 4	26 years	3 years	2 schools	Bachelors	Algebra 1, Algebra 1 pt 2, Algebra 2, Alg. Functions/ Data Analysis
MATH 5	18 years	10 years	1 school	Masters	Algebra 1, Algebra 1 pt 2, Computer Math
MATH 6	8 years	3 years	2 schools	Bachelors	Algebra 2, Alg. Functions/ Data Analysis
MATH 7	10 years	10 years	N/A	Masters	Calculus, Geometry, Statistics, Analysis Dual Enroll/ AP
Science					

Appendix A (continued)

SCI 1	36 years	10 years	2 schools	Masters	Astronomy, Geology, Biology
SCI 2	7 years	2 years	3 schools	Bachelors	Chemistry 1, Chemistry 2/ AP, Chemistry 1 Honors
*SCI 3**	4 years	0 years	1 school	Bachelors	Environmental Science, Environmental Science AP
SCI 4	16 years	8 years	2 schools	Masters	Biology 1, Chemistry 1
*SCI 5**	29 years	9 years	1 school	Bachelors	Biology 2 Honors, Environmental Science
*SCI 6**	12 years	10 years	1 school	Bachelors	Biology 1 advanced, Biology 2 survey, Environmental Science
Social Studies					
Soc St. 1	3 years	2 years	1 school	Bachelors	World Geography, Modern World History AP
Soc. St. 2	21 years	10 years	2 schools	Bachelors	US History, Government, Government AP
Soc. St. 3	19 years	10 years	2 schools	Masters	World History 2, US History, US History AP
Soc. St. 4	38 years	10 years	3 schools	Masters	Psychology/ Sociology, US History, US History Honors
Soc. St. 5	2 years	2 years	N/A	Bachelors	World Geography
Soc. St. 6	19 years	10 years	2 schools	Bachelors	Psychology AP, Human Geography AP, Government, Government Honors
Special Education					
SPED 1	21 years	7 years	5 schools	Bachelors	Learning Strategies, Assist in World Geo, Env. Science, English 9
SPED 2	20 years	5 years	4 schools	Bachelors	Learning Strategies, Independent Living, Work Study, Math, Science
SPED 3	22 years	3 years	3 schools	Masters	Learning Strategies, Assist in Alg 1, Bio 1, Eng 10

Appendix A (continued)

SPED 4	18 years	4 years	1 school	Bachelors	Learning Strategies, Assist in Gov't, US History, English 12, Comp. Math
SPED 5	5 years	5 years	N/A	Masters	Learning Strategies, Assist in Eng 11, US History, Comp. Math
SPED 6	3 years	3 years	N/A	Bachelors	Learning Strategies, Assist in Eng 10, Eng 11, Comp. Math, Bio 1, U.S. History
Health and PE					
HPE 1	26 years	10 years	3 schools	Masters	P.E. 10/ Drivers Ed, Advanced P.E.
HPE 2	16 years	10 years	2 schools	Masters	P.E. 10/ Drivers Ed, Study Skills
HPE 3	0 years	0 years	N/A	Bachelors	P.E. 9
World Languages					
World Lang. 1	31 years	10 years	6 schools	Masters	Latin 1, Latin 3/4
World Lang. 2	29 years	2 years	2 schools	Bachelors	Spanish 2, Spanish 4/ AP
World Lang. 3	11 years	10 years	1 school	Masters	Spanish 1, Spanish 3
World Lang. 4	15 years	10 years	1 school	Bachelors	French 1, French 2, French 3
Fine Arts					
Fine Arts 1	6 years	6 years	N/A	Bachelors	Guitar 1/2, Jazz Ensemble, Percussion
Fine Arts 2	10 years	10 years	Shared between other schools	Bachelors	Choir, Musical Theater, Piano 1/2
Fine Arts 3	6 years	1 year	4 schools	Bachelors	Art 1, Art 2, Craft 1/2, Art AP
Career/Technical					
CTE 1	2 years	2 years	N/A	Bachelors	Agriculture Power, Horticulture 1/2, Animal Systems Intro
CTE 2	26 years	10 years	4 schools	Bachelors	Marketing, Sports Marketing, Economics/ Personal Finance, Principles of Business
CTE 3	3 years	3 years	N/A	Masters	Technology Foundations, Engineering/

Appendix A (continued)

					Construction, Alternative Education,
CTE 4	5 years	0 years	Shared between other schools	Bachelors	Intro to Foods, Nutrition and Wellness, Independent Living, Intro to Early Childhood Education and Child Development
CTE 5	14 years	10 years	1 school	Bachelors	Economics/ Personal Finance, Computer Information Systems, Computer Information Systems Advanced
Alternative Education					
Alt. Ed. 1	24 years	10 years	5 schools	Bachelors	Alternative Education

*Indicates teaching at least 1 course outside of certification

Appendix B

Comparison of student demographics data shown in Figure 1: "Somewhere VA" High School Fall Membership by Subgroups with programmatic data displayed in Figure 2: "Somewhere VA" High School Learning Climate Data ~ Short-Term Suspensions by Subgroups (following page).

Figures 3–10: "Somewhere VA" High School Learning Climate Data ~ Chronic Absenteeism by Subgroups (pages 30–35).

Figure 1: "Somewhere VA" High School

2020 Fall Membership by Subgroup: Racial and Ethnic Groups

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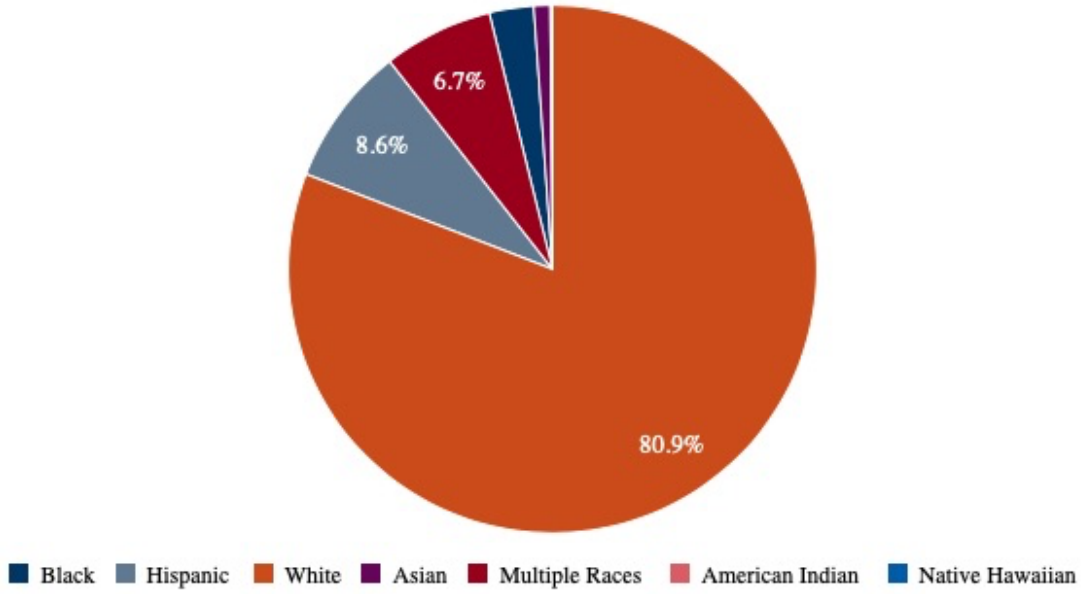


Figure 2: "Somewhere VA" High School

Learning Climate Data ~ Short-Term Suspensions by Subgroups

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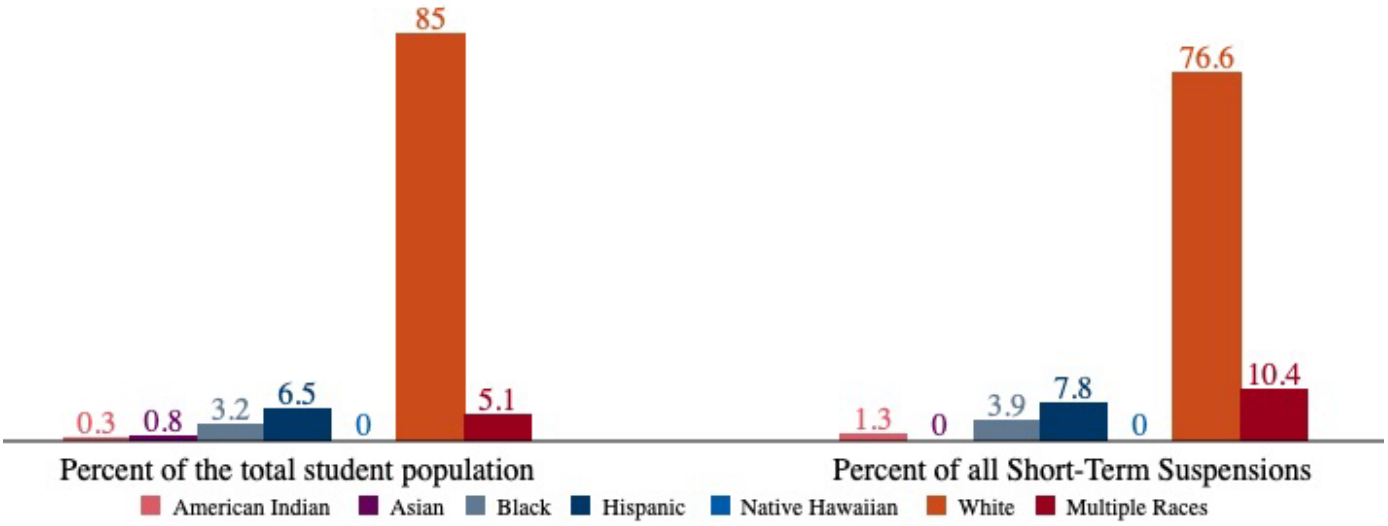


Figure 3: "Somewhere VA" High School

Learning Climate Data ~ Chronic Absenteeism All Students

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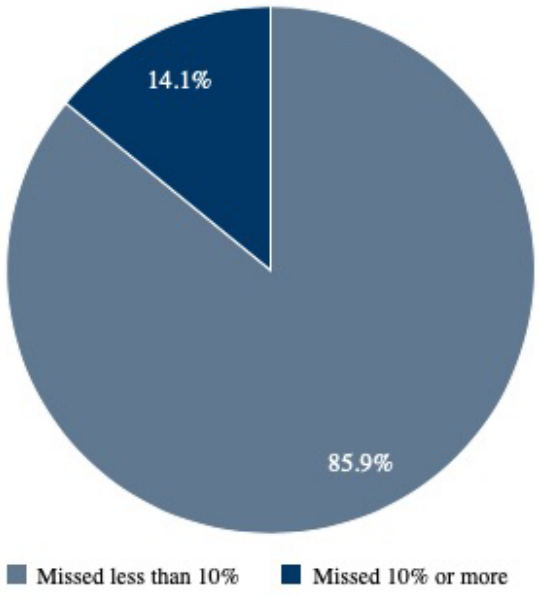


Figure 4: "Somewhere VA" High School

Learning Climate Data ~ Chronic Absenteeism by Subgroups - Black

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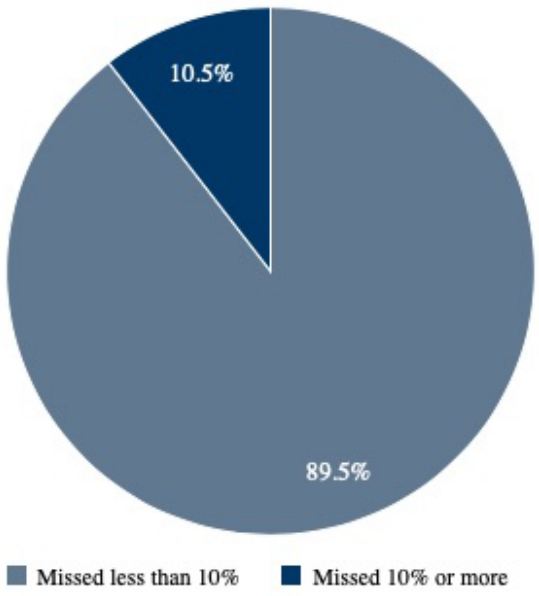


Figure 5: "Somewhere VA" High School

Learning Climate Data ~ Chronic Absenteeism by Subgroups - Hispanic

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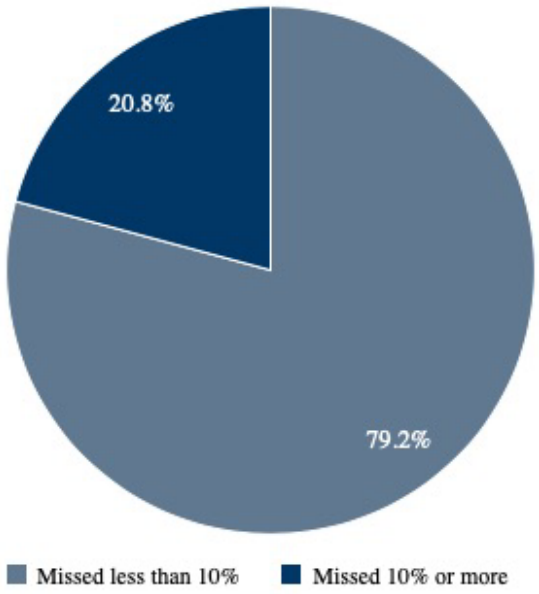


Figure 6: "Somewhere VA" High School

Learning Climate Data ~ Chronic Absenteeism by Subgroups - White

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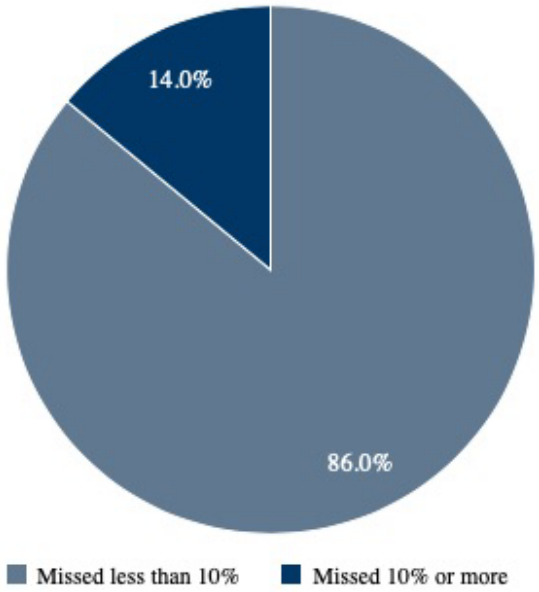


Figure 7: "Somewhere VA" High School Learning Climate Data ~ Chronic Absenteeism by Subgroups - Multi-races
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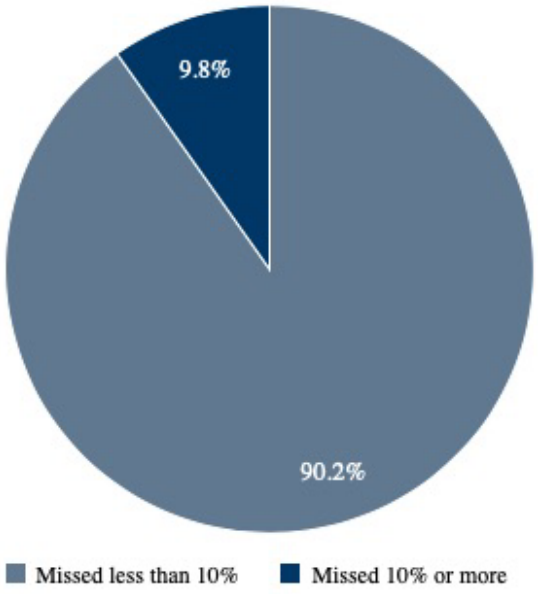


Figure 8: "Somewhere VA" High School Learning Climate Data ~ Chronic Absenteeism by Subgroups - Students with Disabilities Source URL: https://schoolquality.virginia.gov, 2/18/2021, 8:58:52 PM

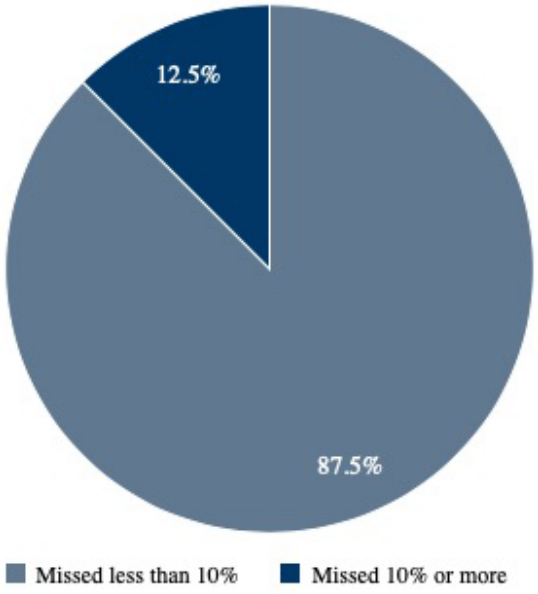


Figure 9: "Somewhere VA" High School Learning Climate Data ~ Chronic Absenteeism by Subgroups - Economically Disadvantaged Source URL: https://schoolquality.virginia.gov, 2/18/2021, 8:59:07 PM

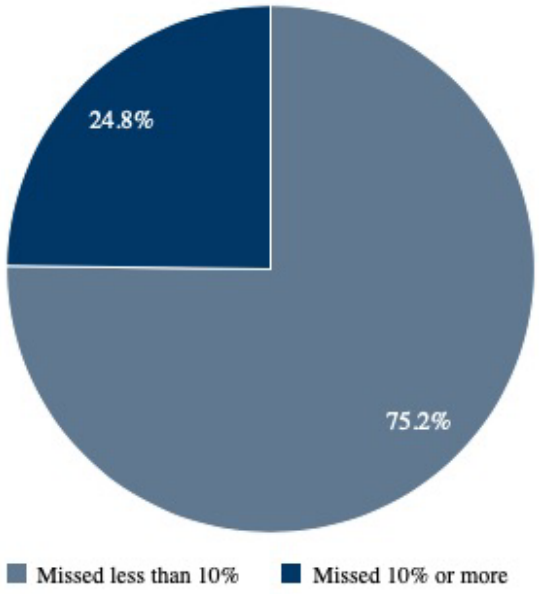
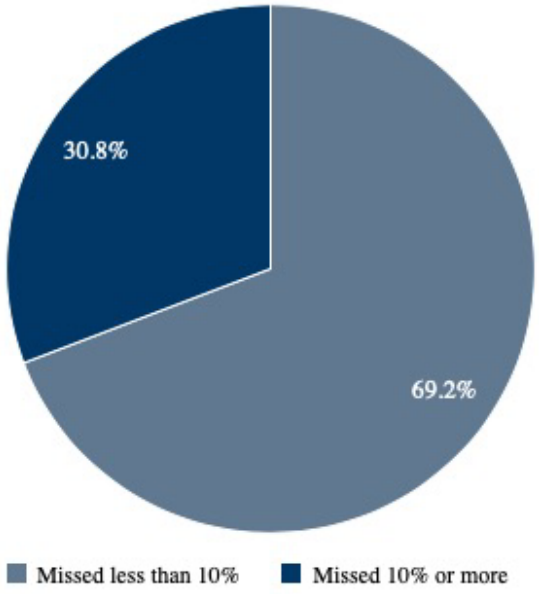


Figure 10: "Somewhere VA" High School Learning Climate Data ~ Chronic Absenteeism by Subgroups - English Learners Source URL: https://schoolquality.virginia.gov, 2/18/2021, 8:59:16 PM



Appendix C

Table 2: Graduation Tracks for "Somewhere VA" High School

Subgroup	Advanced Diplomas	Standard Diplomas	Other Diplomas	GEDs
All Students	111	81	6	3
Female	67	37	3	0
Male	44	44	3	3
Asian	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Black	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported
Hispanic	4	8	0	0
White	94	65	6	3
Multiple races	8	5	0	0
Students w/ disabilities	1	17	6	3
Economically Disadvantaged	17	42	2	2
Homeless	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported

Appendix D

Figure 11: "Somewhere VA" High School Science Performance - All Students

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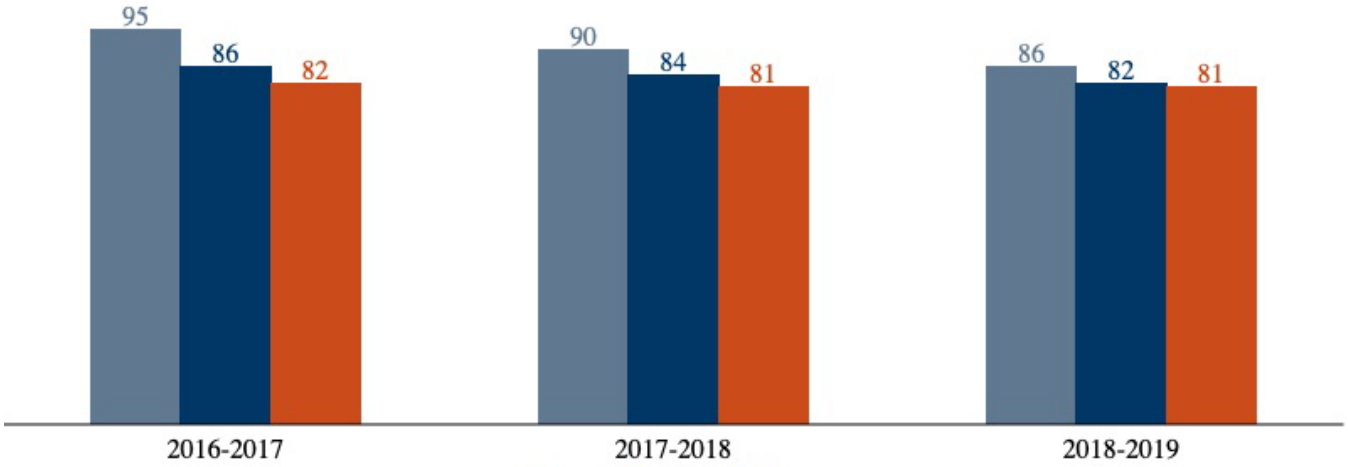


Figure 12: "Somewhere VA" High School Math Performance - All Students

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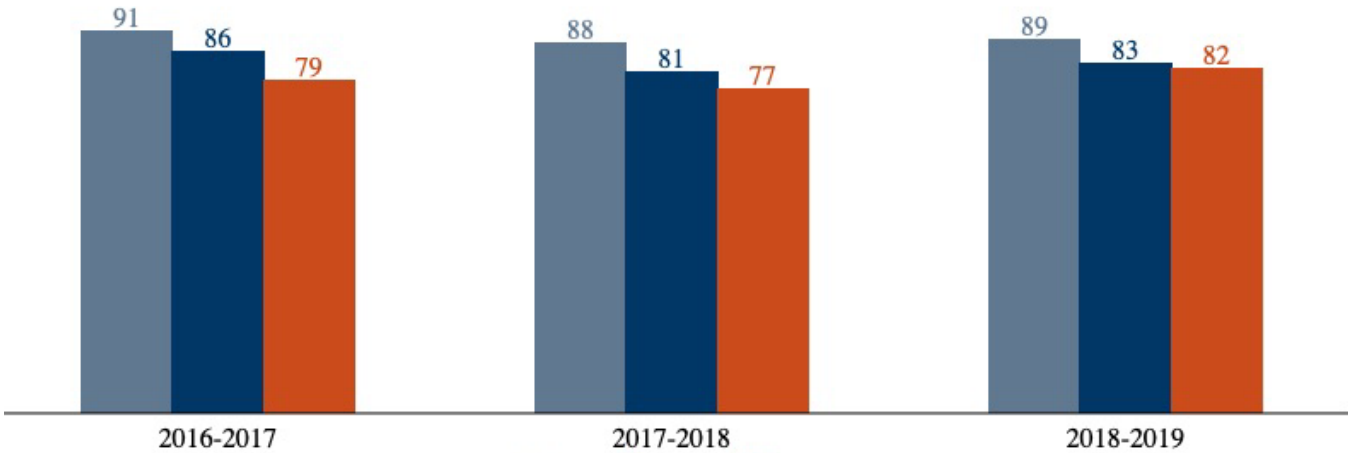
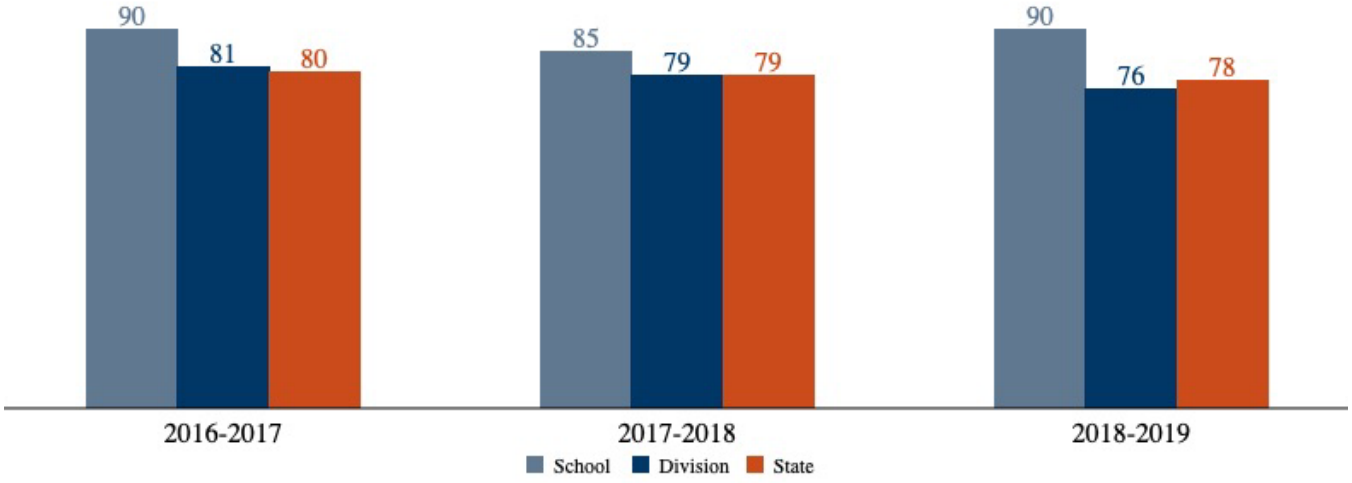


Figure 13: "Somewhere VA" High School Reading Performance - All Students

Source URL: https://schoolquality.virginia.gov, 2/18/2021, 9:21:35 PM



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We Love Virginia's New Teachers!

VASCD's New Teacher Network is open to Virginia teachers in their first three years as well as to preservice teachers in Virginia's higher education institutions. This year over 450 new teachers are members of the network, and receive:

- a one-year membership in VASCD at no cost;
- a quarterly New Teacher Message featuring one of Virginia's Teachers of the Year providing tips, techniques, and resources of interest to new teachers; and
- invitations to register for one of our popular webinars per semester at no charge.

Working towards Visible Equity: Transforming Leadership for Visible Equity

Preparing lifelong learners to be citizens who can navigate the complexities of social unrest layered by issues of a global pandemic has proven to be challenging. However, P-16 educational practitioners, armed with tools to reflect upon their actions, can lay the foundation for visible equity to exist within their institutions. In this article, the authors give life to the terminology of "visible equity" and introduce four tenets that build a framework for interventions useful to P-16 administrators and faculty.



Veleka S. Gatling, Ph.D.

With over 27 years in public education, Dr. Veleka S. Gatling has served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, executive director of special and gifted programs, and executive director of professional learning in various school divisions in Hampton Roads. She has also served as an adjunct professor and lecturer in the department of educational leadership and currently serves as the Director of Diversity Initiatives at Old Dominion University. Most recently, Dr. Gatling was appointed by Governor Northam to serve on the Culturally Relevant and Inclusive Education Practices Advisory Committee. She is also the Co-Chair of a workgroup on the Task Force for Racial Equity at James Madison University.

Cynthia S. Nicholson, Ph.D.



Cynthia S. Nicholson, PhD, has spent over 25 years as an educator in secondary and post-secondary English and Teacher Education. As a Graduate Program Coordinator in the School of Education at Norfolk State University (NSU), Dr. Nicholson enjoys preparing students to serve in the field of education. Prior to joining the NSU faculty, she worked as an administrator at a private, liberal arts university, managing and collaborating activities for eight academic departments. Dr. Nicholson serves as a Faculty Fellow for NSU's Center for Teaching and Learning, facilitating instruction for the faculty credentialing with the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE).

For something to be visible, it must be perceptible to the senses, constantly and frequently in thoughts and actions. Nothing is more disheartening than to hear, "we do equity." It is just like hearing, "we do inclusion." "Doing" becomes more like checking a box than acknowledging that both are philosophies rooted in visible practices and are paramount to ensuring continuous improvement. In this article, we give life to the terminology of "visible equity" and introduce four tenets that build a framework for interventions useful to P-16 administrators and faculty.

The need for a well-rounded education has never been more necessary than it is today. Preparing lifelong learners to be citizens who can navigate the complexities of social unrest layered by issues of a global pandemic has proven to be challenging. However, P-16 educational practitioners, armed with tools to reflect upon their actions, can lay the foundation for visible equity to exist within their institutions. Throughout the halls of academia, we can find mission statements touting the provision of a safe space where students can flourish. In the absence of a plan to achieve *visible equity,* administrators, teachers, and staff will stifle their students' productivity, not because of their intended commitment, but because a lack of awareness is at work. With thoughtful planning for the total well-being of all students and staff this task is not impossible. Intentional planning for how visible equity should manifest itself in schools and university classrooms is key. It has the power to transcend school divisions and university culture, including professional learning communities, parent/teacher conferences, and faculty/staff meetings.

Building on the scholarship of John Hattie (2012), we explore how influence springs from teachers whose impact is visible in the way they evaluate, modify, and improve their instructional effectiveness. This happens as teachers "see learning through the eyes of the students and help them become their own teachers" (Hattie, 2012, p. 45). *Visible equity* is about P-16 administrators and

faculty ensuring that their own self-reflection plays a vital role in shaping their philosophy, policies, and practices resulting in ongoing opportunities for marginalized and under-represented populations to thrive and grow.

Research on the topic of equity has served as a catalyst for starting the conversation to promote visible equity (Khalifa, 2018; Winters, 2020; Mayfield, 2020; Hammond, 2015). Most commonly there is an agreement on the need for self-reflection or self- awareness, which according to Brené Brown (2018), is the

...we must demonstrate respect by seeking to understand others and treating them as they desire, not as we desire.

first step to invoking change. She offers, "We desperately need more leaders who are committed to courageous, wholehearted leadership and who are self-aware enough to lead from their hearts, rather than unevolved leaders who lead from hurt and fear" (Brown, 2018, p.4). The call continues to be made for P-16 educational practitioners to reflect upon a diluted history that still contributes to diversity decisions (Khalifa, 2018; Mayfield, 2020). Having an awareness of this knowledge is vital to creating and sustaining a vision for learning spaces that practice *visible equity* even when no one is looking.

Four Tenets of Visible Equity

To achieve *visible equity,* we must humanize members within our communities to practice in ways that respect and acceptance become the norm, not just another cliche. Then, we must demonstrate respect by seeking to understand others and treating them as they desire, not as we desire. In this article, we

aim to contribute collective experiences from professional developments and research conducted with P-16 administrators and faculty. From teaching in the public school and university classrooms to emerging as administrators in both settings, we situate our analysis on the constructs of practice which have evolved into a framework with four tenets that lead to *visible equity*. Leaders and teachers can negotiate daily operations in ways that allow positive routines to impact learning across the board.

School and university leaders must act as trailblazers who are not afraid to unveil the underlying issues that hinder visible equity.

TENET 1: Leaders who practice self-reflection to shape philosophy, policies, and practices

School and university leaders must be intentional and purposeful in their self-reflection to promote visible equity. This self-reflection requires vulnerability, because once we learn something about ourselves, we must do something about it. Once we learn that our silence in meetings or our "go-along to get-along" attitudes have been seen as agreement to policies and practices that don't promote visible equity, we have to do something. We may have to revisit a conversation with colleagues and sometimes even friends to admit that the old way we used to do business is not the equitable way. Brown (2018) affirms, "When we build cultures at work where there is zero tolerance for vulnerability… where perfectionism and armor are rewarded and necessary, you can't have [difficult] conversations. They're not productive" (p.57). According to Khalifa (2018), critical self-reflection must be embedded into the horizontal structures

of schooling; that is the work that must occur more than one time a year when school and district equity data is released. "Rather it must be woven throughout all the tools and processes that schools use" (p.73-74).

TENET 2: Leaders who inspire teachers to be aware of their own self-reflection practices

School and university leaders must act as trailblazers who are not afraid to unveil the underlying issues that hinder visible equity. Oftentimes, institutional climate and culture can be the culprit if no one challenges such norms. Being aware of one's own beliefs and biases is the very first step to changing workplace culture; however, it is not always easy. Awareness must be followed by a decision to do what it takes to make the environment one that is comfortable for all students to thrive. Administrators have the power to be agents of *visible equity* who transform their various institutions. While this may be met with many challenges, the courageous investment of time to learn and share will be beneficial.

In an interview with *Inside Higher Education,* Tia Brown McNair (2020) suggests:

> *Leaders often invoke equity, diversity, and inclusion as values they hold dear; however, their espoused embrace for equity often fails to turn into action and transformation because many leaders lack the knowledge to enable them to "see" the production of racialized consequences through everyday practices they take for granted. They have not acquired the habit of considering who is advantaged/disadvantaged when a new policy or a practice is introduced and have difficulty recognizing and acknowledging when institutionalized racism runs through the arteries of their institutions' practices, policies, and structures. Doing racial equity work requires that leaders admit to not always knowing how to address racism.*

It is seen as unpopular for a university or school leader to be vulnerable and admit they don't know something. Yet, if there is to be any change at all, such vulnerability is necessary and needed.

TENET 3: Teachers who consider their own beliefs as an intricate part of the instructional process

Content knowledge, coupled with an understanding of state curricula, is one important tool needed for learning to occur. However, to execute the delivery of instruction, teachers must take into consideration what they believe about each student who enters their classroom. This may require acknowledging deficit thinking that often looms over interactions with minoritized student populations

Teachers must be determined to construct and execute curricula that allows learners to see themselves honored and celebrated.

(Valencia, 1997; Valencia, 2010). Embracing visible equity means teachers take a real look at their cultural ways of knowing. For many students, teachers are revered as caring professionals who by the nature of the occupation want them to be successful. Anything contrary to that credence requires self-assessment of one's beliefs about teaching and learning.

TENET 4: Teachers who advocate for students' lived experiences to be a part of the curriculum

One benefit of teaching is the potential for each classroom to mirror a pluralistic society. To glean from this type of learning space, teachers must celebrate the differences that make up their student population, including but not limited

to race, culture, and gender. Resisting the temptation to marginalize groups of learners is key if visible equity is to exist. According to Lisa Delpit (2006, p. 67), "...all teachers must revel in the diversity of their students and that of the world outside the classroom." Our goal is to create a learning community where students' lived experiences are valued and appreciated. Teachers must be determined to construct and execute curricula that allows learners to see themselves honored and celebrated.

"Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced." These are words of from an essay written by James Baldwin and published in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1962. Because leaders and [teachers] wield considerable "administrative privilege". If not mindfully and critically self-reflective, they will be unresponsive—and thus oppressive toward community perspectives and needs (Khalifa, 2020, p.34). Leaders and teachers must also take responsibility for ensuring visible equity. This means that it is everyone's responsiblilty. The next section of this article will outline scenarios with tips that deserve the attention of teachers, school leaders, as well as university leadership.

Practical Tips for P-12 Administrators

Confronting microaggressions in leadership meetings is imperative to achieving visible equity. Being dismissive of the ideas of a colleague from a marginalized population could be viewed as a microaggression. Imagine that during a cabinet level meeting, a black female is called on to provide a suggestion for the strategic plan. The idea is met with approval from her colleagues; however, the leader of the meeting provides no feedback. Ten minutes pass and a white male colleague provides the same suggestion. The team leader provides a sign of approval and then closes the meeting. When the black female explains to the leader that her idea has been ignored, the leader tells her she is being too sensitive. It isn't

until another white female brings it to the attention of the leader that he finally acknowledges what he has done. He does not, however, share this with the black female, only the white female and white male. This scenario offers an example of

It is not a one-time fix, but a continual process for growth and sustainability.

how interactions among institutional leaders can reflect non-equitable practices. To correct this situation the leader must be willing to recognize and admit their wrong. This is the only way that visible equity can take place. It is not a one-time fix, but a continual process for growth and sustainability.

Practical Tips for University Administrators

Confronting and overcoming the ideas and stereotypes that we have learned about other cultures is imperative to achieving visible equity. One way to put visible equity into practice is for university administrators to expand their knowledge of the systemic barriers that hinder minoritized groups from being a part of the campus community.

Following the unjust death of George Floyd, a CommUNITY Conversation was sponsored by a local university. They focused on what could be done as a campus to become allies and/or advocates for social justice. One of the breakout sessions for the event focused on learning about the history of oppression in the African American community, with an emphasis on slow integration of local schools and universities, after the Supreme Court Decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954. As a campus community, participants began to understand the history of the integration. This allowed them to see how

marginalized populations were denied opportunities that had traditionally been occupied by the dominate culture. Taking the time to learn more about other cultures is important to promoting visible equity.

Listening to Our Students

Nicholson: "What are your earliest memories of reading?"

> Aimeé: *"Reading was hard…in elementary school, I had a teacher who set levels for us [Black kids] and didn't expect or let us go higher than those levels. I didn't want to do what she said…it made me want to fight the little box she put me in and go beyond what she said I should or could do. So, when I got to the next grade, I was reading several grade levels ahead. I wasn't going to let her take my power, my mind, my intelligence. That's what I have, and you can't take it from me. Only I can put a limit on that, you can't put a limit on that. I started getting reading awards. Give me a book!"* (Nicholson, 2011, p. 98)

The study referenced above began as an observation of community literacy practices among African American students in a church youth program. Six months into the study, an interview with Aimeé led to our dialogue about her school reading instruction. After intently listening to this soft-spoken 8th grade girl, questions arose as to why Aimeé believed that her teacher "set levels" for her learning and success. Whether covertly or overtly, how we respond to students in the classroom can have a lasting effect. Confronting and overcoming the ideas and stereotypes that we have learned about other cultures is imperative to achieving visible equity. Too often, students believe that teachers do not understand them. To navigate those relationships and to build rapport with our students, it is imperative that teachers connect with students as people. Humanizing their experiences and their feelings is key to learning to advocate for them as learners.

Rethinking Instructional Practices

Confronting deficit mindsets used to categorize traditionally marginalized student populations is paramount if visible equity is to transpire in the higher education classroom. Regardless of the institution, conversations about underprepared students often takes place in an attempt to maintain or increase university retention and persistence rates. We learn from Stephen Brookfield (2006, p. 2) "the highly situational nature of teaching", as there is no prescription that works in all classrooms. What we do with one group of students, may not work with another group of students. If we are to engage students in the learning process, the focus must shift from "teaching them how to assimilate into the dominant college culture" (McNair, Bensimon, and Malcolm-Piquex, 2020, p. 46). Instructional practices should be created to not only teach our students, but to relate to them as people. One example of this is

Instead of creating all the assignments before the course, talk with students to get their input on ways to best meet the course objectives and demonstrate mastery of content.

to allow students to be a part of developing the syllabus. This activity requires a conversation with students at the beginning of the semester to inform them of the course objectives. Instead of creating all the assignments before the course, talk with students to get their input on ways to best meet the course objectives and demonstrate mastery of content. Meeting them at the point of their need is essential if we are to transform the way we teach in the higher education classroom.

Final Thoughts

We all know that the first step towards any type of change and/or improvement is the hardest. For some, eliminating sugar or bread in attempt to diet can be hazardous to someone else's health. Asking someone to identify their current reality as it relates to equity can be just as hazardous. According to Michael Fullan (2006), "Most theories of change are weak on capacity building and that is one of the key reasons why they fall short" (p.75). It takes more than simply exposing administrators and faculty to the definition and tenets of *visible equity,* we must build our capacity to not only understand but to also demonstrate and share our knowledge. Modeling support and feedback while continuing the conversation on visible equity will allow us to transform education in meaningful ways. Together, we can create safe spaces for learning to flourish and expand.

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How One High School Responded and What We Learned

When COVID-19 hit in the spring of 2020, public schools everywhere did what they could to close out the school year with no students or staff present beginning officially on March 13, 2021. Little did everyone know that the challenges presented during the spring of 2020 was merely the beginning. Amelia County High School, a rural high school located in central Virginia, opened on time in the fall of 2021 with reduced instruction time for all and many students choosing to remain fully virtual. Multiple strategies, procedures, and efforts were implemented during the 2020-2021 school year. ACHS grew and learned from each attempt to support our students and staff.



Jennifer Renee Royster Ramey, Ed.D.

Dr. Jennifer Ramey is the Assistant Principal at Amelia County High School, located in Amelia, Virginia, a rural central Virginia community. Prior to this position, she spent two years as Assistant Principal for Amelia County Elementary School, six years as Amelia County High School Special Education Coordinator, and five years as Amelia County High School Special Education Teacher. She enrolled in Liberty University to pursue her Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction, and completed the degree in the spring of 2019, earning her Education Specialist Degree along the way. She is married to her husband, David Ramey, and lives in Chesterfield, Virginia. She and Dave have four children and three grandchildren.

Overview

As regulations that were mandated by our government regarding occupancy, masks, social distancing, etc., continue to loosen, we are all hopeful for a "normal" school opening in the fall of 2021. But, what is normal anymore? I am certain that I have forgotten about more than I remember. In retrospect, I would have written segments of this article as ideas and events occurred, but finding

time was difficult as the extremes we endured this past school year unfolded. Everyone within the Amelia County Public School system, located in rural central Virginia, came together to plan for the most unique school year we had ever encountered. My role as Amelia County High School Assistant Principal provided a unique perspective to decisions that were made and their impact on our students and staff in many ways.

On February 22, 2020, I flew from Virginia to Texas to meet my aunt for a long weekend getaway. My mom's sister and I are close in age and best of friends. She moved to Seattle, Washington a few years ago, and we do not see each other often. The trip was filled with shopping, eating, and catching up. During our first lunch in Dallas at a quaint Mediterranean-style bistro, I learned that she almost did not come. Her husband was sicker than he had ever been. After a very dramatic beginning to his illness, he had been diagnosed with the flu without a positive flu test. He was at home still very ill, but resting and recuperating, so she decided to go ahead with the trip. Not long after, some of the first positive COVID-19 tests in the United States were reported in Washington. His illness was never confirmed as COVID-19. Little did we know this would be the last trip we would take for a very long while. Less than one month later, on March 13, 2020, schools in Virginia were closed for the remainder of the school year, and educators everywhere scrambled to figure out how to close the school year with no students or teachers in buildings for the last quarter of the year.

Closing the 2019-2020 School Year

We knew that we could not rely on students having access to the internet in our rural community, and we were given the task of providing fourth quarter assignments without online access. This early challenge was met with paper packets intended to help students who were failing but not hurt students who were passing. Teachers scrambled to put together packets in an insanely tight

timeframe. The question was how were we going to be able to disseminate the packets to students safely during a pandemic. Our local Food Lion came to the rescue and donated 500+ grocery bags. We labeled each bag with a student's name, and the bags were opened and lined up on cafeteria tables in alphabetical order. Teachers took turns going into the cafeteria and placing each student's packet into a labeled bag. Once the bags were full of as many as seven packets per student, parents and students drove to the cafeteria door to receive their bags. Staff members were outside with walkie talkies. The parent drove up and told us their student's name to receive their bag without leaving their car. A socially distanced assembly line of volunteer teachers, administrators, and other staff donning masks and gloves, spent several days making sure students safely received the materials they needed to finish the school year.

2020 Graduation

In the spring of 2020, with students and teachers at home, our team brainstormed how to hold some type of graduation recognition for our students who had worked so hard to get to this point. Having already missed spring sports and prom, we wanted to find a way for these students and their parents to be able to hear their name called as they walked across a stage in cap and gown to receive their diplomas. We were mandated that no more than 10 people could be in any one area at a time. Only the principal, superintendent, and photographer were allowed in the auditorium during the ceremony, which allowed each graduate up to six guests. One by one, our graduates entered the building with their guests. Stations were set up in the hallway where they could return their chromebooks and receive directions for participation. The family entered the auditorium while the graduate moved to the side door for stage entry. Once their name was announced, the graduate walked across the stage, received a diploma, and paused for a photo opportunity. The entire graduation ceremony took an exhausting three full days, but each student was

able to have a moment in the spotlight. In the fall of 2020, restrictions had been loosened enough for us to have a very small, socially distanced, but otherwise fairly traditional graduation. A few students participated, which I believe was a result of most seniors feeling the closure they needed in the extremely unique program that had been held during the prior spring.

As did schools everywhere, we moved through the challenges to close out the year the best we could. After successfully meeting this challenge, a diverse team of teachers, administrators, directors, staff, and superintendent, spent hours on Google Meet during the summer of 2020 planning our division's opening in the fall.

The 2020-2021 School Year

Fall 2020

While most schools in our area remained closed with teachers and students working remotely and virtually from home, we opened on time with students in the building! We invited our students to sign up for either virtual or hybrid learning. About 40% of our high schoolers chose to remain at home, learning virtually, and about 60% returned to school in person. Our charge was to bring back those who wanted to attend in person as much time as possible but also to keep them safe. Our hybrid program allowed about 30% of our student population to attend school in person on Mondays and Tuesdays, 30% on Thursdays and Fridays, and 40% remaining at home attending school fully virtual. Classrooms were measured and desks were placed six feet apart. Each classroom had a maximum number of students—approximately 12—who could attend, and a massive spreadsheet was created to keep track of numbers of students in classes for seven periods per day to ensure that we never exceeded our capacity. Students had their temperatures taken as they entered busses or exited their vehicles in the morning, wore masks except while eating lunch,

and ate food that was delivered to them in their classrooms. Our hallways were labeled with directional instructions, and everyone travelled in the same direction during each class change to minimize exposure. Each student desk was cleaned prior to every class change throughout the day.

Many specific challenges arose throughout the school year, and Amelia County stepped up to the plate to meet these challenges the best we could. With each new challenge, a team approach was taken to come up with solutions, and everyone worked together to make the best of a tough situation.

Technology Needs

Our division has an approximately 60% socioeconomically disadvantaged student population. Additionally, because of our rural location, many of our students, both virtual and hybrid, do not have internet access in their homes. How could we serve the students without internet access when they are not in our building? Our team kicked it into gear to come up with a solution to this dilemma. All students, K through 12, were provided Chromebooks. While many localities were ahead of us in this area, we made it work. Our secondary students had already been issued Chromebooks, but the current situation called for all students, K-12, to receive them. Even with this, the fact remained that our students needed something more because, without internet access in their homes, what good is a Chromebook? We had to come up with a solution that could provide each child with necessary access. The solution was multifactorial.

First, our teachers were using Google Classrooms to provide video lessons, materials, and assignments. Flipped classrooms were encouraged to ensure equity in the lessons that all students received. However, in a community where some segments of its population have limited knowledge of all things modern,

jumping into the Google Classroom platform was the easiest way to manage this challenge, but also quite difficult in many ways.

Second, in order to reach all students, we had to be certain that all work posted in the Google Classrooms was downloadable so that no internet access was needed once it was uploaded to the Chromebook. Teachers struggled with content and assignments that were both downloadable and engaging, and did not include streaming videos or other online platforms. Third, each student was issued a high capacity flash drive. If they attended school in person, they could come to school and download assignments to take home on their flash drives to

...our technology department installed Wi-Fi access points in our high school parking lot and at every fire station throughout the county.

complete during their virtual days. Remember, though, that approximately 40% of our students (and higher as the year pressed on) were not attending school in person at all. How could we ensure that these students could access lessons and assignments if they did not have internet at home? Once again, our technology department was a vital piece to the puzzle.

Our county had very few Wi-Fi access points—the community library, a fast food restaurant—that's about it. In response, our technology department installed Wi-Fi access points in our high school parking lot and at every fire station throughout the county. Weekly assignments were uploaded by teachers to Google Classroom and students accessed them when they could, where they could, downloading assignments to their flash drives, which they could then

retrieve at home even if they did not have internet access. With a solution for access to students seemingly workable, the challenge of access as it pertained to special education students was compounded.

Teachers needed guidance and a shoulder on which to cry. The idea of accountability for students was now being replaced with grace and mercy.

Special Education

When schools stopped meeting on March 13, 2020, our special education experts scrambled to ensure that what was written in our IEPs was being met. This created a need for countless phone calls, addendums, and signatures. The issue was that in the spring of 2020, the folks who were writing IEPs had no way of predicting how services would look or be provided during a pandemic school year. This created an inevitable situation of even more phone calls, addendums, and signatures again in the fall of 2020. However, the most important aspect of special education during the pandemic remained how do we find ways to meet the individualized needs of all students. Our special education teachers provided services in person and virtually. They spent countless hours attempting to contact virtual students who were unresponsive, as well as countless hours attempting to contact hybrid students who were struggling with attendance. I have never seen a group of individuals work harder.

Teacher Struggles

In response to opening our school differently, having fewer students in our building, having some students who never came into our building, and high numbers of struggling students, innovation and improvisation were the names

of the game. Teachers needed guidance and a shoulder on which to cry. The idea of accountability for students was now being replaced with grace and mercy. We had no way of knowing what our students were going through at home. We had no way to prevent the inevitable Googling and sharing of answers that

When as a collective idea teachers decide that if a student cares enough to Google the answers this might be a good thing, we have come to a crossroads that we have never approached in education before.

was most definitely more the norm than not. When as a collective idea teachers decide that if a student cares enough to Google the answers this might be a good thing, we have come to a crossroads that we have never approached in education before. As we encountered issues, we worked to find solutions. The year was different from anything we had ever experienced, and everyone was simply doing the best they could. Several attempts to save the school year were made, some more successful than others. Layers of remediation efforts were implemented to help our struggling students who were unresponsive in some cases. Teachers struggled with their own challenges of suddenly being thrown into the role of both virtual and in person teacher, recording videos for students who were not with them, and learning how to teach, assign, and assess in an online platform. On multiple occasions, we had students, teachers, and even entire sports teams quarantined due to positive COVID-19 tests or exposures. Never did it get to a level where we could not rally together to get through and move forward.

Advisors and Advisory Time

When the pandemic began, our high school was in the early stages of Virginia Tiered Systems of Support (VTSS) training. We were nowhere near ready to implement the program, and are still in the training stages. Student advisors and advisory time was something that we had planned to implement down the road after much training, so that teachers understood the role and purpose of each. With our new reality, we decided to incorporate both into our high school community based on what we were sure would be a social-emotional need for students to have a teacher that they could rely on and time during their day to be able to relax, socialize, and learn to trust one another. Teachers were assigned a homeroom that would meet every morning for breakfast. These same groups of students met in the middle of the day for "advisory time" during which they ate lunch and had a period of time that could be used for social-emotional lessons, counseling, special education services, and academic support. Throughout the year, this time was used for so many creative purposes. Because we could not gather students for assemblies or grade level meetings, when we found a teaching need, we made instructional videos that would be pushed out to all teachers to show during advisory time. At the beginning of the school year and throughout the year, we used this time to teach expectations to students through personal videos from our principal, assistant principal, counseling, and teachers. It became a valued addition to everyone's day.

Remediation Efforts

Boot Camp

One way that our school found value in the Advisory time was Boot Camp. Boot Camp is a remediation program repurposed from previous years that was named to sound interesting to students. We used it for years to provide remediation for students who need extra help to pass their Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. A

time was built into the daily schedule, and an elaborate schedule was created to ensure that students met with the teachers they needed. Our school had some discussion on whether this time should be used for SOL remediation or if it should be used to assist students who were failing classes to make up missing assignments. Ultimately, we decided to use the time for the traditional purpose of SOL remediation. At the time it was implemented, school systems in our state had not been given information regarding how SOL scores would be accommodated based on a pandemic, and we wanted to be sure that we were serving students in the best way possible considering the circumstances. However, Boot Camp would only reach our hybrid students on their in-person days. We had to come up with a way to accommodate virtual and hybrid students who needed assistance with SOLs or regular class assignments, which was the beginning of a brainstorm of how to use and modify a program that has been in existence for years, Twilight.

Twilight

Twilight was a program born through the realization years ago that we needed to do something more for a select group of students who had not been successful, for whatever reason, in traditional k-12 education. In past years, students who had not graduated on time were brought in and told there was hope and light at the end of their tunnels. Students attended Twilight after school and completed coursework through an online program with content area expert teachers on hand to get them through difficult tasks. The students had myriad challenges, including their own children. One young woman did not have a babysitter to watch her infant son so that she could attend. The teachers took turns helping her with assignments and bouncing her baby so that she could complete the requirements to graduate, and she did.

At the end of the third quarter of the 2020-2021 school year, our failure rates were high. Some students who traditionally were honor roll students were

making Ds and even Fs. In spite of everyone's efforts, our student body was struggling. In response, we decided that we needed to get creative with our after school program. Any student who had a grade of 40 or higher for the first semester for any course and was failing the course for the year at the end of the third quarter were registered to the program. Participants spent one hour and 45 minutes after school, Monday through Thursday, getting caught up on assignments and receiving academic support. Students were told that if they participated in the program and got caught up on current fourth quarter work, they would be allowed to go back to third quarter work and make up missed assignments. This was just the motivation some students needed to pull it together and pass some courses. Virtual and hybrid students participated, and transportation was provided to various convenience stores around the county to make pick-up for their parents more convenient. Everyone was in this together, and it helped some students.

Special Assignments

We were fortunate that we had one extra staff member available to help with the challenge of failing students. Our alternative school is very small, and we began the school year with only one student attending the program. When the student was able to return to the regular population, it freed up a teacher to assist us with remediation efforts. A list of students and a seven period schedule was created for him to work with students based on senior failures and underclassmen failing their English classes. The students were pulled from study halls and gym classes (with the gym teacher's blessing) to work one-on-one with the alternative teacher to receive academic support. At the end of the year, 83% of the students who participated in this program passed their English class. However, at the end of the day, we still had more failures than usual and we knew we had to do more to support these struggling students to get back on track. This solution turned into summer school.

Summer School

For our school, we had not typically offered summer school for course recovery. Pre-pandemic, our summer school program had been used for SOL recovery, helping students to earn the verified credits they need to graduate in the state of Virginia. However, we knew that we had to do more this year. Summer school was offered to any student who failed a class. Some classes would be traditionally taught by a teacher in a classroom setting. Other courses would be taught through an online program. Teachers were hired to monitor the program and provide academic support. Students would not only have the opportunity to earn the credits they needed to advance to the next course, but also take associated SOLs if needed. At the beginning of the summer, we found hope in the high numbers of students who enrolled and actually showed up to retake failed courses. It is amazing to walk the halls of our summer school classrooms and see students who have struggled all year, quietly working and receiving the help they need to be successful. Many of the students enrolled in the summer

We learned that teachers and students need each other; statistically, those who attended school in person two days per week greatly outperformed those who were fully virtual.

school program are ninth graders who have been our students all year, but they have never before entered our building, and we have never met them in person. Our goal is that every student who attends summer school recovers at least one failed course, with high hopes that many students will recover more than one.

During the first session of summer school, 92% of students who attended earned at least one recovered high school credit, with many earning more than one. Second session is showing promise of the same results.

Strategies that Stick

While numerous strategies were tried, some were more successful than others. We plan to continue with some, get rid of some, and implement some as needed in the year to come. We learned that teachers and students need each other; statistically, those who attended school in person two days per week greatly outperformed those who were fully virtual. We also learned that no matter how much technology and support we provided, students would struggle without face to face interaction with peers and teachers. Our school opened in August 2021 with a virtual option; 97% of our student body chose to attend school in person. Figure 1 on the following page displays changes that were made and those that will and won't stick this upcoming school year.

Full circle...

Graduation was held on May 22, 2021. Ninety-three out of 105 candidates had fulfilled the requirements for graduation in spite of the pandemic that made educating students most challenging. The remaining twelve students were allowed to continue their studies to make a summer graduation possible, and the vast majority of them did just that. We were able to hold an in person, outdoor, socially distanced graduation for all students at a one-hour long ceremony. Those who had been vaccinated were not required to wear masks. The next day, my aunt flew from Seattle, Washington to Virginia for a visit. Her husband had fully recovered.

Strategy Attempted	Will it Stick?
Breakfast/Lunch in the Classroom	Yes - We plan to continue with the practice of students meeting each morning for homeroom where they will have breakfast. This is different from pre-pandemic when students either went to the cafeteria or gym each morning to await the first period bell. We will use our cafeteria for lunches, but at a limited capacity for now, with students continuing to eat in their rooms on a rotating schedule. We learned that when given the chance, students will appropriately use free time to lean on one another and their teachers for support.
One-Directional Hallways	Yes - We learned that the one-directional hallways solved a problem of congestion in our back hallway that could become quite crowded between class changes. This may be something that sticks well beyond the pandemic. This fall, we plan to continue with the one-directional hallways for the safety of students.
Google Classroom for Instruction	No - During the spring and summer of 2021, our school adopted and trained all staff on the LMS Schoology. Therefore, we will no longer use Google Classroom.
Strictly Downloadable Lessons/Assignment	No - Our students were given a virtual option, but those who chose this option will be enrolled in Virtual Virginia. Our teachers will only teach students who are coming into our building, eliminating the need for strictly downloadable assignments and lessons. We learned that teaching virtual and in person students was difficult to say the least.
Advisory Time	Yes - Advisory time will continue to be a part of our daily bell schedule. Students will meet each morning and during the day between fourth and fifth periods with their homeroom teachers, who will also serve as their Advisors. VTSS will be fully implemented in the fall of 2021.
Video Lessons During Advisory Time	Yes - Why not? It is an easy way to get the same information to all students without disrupting the day.
Boot Camp	Yes - Boot Camp will be implemented as usual in the second semester of the school year.
Twilight	Yes - As a way to help manage lost learning due to the pandemic, we plan to implement Twilight even earlier than before. Twilight will be offered as an after school remediation program beginning the second quarter of the school year for anyone who struggles during the first quarter.
Summer School	Yes - I predict that summer school as a credit recovery program will continue.
Alt School Teacher Remediation Schedule	Yes - Our alternative school teacher will continue to assist with remediation efforts as possible.

You know outstanding educators.
We want to recognize and support them.
Nominate a colleague for one of VASCD's prestigious awards.

Each year, VASCD honors Virginia educators who exemplify the spirit of our learning, teaching, and leading mission. Nominations for our Leadership and Impact Awards are being accepted through December 21 at vascd.org, and in 2022 we will present our first-ever Team Impact Award.

Nominate a colleague or team who inspires you
—we bet they are impacting others as well!

Recipients of VASCD's 2021 Leadership and Impact Awards were honored in September. Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction James Lane, Virginia Secretary of Education Atif Qarni, Deputy Secretary of Education Kathy Burcher, VASCD President Alan Seibert, and members of the VASCD Board were all on hand to offer words of congratulations and encouragement to these outstanding educators.

Detailed guidelines and directions for nominations for both awards are posted at VASCD.org. The deadline for nominations is December 21, 2021.

Our 2021 Award Winners!

VASCD Leadership Award Recipient:



J. Kapuchuck with his wife Leslie and James Lane, Superintendent of Public Instruction

JOSEPH KAPUCHUCK

Mr. "J" Kapuchuck is currently principal at Peak View Elementary School in Rockingham County. He is a joyful, energetic leader who has built strong community relationships and who never, ever gives up on his kids. He has led improvements in academic scores as well as strong school culture. Mr. Kapuchuck has presented at Virginia and other state conferences and contributed to various state and national publications. He leads not only the school but also the community to believe there is hope and a brighter tomorrow.

VASCD Impact Award Winners:

MEGAN CREW

Ms. Megan Crew is the Division Coordinator for Preschool and English Learner Programs for Salem City Schools, having recently left her position as a fifth grade teacher at West Salem Elementary School and a division Instructional Coach. Meg is known in her school division as a natural leader and one who puts others before herself. She is skilled in leading students to become architects of their own learning and she personalizes instruction to meet their varying needs. Ms. Crew has National Board Certification and is generous in making herself and her knowledge available to others.

Our 2021 Award Winners!

VASCD Impact Award Winners:

COURTNEY KLEIN

Ms. Courtney Klein is an Instructional Coach at Lake Braddock Secondary School in Fairfax County Public Schools. She pioneered Instructional Coaching at Lake Braddock Secondary School and has built trust and relationships with teachers to advance this important work. Ms. Klein has provided leadership for the Shared Vision Committee and the Lead Innovator cohort, and established a monthly meeting where school leaders furthered their learning around the Professional Learning Community (PLC) Cycle and instructional best practices.



The award recipients with Superintendent James Lane, Virginia Secretary of Education Atif Qarni, and Deputy Secretary of Education Kathy Burcher

HERB MONROE

Dr. Herb Monroe is Assistant Superintendent for Caroline County Public Schools and is known for his commitment to relationships and people. He has committed himself to ensuring division-wide beliefs and practices that reflect equity, diversity, and inclusion. He has organized professional learning, application activities, and progress monitoring systems to ensure that goals become outcomes. Dr. Monroe serves as an advisor for principals and provides mentoring to students, especially males, who are in need of support and guidance.

Our 2021 Award Winners!

VASCD Impact Award Winners:

NICK NYCUM

Mr. James "Nick" Nycum is principal of Stuarts Draft High School in Augusta County Public Schools. He is known for his passion in pursuing success for every student through Enrollment (in higher education), Enlistment, or Employment. This mantra encourages all students to select a pathway, set goals for their future, and work toward meeting those goals. Mr. Nycum works tirelessly to broaden students' understanding of opportunities in the community, state, and nation as well and to give purpose to the learning and skills each student will need to acquire.

SHARON POPE

Dr. Sharon Pope is the Chief Academic Officer of Chesterfield County Public Schools. She has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to improving instruction for all students throughout her career. A masterful communicator, she tirelessly listens to others—central office staff, school personnel, the public—and then responds in ways that validate, clarify, inform, or contextualize. In working with a variety of stakeholders and priorities, Sharon persists in finding the fundamental issues and applying collaboratively-derived solutions. While Director of Organizational Development, Dr. Pope used Agile strategies to lead efforts to create the division's new strategic plan "Imagine Tomorrow", the foundation for Chesterfield's future innovation and growth..

CASEY ROBERTS

Mr. Casey Roberts is the Executive Director of the New Horizons Regional Education Center and a 2019 ASCD Emerging Leader. He is a progressive, innovative leader who displays a spirit of inquiry and collaboration. His leadership has prompted a focus on project-based learning as a vehicle to promote thinking and rigor. Mr. Roberts has served as an educator, activist, scholar, and community servant. Across all of his roles, he demonstrates his commitment to creating equitable learning environments for all students.

SARAH TANNER-ANDERSON

Dr. Sarah Tanner-Anderson is the Program Director for Educational Leadership and the winner of the 2021 Junior Faculty Award at Longwood University. She is an energetic, passionate, and collaborative leader who works to create educational leaders who are change agents. Dr. Tanner-Anderson's enthusiasm and her passion for teaching are contagious. She consistently takes time to learn, to share ideas with colleagues, and to recognize talent in others.

Education in the Eye of a Hurricane: Rediscovering Purpose in the Midst of a Pandemic

"Adversity does not build character, it reveals it." -James Lane Allen

Unprecedented times provide fertile ground for reconceptualizing priorities in education, and to align instruction with what is urgent and real. The crises beginning in 2019 peeled back layers of misguided policy to reveal three key essential goals public schools must prioritize and sustain: find our children and understand where they are, both academically and in need, and feed their bodies and souls, including their families; connect our children both technically and in genuine relationships with each other and their adults; and inspire students through meaningful instruction that engages and provokes them to want to come back to investigate more again and again.

Accountability is the gatekeeper for dynamic school change. As long as policy makers prioritize standardized assessments as markers of public school success, instruction is held hostage to superficial basic learning that meets requirements of existing high stakes and biased tests.

Cunningham Park Elementary School presents as a case study of possibilities that open to our children and staff when accountability becomes authentic. Focusing on the three priorities that were made evident by crises, we saw the roof of testing come off of learning, as we handed the world to its future - our children.



Katie Goodman Le

Katie Goodman Le is an aspiring poet and essayist with a passion for growing young critical and creative thinkers who are constructors in their own learning, and who see themselves as essential to the world around them. Katie is Principal of Cunningham Park Elementary School in Vienna, Virginia, a richly diverse community school where neighbors, parents, staff, and students come together to elevate our children as scholars. She holds degrees in Educational Leadership (MEd) from University of Virginia, and Sociology, Early Childhood Education, and Music (BS) from James Madison University. Connect with Katie at **ktle@fcps.edu** *and on her* **Facebook page.**

"Just one more question!!" said Tyler, a third grader at Cunningham Park Elementary School in Vienna, Virginia. He rushed toward his screen, grabbing my attention. We had already said our "goodbyes." Having run past our allotted time, students were late for their next classes. My cursor hovered over the icon to end the session, waiting to send our images into darkness. The group of us, each in our own little cell, looked at him through our monitors.

"If the world is ours, can we change it?" he asked.



Yes. And We Must.

My student group, including Tyler, met online regularly in the spring of 2020, like many other schools and classes around the country. For months, students received distance learning resources both online and in packets mailed to them from the school district. Teachers, after a whirlwind of training, had kicked off synchronous instruction several weeks before. Through a combination of direct teaching and independent learning, we pieced together educational programs to meet the needs of our students.

The *real* needs. Not the ones defined by standardized tests.

When the COVID-19 outbreak put a pause on what we consider traditional schooling, the idea of educational success was redefined. In a nation that still holds public schools accountable for meeting children's various needs, the change in focus was monumental. It may have been the silver sparkling through clouds of a pandemic often characterized as a hurricane.

It could still even catapult innovation, as long as educators see the potential to ignite a natural revolution.

Does Accountability Really Drive Learning?

Federal legislation has been a catalyst for using high-stakes standardized tests to judge public schools for decades. Focusing accountability on annual assessments led to the tragic misalignment of instructional priority. Under threat of sanctions, educators had found it essential that above all else, students must pass end of year tests. Period.

The sudden closure of schools in March of 2020 unexpectedly realigned educational urgency to meet authentic student needs. Superficial testing practices were canceled quickly and easily. In a global crisis, the fallacy of the testing culture was exposed, and three true necessities emerged: *food, connection, and inspiration*.

Feed the community.

Public school districts across the nation recognized and addressed the emergency faced by students who depended on school breakfast and lunch. With incredible efficiency, they mobilized pop up tents, buses, food pantries, and gift card collections to hand out food. Quickly, the community was fed.

Establish connections.

School systems posted learning resources online, and a major movement began

to get internet access to all students. Teachers distributed laptops to students without. Technology specialists drained the MiFi supply chain to get students online. Resource teachers used personal phones to hunt down children who would, otherwise, have been swept away in the pandemic's storm. Over time, we continued to get students connected.

Inspire.

The third phase for schools was live instruction. Teaching online, and with a twist: no standardized tests at the end. It was an experiment by necessity, and one that flew in the face of traditional political messaging that state tests increase teacher productivity. In fact, what we found was the opposite.

Staff at Cunningham Park, for example, report they worked *harder* and *longer* than usual in the midst of the outbreak. When offered multiple online trainings and the option to choose one, overwhelmingly, teachers attended *all* of them. The following day, educators would plan together, having worked the night before until they nearly mastered the newly learned technologies. Contact logs indicated many attempts to reach students well outside teachers' expected work hours. Collaborative learning teams met so often and efficiently, normal assigned protocols were dropped because they hindered professional problem solving, creativity, and productivity.

Teachers became *more* driven to find ways to engage children as scholars without the antiquated testing regime. Why?

They were resolute that no children would be lost to the storm.

Authentic Purpose Raises Standards

Now, teacher accountability reflected authentic purpose, and the bar to succeed was lofty: keep them coming back. Inspire them to want to return to us every

day. Motivate students to learn even when they aren't in school and teachers aren't there.

In the period where teachers completely held the reigns for instruction, they found the first chance in memory to educate children as dynamic individuals, rather than to prepare them for a test.

Connect. Inspire. Engage. And make them understand they matter.

Across the school district, teachers found themselves suddenly without county pacing guides or standardized guidance that fit within the new parameters for instruction. District and state personnel scrambled to realign standards and publish updated guides and, during the lag before new curriculum could be pushed out, Cunningham Park staff discovered opportunity. In the period where teachers completely held the reins for instruction, they found the first chance in memory to educate children as dynamic individuals, rather than to prepare them for a test.

Our staff pivoted smoothly to implement a different and effective framework for instructional planning: Project Based Learning (PBL). Without end of year high stakes tests hovering over them, teachers felt the seismic shift in educational purpose, and they rose to the occasion. Educators embraced the chance to get to know their children on deeper, more personal levels. They relished the ability to plan learning experiences that would authentically engage their learners. After all, what other way is there to hold onto students when basic attendance policies no longer mattered?

Grade levels began the process with a common question: how do we keep learning even when we're not together in our classroom? Students' brainstorms provided insights into what was important in their eyes, what interested them, what would motivate them to keep returning to what we called "School 2.0." In Collaborative Learning Teams, teachers came together with information they gleaned and planned steps forward that would introduce new technologies while involving students in solving the problem of school without walls.

The **PBL process,** which teachers had used for years in their classrooms, proved highly effective in the online learning environment. As students shared and debated ideas for lessons, even the act of learning gained new relevance for them. In contributing ideas and seeing them implemented authentically, individuals felt important and valued. When students helped guide their own trajectory, they became invested in their own education and, despite various personal challenges that may have been in their way, they responded.

Online, we gathered and celebrated each other together as one. We celebrated poetry by inviting students to recite their favorite or original poems on Flipgrids, we featured almost 100. We held School-Wide Virtual Morning Meetings, one including a poetry slam, another, led by students who had composed an original song that they taught the school. We made videos to celebrate our assistant principal for his appreciation week, and shared photo collages for birthdays, well-wishes, and just because.

Outside of class, school staff kept tabs on which students were not attending regularly. Teachers and specialists called them, investigated issues preventing their attendance, and worked tirelessly to clear pathways through obstacles. Some families went unfed—a food distribution site was set up by the Vienna community in a location that expanded accessibility. Some lacked reliable

internet and there was a severe backlog on school-issued MiFi's—staff found resources for free connectivity. Many lacked books—the community poured book donations into the school library, which stored them for a time period in line with CDC guidelines, and then gave them out at food distribution sites.

Staff members wanted to visit students at their homes to bring materials and necessities. They were only prevented by the unknown consequences of inadvertently coming into contact with the disease and spreading it themselves. So they organized a car parade, complete with police escorts, as a unifier for the community of learners, neighbors, and friends.

Teachers and staff from afar, bonded together. We met via Google Meet for fun and for business. We developed new traditions, such as bring your favorite coffee mug to work, or wear the funniest hat. For Teacher Appreciation Week, the PTA coordinated with a local restaurant that allowed staff to place orders and come pick them up throughout the week, and they placed a huge sign outside the school proclaiming that teachers are superheroes.

Social media became a major communication tool to keep the families informed, provide ideas for students, and to maintain community connection. Stories were read to students via livestream, a method also used to operate clubs like Socratic Seminar and Philosophers' Club. Extra-curricular events such as literacy nights were moved online, and Maker-challenges were extended for students to invent machines, innovative buildings, and more using everyday items they found at home.

Overall, in the raging storm of the pandemic, we found the opportunity to teach for real and genuine purpose. And teachers in the field capitalized on it, deepening relationships, finding ways to make learning relevant to children, and authentically helping students learn and grow.

Revealing Amazing Potential

The poet, Atticus, wrote "Watch carefully, the magic that occurs when you give a person just enough comfort to be themselves" (2017). Without arbitrary testing requirements in education, authenticity and purpose shine, and student engagement organically ignites.

Nourish children's appetites. Effectively get them connected. Bring them back hungry for knowledge and engaged as scholars. And watch the sparks fly.

At Cunningham Park, a clear and natural shift in focus profoundly enhanced learning—we simply aligned accountability with what was genuinely urgent. Nourish children's appetites. Effectively get them connected. Bring them back hungry for knowledge and engaged as scholars. And watch the sparks fly.

Yes, Tyler, we *can* change the world. And we *must*. Because the world is yours.

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Call for Journal Articles!



The next issue of the VASCD Journal, our online publication, will be published in the fall of 2022.

Do you have anything interesting or exciting about your work as a teacher or leader that you'd like to share with educators around the state? *If so, consider writing for the VASCD Journal!* The annual VASCD Journal highlights innovative classroom and school practices that showcase the work of individual educators, schools, or districts across all subject areas and topics. If there's a story to tell, we'd love to hear it!

Practices can include instructional approaches, assessment strategies, curricular decisions, or professional development offerings, to name a few. For example, authors might consider focusing on any of the following:

- Adjustments or modifications to existing curriculum to prioritize what is taught
- Innovative instructional approaches with or without the use of technology
- Assessment strategies that…
  …provide consistent, ongoing feedback to students
  …are passion-driven or personalized
  …promote opportunities for deeper learning
  …replace or augment traditional grading practices
- Strategies to support the social-emotional needs of students (or teachers) during these uncertain times
- Wrap-around supports for students and families
- Professional development that is relevant and meaningful

We publish content from a variety of perspectives and topics, so please reach out if you have an idea you'd like to run by us! We are excited to hear from you!

The deadline for submission of materials for the next issue is

August 1, 2022

Manuscripts should follow format and reference guidelines outlined in the Publication Manual of the American Psychology Association (APA). Include your professional title(s), workplace(s), email address(es), and a one to three sentence summary. If accepted, we will request author photos and brief biographies to be submitted. All manuscripts, book reviews, or other items should be emailed to:

VASCD Journal
Eric Carbaugh, Editor **carbauem@jmu.edu**

Pandemic Serendipity: Using a Math Game to Assess Student Learning

The sudden transition to virtual school during the Covid-19 pandemic led to major changes in the classroom. In the process of adapting one of my activities for online school I stumbled on a strong correlation between a mental math activity and performance on a subsection of a major standardized assessment. In this article I share the discovery, and discuss its potential as an alternative assessment used to assess best practices in the middle school math classroom.



John Barclay

John Barclay is math and science teacher at Franklin Military Academy for Richmond Public Schools. As he enters his 8th year of teaching, John's interests include analyzing student data to improve learning outcomes for individual students and identify effective teaching methods. John is a graduate of the College of William and Mary with a Master of Arts in Education in Curriculum and Instruction. In 2019, John was a recipient of the R.E.B. Award for Teaching Excellence, awarded to high performing teachers in the greater Richmond area.

In the transition to the virtual classroom, I found that my existing teaching tools fell into two categories: items that needed to be adapted, or items that needed to be thrown out entirely. Group work, for example, could be simulated by creating break-out rooms from the main class meeting. Kinesthetic activities, on the other hand, were largely not applicable to the new world of computer screens that replaced my brick-and-mortar middle school math classroom. Though there were many complications associated with this entirely new style of online learning, there were also many benefits. For example, using the Google

Workspace toolset (Sheets, Forms, Documents) made for easy data entry and organization. In the process of adapting a math warm-up for the virtual setting, I stumbled on a useful relationship that I likely would not have found if not for the impetus to re-work my classroom.

For several years, I've used the **24 Game®** to help build and maintain mental math skills among my students. In the physical classroom, this was typically as simple as placing one of the puzzle cards onto the document camera, and having students share when they've found a solution. It's a routine that my students and I both enjoy, but I found early on that it didn't translate well into the online setting. To make it work better for the online classroom, I introduced students to a clone app called **Four Numbers**. This app measures the number of puzzles the student can solve over a specific time period, and then assigns them a score based on the difficulty of the puzzles solved. Each week my students would play the Four Numbers game individually, and then submit their score in a complementary Google Form. By the end of the year, I had a collection of scores for each student showing their progress. Though I would likely never have set up the activity in this way if not for the COVID-19 pandemic, the change proved serendipitous when I went to compare each student's Four Numbers score with their performance on our end of year state test.

In recent decades, there's been a lot of discussion about the power of major summative assessments to understand student growth. Sidestepping the "boogie man" debate on standardized testing, assessments like the Virginia Standards of Learning test provide a powerful insight into a student's bank of knowledge and skill, and can provide insight into effective teaching practices (Phelps, 2005). They can also effectively help teachers and districts identify candidates for different course levels (Huang et al, 2014). My district uses the NWEA MAP Growth assessment to better diagnose and discover individual

student growth, as well as to ensure students are on track for matriculation to the next level. The MAP test is a computer-adaptive assessment that is well

What if we could get the same powerful data/ feedback from a test that can be completed in 2- 5 minutes? What if this hypothetical powerful assessment looked to students as an engaging game? In this investigation, I believe that I found an assessment that fits the above criteria.

correlated to Virginia SOL performance (NWEA 2020). It takes on average over 100 minutes for the entire class to complete the 48-53 question test (Wise, S.L., 2015), but the exam generates extremely specific results that describe each student ability level in terms of five distinct sub-groups (ex: "Patterns, Functions, and Algebra" vs "Probability and Statistics"). Despite all of the complications of the virtual school year, we still administered this exam twice. Though the data from this test is extremely helpful in understanding student ability/growth, this test, and others like it, are far too time consuming and aggregated to be a useful tool in gauging the effectiveness of an individual lesson or intervention. It is not viable to have students take a multi-hour test every few weeks, although having detailed data like this test could provide significant insights into best practices. What if we could get the same powerful data/ feedback from a test that can be completed in 2- 5 minutes? What if this hypothetical powerful assessment looked to students as an engaging game? In this investigation, I believe that I found an assessment that fits the above criteria.

The Game

Though the format looks different, I'm sure that most readers are familiar with the premise of the 24® game. Given Four Numbers, the student must use basic mathematical operations in order to get a final answer of 24.

The specific format that I'm using is called Four Numbers and was created by C. Chang. The front-end app generates a random set of 4 numbers which can be used to make 24, and students are timed on how long it takes them to complete the problem. The app then assigns a numerical "score" for their performance on each set of numbers based on their comparison relative to the median time for each person who has ever solved that specific puzzle in the past (n= 4,216,930 and counting). Students who solve the puzzle significantly faster than the median puzzle time receive a high score (up to 99) and students who solve the puzzle slower than average will receive a lower score. By comparing the student's performance time per puzzle to the global average, the app is able to reliably assign a percentile score to each student that can be compared to students solving different problems. Essentially, each set of Four Numbers can be weighted by difficulty. (**Want to find out how you compare to the rest of the world?**)

Figure 1 Here is your test summary

Your 1024Math score is 67.5

You are probably better than 67.5% of all players around the world!
You are pretty good at this game, eh? Challenge top players around the world in our official game!

	Your time	Score
Level 1: (4 6 11 11)	3.19	99
Level 2: (2 8 13 13)	4.49	98
Level 3: (2 6 6 8)	10.58	45
Level 4: (2 3 7 12)	5.61	95
Level 5: (2 7 7 11)	3.91	99
Level 6: (2 2 3 6)	9.16	73
Level 7: (1 3 6 11)	Didn't finish	6
Level 8: (4 6 8 13)	Didn't finish	10
Level 9: (3 5 7 12)	9.06	95
Level 10: (4 7 8 10)	28.01	54

The Set-Up

I've been using this tool for several years in order to help build numeracy skills in

my classroom. This is, however, my first time thinking of the Four Numbers game as an assessment. At the beginning of last semester (Spring 2021) I introduced the Four Numbers game to my new students. After this, each student turned in a "24 Score Report" by the end of each week. This consisted of the student playing the game, and then submitting their percentile score through a google form. By the end of the year I had each student's (n=28) weekly growth catalogued.

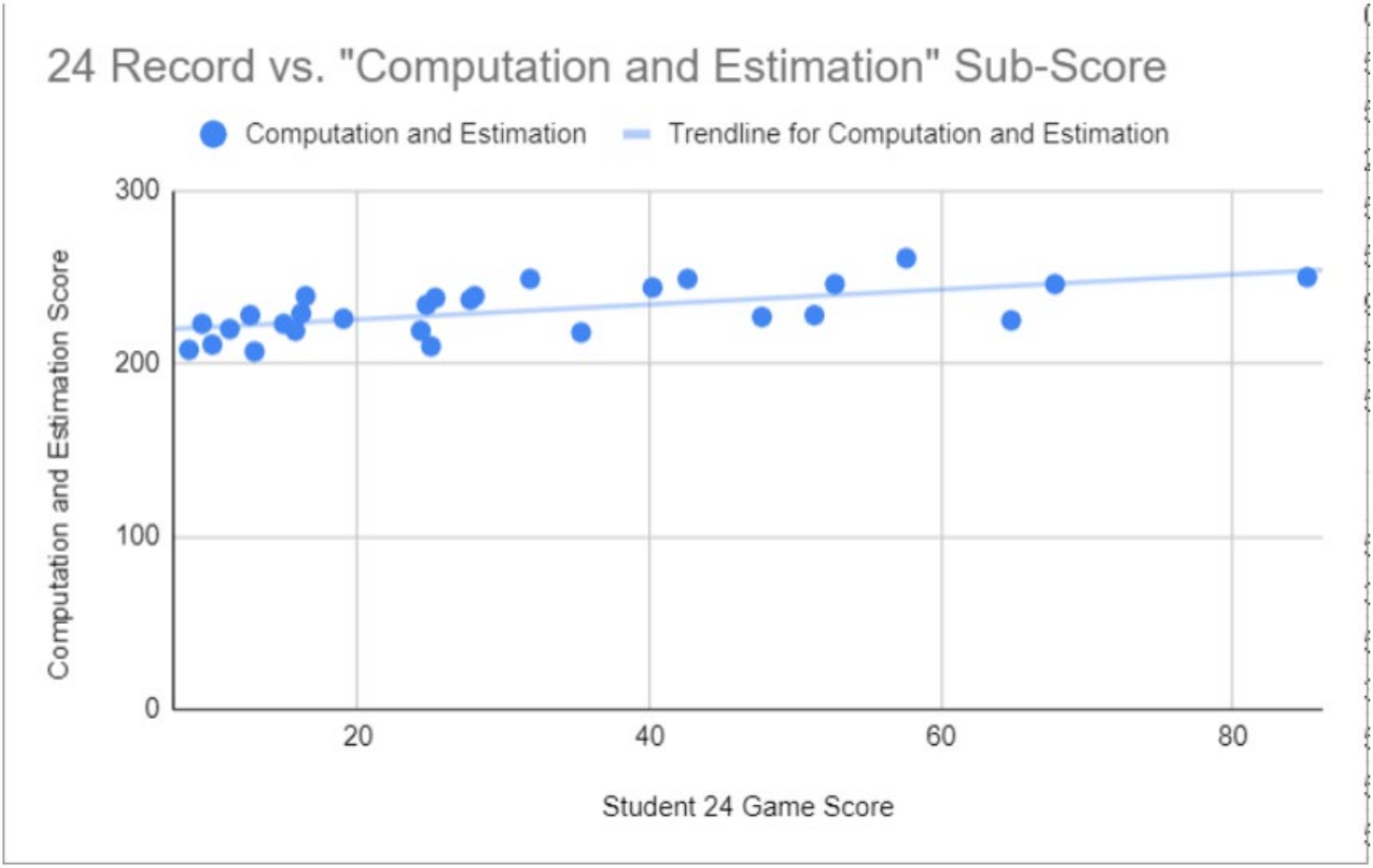
To look for validity in the 24 scores, I compared each student's Four Numbers game performance compared to their performance on the NWEA MAP growth assessment. This adaptive test ranges from ~48-53 questions and provides detailed information about a student's mathematical abilities. In my district we typically administer the MAP test 3 times a year. Upon completion, students receive an overall score, and a score on each of the test's 5 "sub-categories" (Figure 2). I looked for correlations between student's overall performance scores as well as their performance on each of the 5 sub-groups and their 24 percentile scores.

NWEA MAP Growth Test 6-8 Categories **Figure 2**
Numbers and Number Sense
Computation and Estimation
Measurement and Geometry
Probability and Statistics
Patterns, Functions, Algebra

Results/ Discoveries

The significant link in this observational study is the one between each student's Four Numbers score and their performance on the "Computation and Estimation" sub-section of the NWEA MAP test. There is a good correlation ($r = 0.62$) between each student's best score on their 24 Score report, and each student's performance on this sub-section of the MAP test. In addition, there is not a nearly as strong a correlation between

24 Scores and any other section of the MAP test. This helps to strengthen this finding because it helps control for the possible conclusion of "Good students do well at everything." There appears to be a specific, strong link between a student's performance on the Four Numbers game, and their ability to estimate and work with numbers. This suggests that the Four Numbers game can be used to predict, and could possibly be used as a substitute for the MAP test if the goal is to assess this specific skill. This would allow teachers to assess the efficacy of individual interventions geared at building computation and estimation skills by looking for growth in student Four Numbers score without needing to administer a time-consuming assessment.



MAP Overall Score	Numbers and Number Sense	Computation and Estimation	Measurement and Geometry	Probability and Statistics	Patterns, Functions, and Algebra
R = 0.36	R = 0.23	R = 0.62	R = 0.34	R = 0.44	R = 0.12

Looking Forward

I see this discovery as the first step in the goal to get good data in the classroom without overwhelming students with excessive standardized assessments. I hope to one day—long after the COVID-19 pandemic is over—see a classroom where well-correlated activities and games can be used to properly meet specific learning needs and assess the efficacy of specific interventions. This finding involving the Four Numbers game is, of course, only an early step towards this ultimate goal.

This strong relationship between the Four Numbers game and a valid assessment score allows us to begin to rethink how we evaluate the impact of interventions and check for student understanding in a way that requires less time and less stress on students.

I think there is room for further investigation into this game as a tool as well. It is unclear from this relationship if the Four Numbers game is effective at teaching students computation and estimation skills (Do students get better at math from taking tests?) or just at indicating a correlated skill set. Likewise, it

is possible that there are other confounding variables. Anecdotally I've noticed that my own personal score in this game varies by time of day or emotional state. I even sometimes use it as a "cognitive diagnosis" to check how quickly my brain is functioning at any given minute. It is possible that there is room for a future investigation exploring this link, and could have positive implications for the classroom (How well is my class thinking today? Are they ready for this advanced concept?).

Despite room for additional investigation and further study, I do think these results should yield a benefit outside of the online classroom. As we in the education ecosystem look for reforms and improvements, it is important to have the ability to verify that a given reform is moving in the right direction. This strong relationship between the Four Numbers game and a valid assessment score allows us to begin to rethink how we evaluate the impact of interventions and check for student understanding in a way that requires less time and less stress on students.

Would you be interested in running something similar in your classroom to add to the data pool? Would you like access to my data on this project in order to look into your own query? Please contact me at **jbarclay@rvaschools.net**.

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The Self-Authoring Educator: Designing Your Own Legacy

Self-authoring educators independently develop personal and professional skills to navigate the challenges of life as a professional educator. This article argues that self-authoring educators are powerful practitioners who can challenge issues of teacher retention and deprofessionalization. Steps to self-authorship, and the impact of self-authorship in education are outlined. The role of the Edjacent Design Collaborative is to support educators in their self-authoring journey.



Meghan Raftery

Meghan is a freelance educator and Chief Design Officer of Edjacent, an educator design collaborative in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Her current work includes serving as Innovation Coordinator for Virginia Beach City Public Schools, trainer and content designer for Defined Learning, and adjunct faculty for William and Mary, as well as providing project support for VASCD, the CROP Foundation, and ReadBooks, an independent bookstore. Meghan is passionate about education reform, especially the power of the self-authoring educator to develop joyful, authentic learning experiences. She is also an avid reader and book-pusher who prides herself in unusual and perfectly-suited book recommendations. Find her **@meg5han on Twitter** *for a recommendation!*

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Have you ever attended a conference or read a book and uncovered a new corner of your practice you hadn't considered before? Have you read a Tweet that ignited a new passion? Do you have a network of educators, relationships built over your career, who you text when you face an issue or challenge? When you feel frustrated and powerless in the face of change, do you have a mentor or coach you reach out to that helps you feel unstuck? When the context of your teaching and learning environment shifts, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, do you know what is most important and how to shift your practice? If so, you may already be a self-authoring educator!

Kegan (1994) described self-authorship as a state in which individuals have developed a personal authority in their professional practice. For example, an educator who publicly shares their best practice, or seeks their own professional development by attending courses or workshops, or who connects their personal interests to their teaching practice may be a self-author.

Self-authoring educators independently develop personal and professional skills to navigate the challenges of the life of a professional educator. They are

In a profession where the average teacher is increasingly less experienced and more likely to change careers, school systems often react by providing support in the form of standardization and fidelity to scripted programs.

resilient, they network, have a clear purpose, and support and challenge others. It is rare for these teachers to experience explicit instruction in self-authoring,

and, paradoxically, the self-authoring educator may encounter tensions in their work that others do not. For example, self-authoring educators sometimes feel discouraged when they are not trusted to make their own decisions. Sometimes they see solutions to problems, but do not have the autonomy to solve those problems in the way they think is best.

In a profession where the average teacher is increasingly less experienced and more likely to change careers, school systems often react by providing support in the form of standardization and fidelity to scripted programs. The unintended consequences of this kind of restriction affect both the self and collective efficacy of teachers. We often task our more successful students with helping others in their learning. The same is true for high-functioning educators who are often left to assist others, while accumulating more responsibility and workload, too often with limited support or compensation. By ignoring our best educators to support those who are still growing, schools and school systems neglect the people we need the most to move them forward.

In Virginia, a group of self-authoring educators meets regularly to develop their personal and teaching lives in order to redefine what it means to be a professional educator. United by the belief that the people closest to the learning—the teachers, students, and caregivers—should have the efficacy to lead and change in and across schools, This community advocates for teachers and students, creates content to help educators develop professionally, and provides personalized coaching to support educators on their self-authoring journey.

Why We Need Self-Authoring Educators

Teacher Autonomy

It may not have seemed so at the time but the sudden shift to remote learning in April 2020 was a golden opportunity for innovation, clarity, and perspective

in education (Gonser, 2020). Student and teacher safety was a priority. Parents had a front row seat to the hard work and dedication required to coral a class of students, whether they were 5, or 15 years old. Social media was crowded with memes about teacher pay and respect. Districts that previously imposed restrictions and standardization loosened the reins which allowed teacher autonomy and creativity to flourish

Not three months later, the tone was different. Tensions grew as schools began to talk about fall reopening plans. The isolation of quarantine, with the physical, economic, social, and emotional cost of the pandemic began to weigh heavy. As the situation became more polarized and partisan, the feelings of goodwill began to fade and the rhetoric about teachers changed. Teachers advocated for their own safety and autonomy to address student needs as professionals found themselves in conflict with many district leaders, parents, and community members.

Teacher Retention

Systemic issues became starkly amplified and districts were faced with long term consequences for hiring and maintaining quality educators in classrooms. Will (2020) describes how 2020 exacerbated the issue of teacher retention. Pre-pandemic, 22% of teachers in Virginia do not return after their first year, while nearly 50% leave after their first four years (Qarni & Pianta, 2020). This steady decline, coupled with a new teacher pipeline shortage and job dissatisfaction, turned a perennial challenge into a crisis. Social media is full of examples of toxic positivity telling teachers to stay positive, seek self-care, and develop adult social-emotional learning skills while districts struggle to address teacher retention (Alvarez, 2021).

It is left to school districts to address teacher satisfaction and retention through their teacher induction and professional development programs. However,

these often do not meet the individual needs of educators. Teachers are asked to lead courses, but report difficulty finding support and funding for their own continued professional growth (Mader, 2015). High-functioning educators, the kind of teachers most people would want for their own children, crave new leadership opportunities that allow them to improve their practice and find joy in classrooms where they know they make a difference. Traditionally, these are the teachers who are pushed into leadership roles which take them away from working with children every day. Educators who are capable of developing a sense of self-authorship are better equipped to navigate these challenges, advocate for change, and ultimately lead successful, fulfilling careers that continue to impact the lives of students.

The Self-Authoring Educator

Since the 1970s it has been accepted that educators undergo stages of development in their careers (e.g. Fuller & Brown, 1975). While these developmental stages are complex and contextual, we can break down the stages of self authoring as follows. For educators, stage one is formal education training, where the educator's learning is shaped by external factors. For example, licensing requirements, programmatic experiences, and the expectations of those helping the educator obtain their first professional role. Stage two of the process occurs when the educator realizes that they are at a disconnect with their professional context. This may be for a variety of reasons, but explains why so many early career educators leave the profession, it is at this point that those who leave are not able to resolve the tensions at play. In stage three, educators begin to reconcile how their values are not always aligned with external factors. When an educator knows enough about their professional identity to navigate this transition, then we consider them to be self-authoring. The self-authoring educator in stage four has the strength of experience, knowledge, and belief to resolve these tensions with confidence.

Our contention is that self-authoring educators are happier about their professional roles and expertise, balanced in their professional lives, and are able to design instruction that meets the needs of their learners. In effect, by understanding who they are, self-authoring educators understand what they need to grow as people and as professionals.

Becoming a Self-Authoring Educator

As self-authoring educators have a clear sense of who they are, the first step toward becoming a self-author is to develop a clear sense of identity: who are you as an educator? Why did you choose this profession? What matters most to you? To what extent is your daily work connected to the things you value? To what extent do you feel empowered to create change in your classroom and school? Self-authors find ways to connect with others for support and challenge. By interacting with other passionate educators, self-authors develop a strong sense of self and develop collective efficacy, which is, according to Donohoo, Hattie, and Eells (2018) a leading factor in student achievement.

To become a self-author, educators can find the support they need in their existing systems. Key opportunities for growth include:

1. **Community** - choosing communities of practice, not by assignment, but by careful curation, is one way educators can develop their sense of self and collective efficacy. Self-authoring educators do this naturally, staying connected to colleagues and connections long after they work together. Social media, district-sponsored activities, and professional organizations provide great opportunities for connecting with other like-minded educators. Developing intentional communities of practice outside of our work assignments can provide deep and diverse connections that have many benefits for the individual and the collective.

2. **Coaching** - finding peer coaches, colleagues who hold each other accountable and provide valuable insight can help educators grow in their practice, no matter how expert they are. They see things we cannot see, ask questions we never thought of, and help guide us toward self-discovering and growth. Moreover, in other fields, mentors we choose (rather than those assigned to us) become assets and allies to the mentee (e.g. Caine et al., 2017).

3. **Growth** - finding opportunities to learn and grow within and outside of our work assignments can lead to greater connection to our work, specialization in particular areas, and a deep sense of fulfillment. Self-authoring educators curate their own professional development, often overlapping with personal development, making connections between mind, body, and spirit in a variety of ways. Staying interested and curious about both the timeless aspects of teaching and the latest developments leads to a greater sense of purpose and power. Rather than waiting for a promotion or a custom job assignment, self-authoring educators develop their own specializations and find ways to continue to lead and grow in those areas.

Impact of Self-Authoring Educators

Teaching, while never easy, is arguably the most challenging it has ever been. The job is difficult, the rewards are often intangible, and the demands are ever-increasing. Self-authoring educators develop a strong sense of purpose. They know who they are, who they are becoming, and who they wish to be. They advocate for change, make decisions based on a clear sense of values, and find the resources they need to grow and change. Self-authoring educators are healthier and happier and more likely to stay the course, because they want to, not because they have to.

Students who have self-authoring teachers have adult role models who are wise and supportive. They grow and learn in safe and healthy learning environments where goals are clear and growth mindsets are the norm. The students of self-authoring teachers see daily examples of curiosity, self-development, resilience, and joy. They feel more confidence in self-directed and inquiry-based activities because these types of experience are the norm, not only for the students, but also for the educators who lead them.

School systems who support self-authoring educators demonstrate clear alignment between the intentions they set for students and the practices and principles they promote for staff.

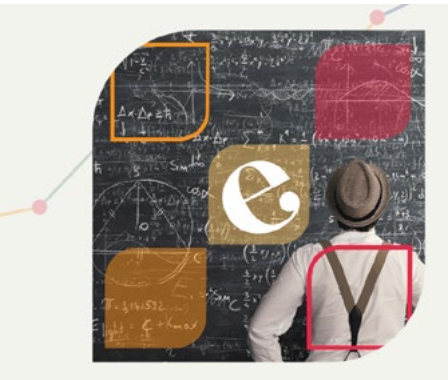
School systems who support self-authoring educators demonstrate clear alignment between the intentions they set for students and the practices and principles they promote for staff. They encourage risk-taking and growth. They seek input and act on it. The growth of their teachers benefits everyone and helps the system innovate and adapt in times of crisis.

Self-authorship is a choice available to any educator willing to grow and adapt. It leads to a greater sense of self-efficacy that, coupled with community, leads to collective-efficacy. When teachers are able to learn and lead with their values and sense of purpose at the center, students and systems benefit. The profession as a whole becomes wiser, stronger, and more responsive to the needs of those it serves. Educators who become self-authoring design their own legacy.

Conclusions

In the late stages of a global pandemic, our education system is under immense pressure. If we continue to do things as we did before, we will lose teachers who we cannot replace. One way to provide support, and encourage teacher retention is to value teachers as people and professionals. Edjacent is a non-profit, collaborative community designed to help teachers to identify how they wish to grow in areas that make them happier, healthier, and better at what they do day-to-day. Edjacent was created to help schools, school systems, and individual teachers develop the skills of self-authoring educators. If we help meet the needs of teachers professionally and personally, they are better placed to meet the needs of their students, which in turn brings success to schools in these challenging times.

To learn more about Edjacent visit **www.edjacent.org**



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Technological Positives to Foster in Post-Pandemic Schools

We have scarcely gone through a week without hearing terms like unprecedented, new normal, learning loss, social and emotional learning/health, and more, all constantly reinforcing the educational desert landscape within which we're all searching for the oasis of normal. COVID-19 has and continues to cause a ripple in education unlike any current practitioners and students have ever experienced. However, it is not a barren desert by any means. Numerous technological positives have emerged and should be fostered in perpetuity, including advances in equitable practices, communication, collaboration, support, leadership, and technology efficacy.



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No one in education has experienced anything near "normal" since schools closed in March of 2020. Some have seen their schools reopen, close again, and reopen just to close yet again as COVID-19 cases rose and fell accordingly. The full impact of the virus will likely not be known for years, however, we do know that nearly every student has experienced significant time outside of the classroom. "Not only did these children lack daily access to school and the basic supports schools provide for many students, but they also lost out on group

activities, team sports, and recreational options such as pools and playgrounds" (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). It cannot be denied that the overall toll that COVID-19 takes on education will likely be negative.

We have scarcely gone through a week without hearing terms like unprecedented, new normal, learning loss, social and emotional learning/health, and more, all constantly reinforcing the educational desert landscape we're all searching for the oasis of normal within. As we start back to school for the 2021-2022 school year, one can readily find glimmers of this oasis in technological positives that rose from over a year of COVID-19 impact that will continue on indefinitely.

Equity

One of the most prominent positives to rise is a heightened focus on the range of inequities existing in education. In some cases, these inequities were brought more into the light throughout the pandemic (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). In other cases, inequities such as the following were exacerbated by the different models of education employed during the pandemic (**hybrid**, **virtual/online**, **hyflex**) (Garcia & Weiss, 2020).

- Capabilities of student and staff devices (multi-taking with intense applications)
- Technology infrastructure to support high numbers of staff
- Students video conferencing, difficulty of offering some services virtually
- Internet (enough bandwidth and speed) & device access (devices for every student)
- Time spent in the classroom (including absenteeism)
- Access to food/nutrition
- Job and health stability
- Having teachers that are trained to proficient levels with technology

In response, many schools around the country have made strides in addressing numerous equity issues for students during the pandemic:

- Purchasing more capable devices for all
- Improving infrastructure (networks, firewalls, etc.) Both within buildings and in publicly accessible areas outside of buildings
- Adding technologies to better enable remote services
- Increasing outreach to at-risk students (chronically absent, homeless, etc.)
- Sustained access to food and nutrition services regardless of students being in school
- Increased technology related training and support for both students and teachers

The challenge will be to sustain these efforts even after additional funding (e.g. **CARES**) is no longer available. Even though the pandemic will begin to fade from prominence, elements of the equity issues will likely continue as should the focus on making meaningful efforts to remedy them.

Communication

In the unprecedented times within education the Coronavirus brought forth, few things are more important than constant and dynamic communication. If we don't tell our school's stories, someone else will.

Schools quickly needed to implement and then plan to sustain efforts of two-way communication with families, students, and the community through multiple channels (websites, social media, "robo calls," text messages, etc). This communication needed to be prominent, focused, and updated frequently to do everything possible to keep all on the same page and current with ever evolving practices, procedures, and information. Some best practices are summarized well

by the Education Advisory Board (EAB) (McNeill, 2020):

- Create a centralized communications team with expertise and clear understanding of district policies, procedures, and current information on instructuction.
- Send relevant communication through multiple channels every 1-3 days as necessitated by changes in COVID-19 cases or information and/or school information updates.
- Be consistent with both how you format information that is posted as well as where you post it. Make it easy to understand, follow, and find at any time.
- Ensure that communication is two-way with guardians and community members having easy ways to provide feedback and communicate needs.

Every level of school communication was elevated in most districts during the pandemic. Websites, blogs, social media, "robo calls," messages, emails, podcasts, phone calls, and more were all employed to facilitate reaching all members of school communities. Information was changing rapidly, meaning communication at the district, school, and classroom level all needed to keep pace to ensure all were informed. Districts did and should continue to keep information current, easy to access, showcase successes, and serve as a central hub for broad information that can be further personalized by links to school websites.

School communications should have elements embedded to help maintain a strong school climate (Bentley, 2020), something even more important during and post COVID-19. Schools should seek to maintain elevated levels of two-way communication with their learning communities bringing in more tools including student information systems (SIS), learning management systems (LMS), and classroom websites that can provide critical information in multiple places making it conveniently accessible and often in front of those that need it.

Schools should consider a unified organizational structure for all three of these communication avenues to facilitate both ease of access and quick location of needed items.

Classroom communication is the most impactful when considering social and emotional learning and health. The relationships built and maintained at this level allow for insights at levels unattainable at the school or district levels.

Teachers also employ a variety of technology tools including text messages services like **Remind**, suites of tools like **Class Dojo**, and more to differentiate and personalize information to each student and their families whenever possible. The key, as with other levels, is to ensure the communication is two-way, consistent, timely, and succinct. Classroom communication is the most impactful when considering social and emotional learning and health. The relationships built and maintained at this level allow for insights at levels unattainable at the school or district levels.

In the end, the school system must ensure that, at all levels, communication is providing a unified message yielding all stakeholders the critical information they need on both sides. It is work that must be considered constantly and should be guided by the feedback of those stakeholders. With this collaborative relationship, all members of the district's learning community can truly be on the same page as all those they seek to serve. The improvements in quality, consistency, transparency, and of communication in education should continue indefinitely.

Collaboration

Collaboration is another area of education that experienced a significant rise during the COVID-19 pandemic. Professional Learning Communities, team meetings, social media connections, and more have long been part of education, however, their role had never been more important. As international professional learning providers, Honigsfeld and Nordmeyer (2020) attest, "We are also seeing unprecedented global cooperation among educators. While collaboration in virtual spaces might not happen the same way as it does in person, connecting with each other, planning around diverse student needs, and figuring out what works has become essential in our current environment."

Team collaboration for planning and both horizontal and vertical alignment became even more vitally important. As the affected school year ended, and planning began for the next, vertical alignment became a significant focus to ensure that students were met with instruction on par with the level they attained the previous year. These alignments and corresponding collaboration were indispensable to teachers, students, and guardians. Without them, more educators would have been pushed to the breaking point, students would have not been able to seek help from peers or receive appropriate instruction, and guardians could not have supported their students as easily. Virtual meeting tools like Google Meet and Zoom became mainstays to collaborate (planning), talk (provide a sounding board), and support one another (maintain social connections & uplift) alongside collaborative documents, slideshows, and more. Teachers, students, and parents all aided and took care of each other making sure to observe physical distancing while not sacrificing social and emotional connections we all needed more than ever.

The rise of technology knowledge and use has helped facilitate virtual collaboration at all levels, even when creating non-technology activities and

lessons. We should "plan to collaborate and collaborate to plan" (Honigsfeld & Nordmeyer, 2020). More and more, education has been shifting away from individual classrooms being silos separate from others with little interaction.

This collaborative mindset should be fostered and maintained past any remnants of the pandemic as it also supports better partnerships with families and communities through a unified system of support for students.

With the pandemic, "most teachers don't want to go it alone. As a result, we have witnessed a seismic shift toward a more collaborative mindset" (Honigsfeld & Nordmeyer, 2020). This collaborative mindset should be fostered and maintained past any remnants of the pandemic as it also supports better partnerships with families and communities through a unified system of support for students.

Finally, in at least my district, the increased collaboration of teachers throughout schools has yielded a better ability to provide more equitable education through differentiation and personalization. **Universal Design for Learning** (UDL) can also be better utilized to allow teachers to "plan for multiple means of engagement, multiple modes of representations, and multiple ways for students to take action or express themselves" (Honigsfeld & Nordmeyer, 2020). Spending less time creating the components of a lesson, unit, project, or activity due to collaboration yields teachers this increased time to customize (with UDL, scaffolds, tech., etc.) each as it is implemented into their classrooms. Choices and student agency are more common now than lectures and recitations with collaboration yielding more student lead learning through flipped learning,

HyperDocs, choice boards, learning playlists, partnerships with guardians and more that should continue indefinitely.

Support

Levels of support across many areas of education rose dramatically during the pandemic. The numerous areas related to technology and support of its use may well have been part of the most meteoric rise. Three areas of support critical to the continuation of successful education that grew during this past year were training/professional learning (teacher, student, & guardian), general support (help desks, repairs, etc.), and resource curation.

Every school district that sought to provide training in the form of professional learning (PL) opportunities to teachers as soon as possible and throughout the pandemic. Quicker than I've ever witnessed in my decade in education, schools pivoted instructional models and deployed asynchronous and synchronous professional learning in the areas of video conferencing, LMS components, screencasting, hybrid, virtual, or hyflex learning, engagement online, and more. In previously unseen numbers, **PL conferences** changed to being completely virtual and, in some cases, completely free (**2021-2022**).

To a lesser degree, but still significantly increased, schools and companies offered learning opportunities geared specifically toward guardians and students. The below list shows some of these resources as utilized by my district.

- **CCPS Learning Technologies Help Page**
- **Wide Open School**
- **Google Resources for Parents/Guardians**
- **Microsoft Resources for Parents/Guardians**
- **USDOE Parent and Family Digital Learning Guide**
- **Michigan Virtual: Parent Guide to Online Learning**

Never before have these two groups needed to teach, learn, and use as much technology with less direct guidance from teachers. Online tech academies, tutorial websites, and help lines all saw a needed surge of importance. Whenever possible, easing the burden of teachers to have to simultaneously teach both content and technologies will always yield more instructional minutes, more support time for students, and less drain on teachers.

Providing these professional learning experiences and support resources as well as employing specialists to curate needed resources for all stakeholders became a prominent job within school districts. Teachers and those they serve every day needed resources, activities, models, and more pulled together. This time burden relieved of teachers would then yield more time to plan and offer dynamic lessons followed by meaningful feedback, all customized to student needs. Districts should continue the role of specialists and coaches to continue the momentum of positive changes in instruction, communication, collaboration, support and equity.

Leading for Technology Integration

In my nearly decade of working as an educational technology coach and supervisor, I've never witnessed anything more powerful in regards to teachers embracing and integrating new tools or strategies than continued administrative support to take the risks needed to try new things, even if mistakes soon followed. Recovering from these mistakes, of course, is a key to navigating these new tools or deeper uses of favorites. Our most successful school leaders during the pandemic led in this way and modeled their grit-fueled growth mindset openly.

Administrators should also seek to work with their technology professionals to provide appropriate and effective technology tools to aid both teachers and students, but to avoid mandating their use. In certain times, it is hard to not

mandate technologies to be used, however, we must remember that they nearly always start a technology adoption in a negative light. Instead, administrators should model use of strategically chosen technology and their best practices while showing positive outcomes that were made possible by the technology. If staff are comfortable, this can be done through sharing at faculty and team meetings or even through allowing staff to lead conference style professional learning in place of meetings.

... it is important to move past the surface level use of technology and into it being integrated.

Making a Difference with Technology Integration

After modeling the technologies you envision making the most impact within your school or district for student and teacher achievement, efficiency, and efficacy, it is important to move past the surface level use of technology and into its being integrated. The pandemic forced much technology use but often stopped short of meaningful integration; technology simply allowed teaching to continue. Meaningfully integrated technology enhances lessons and/or makes learning opportunities possible that were not before. Integrated technology allows for the following that technology use can never do:

- Removal of double-teaching (students know the technology, teachers can focus on the content), which yields more class time (time is not needed to teach tech.)
- Technology as a tool, not a prize (tech Is a vital part of learning, not a reward for being fast)

- Increased efficacy (students are confident with both the tech and when to use it)
- Better facilitated creativity and agency (students know the base uses of tech and can focus on going deeper, exploring and finding new ways to show mastery)

Even with the power of technology to enhance student learning with opportunities never before possible, it is important to remember that technology hasn't been, and will never be, a silver bullet for great teaching, learning, collaboration, communication, or support. Technology enhances the work of people (good or bad). Those most deft at integrating it are knowledgeable of pedagogy first, and technology second. We should merge the best parts of remote, hybrid, and face to face learning to make the "new normal" the best it can possibly be for all. Don't abandon tech and the opportunities it affords, meaningfully integrate it and use it only when it enhances possibilities and opportunities.

Conclusion

There are many positives connected to COVID-19 that should continue on indefinitely as these improvements are integrated into our educational system. These include advances in equitable practices, communication, collaboration, support, and technology efficacy. If nothing else, this time in education has proven the saying many in education have seen numerous times—we are better together. Only together can we ensure that the positives of pandemic related education continue on and get even better.

Thank you to all students, guardians, community members, educators, administrators, specialists, and support staff that have made it possible for meaningful education to continue throughout the entirety of the pandemic. Without contributions and collaboration from every one of these groups, there would likely have been little to no positives to emerge from what could have been a very dark time in education.

Let me end with a short but incredibly important call to action.

> *To those emboldened to criticize teachers and schools, rise again now to recognize and celebrate teachers as the heroes and heroines they are, especially when working collaboratively with guardians. Reach out to your schools and districts to see how you can unite to ensure the positives of this crisis continue on to benefit every member of our learning communities.*

The choice is ours, as is the future path of education.

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Addressing Increased Failures in a Virtual Learning Environment

This article addresses the increased failure rates in a virtual learning environment that many educators have witnessed in the last year and a half. There is an examination of causes and a proposed action plan for supporting students and families, particularly students from traditionally marginalized populations.



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Recognizing the Impact of Covid on Student Outcomes

For the last year and a half, the American education system has been navigating through the COVID-19 pandemic. Individual states took initiative to waive certain accreditation requirements for the 2019-2020 academic year, but at the close of the 2020-2021 academic year, educators recognized that several systemic issues are impacting overall student success. Initially it was expected that schools would close for two-weeks in March 2020 in an attempt to "flatten the curve" of Coronavirus, then allowing traditional instruction for the remainder of the year. When school divisions abruptly closed in-person instruction in 2020,

educational leaders had very little time to make the necessary preparations for virtual or distance learning. For instance, opportunity gaps were exposed due to lack of technological resources or access to reliable internet. In some cases, this academic disruption was further exacerbated by the lack of adequate supervision in the students' homes. Much of this was due to the reality that family members had to continue working; an inevitable shift in household roles if a student had younger siblings who needed support with their distance learning; or the physical and emotional impact the virus may have had on families.

As a high school teacher in a richly diverse school in a large suburban division in Central Virginia, colleagues and I had a front-row seat to the academic transitions and adjustments of 2020. Public school divisions made efforts to continue instruction for the remainder of the academic year, however, there was little understanding of how distance learning would look or work for different students.

My division, along with several others, determined it would be beneficial to provide students with grade-recovery or supplemental content materials rather than introducing new content—knowing that some of their student's families would not have access to the appropriate resources needed to "move on" with instruction. This evolved into the school district foregoing numeric grades for the final marking period of the 2019-20 academic year, which meant that student grades would be based on their performance prior to the pandemic. While some new content was presented in the final months of schools, what was intended to be taught in a traditional school year was not taught, leading to gaps in curriculum. This, paired with student disengagement, led to schools providing extensions for remediated student work over the summer. These recovery efforts created confusion as teachers and parents prepared students for a 'normal' return to school in the fall 2020. Over the 2020 summer months, state

governors and school division leaders followed the pandemic's data and several divisions made the decision to, at a minimum, start the 2020-2021 academic year in a virtual format. It was assumed that school divisions would have used the summer to better prepare for distance learning in fall 2020 to ensure that any learning loss or regression from the previous year would be recovered and schools would be able to deliver appropriate instruction moving forward. Many school divisions across Virginia opted to continue distance learning into the new school year, which resulted in decreased student enrollment (Jones, 2020), sporadic or chronic absenteeism, and increased failures across all levels of schools. Students across the nation were performing at lower academic levels than would typically be anticipated, and there is substantial data to suggest that students who are traditionally marginalized, such as students of color, those

Considering the documented increase in failure rates, especially among specific populations of students, we must determine what needs to be done to ensure that ALL students receive a quality education this year.

with low socioeconomic status, English Learners, or students who receive special education services, were disproportionately impacted (**U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021**).

In January 2021, the Virginia Department of Education presented results from a survey that informed guidelines for reopening schools and provided data on enrollment declines, instructional modalities, and challenges posed by distance learning. The overwhelming number of failing students was ranked as the top challenge school divisions have faced in distance learning, closely followed by

student accessibility to reliable internet (**Coy, 2021**). This status report continued to provide information about the support resources available to students in regards to social-emotional well being, disabilities, low socioeconomic status, and students who are identified as English Learners. Considering the documented increase in failure rates, especially among specific populations of students, we must determine what needs to be done to ensure that ALL students receive a quality education this year.

Recommended Next Steps

Even as the majority of schools return to in-person learning during the fall of 2021, the need to support students academically, socially, and emotionally as we continue a march towards normalcy—particularly those from traditionally marginalized backgrounds—remains a constant issue in schools. I propose three steps to address this issue: (1) form a team of school staff to support students, (2) have team members analyze student data regularly, and (3) ensure communication is transparent in order to engage all stakeholders.

Step 1: Form a team, identify their roles & collect appropriate student data

In order to address the issue described above, it would be beneficial for individual schools to form a team of administrators, teachers, and counselors to meet regularly to review student performance. Team members will need to collect data involving student performance, grades, and attendance records. It would be best practice for the team to create and implement necessary tiered interventions. For instance, the more classes a student is failing, the more intervention services should be provided. The student data should be organized in a platform that is easily accessible and comprehensible by teachers, counselors, and administrators. This should include the student's name, parental/guardian contact information, and feedback for any classes [and teachers] they

are failing. It should be organized in a way that it can be sorted by student name or teacher name, as well as tiered by the number of courses a student is not passing. I recommend that the team establish clear expectations to share with all teachers, so that as the team meets to discuss student progress, grades have been updated and feedback gathered. The team will also need to determine how frequently the student performance database will be updated and how interventions will be categorized.

Step 2: Analyze student data to implement support

Kathryn Boudett's ***Data Wise*** suggests that "data analysis supports a culture of improvement by building the habit of inquiry in which you constantly ask questions and find answers, not in your preconceived judgements of children, but in observable data" (Boudett, 2018, p. 104). In order for the various data sources to be used effectively to promote change, the team must establish a clear vision of what they are trying to accomplish. This will allow the team to set goals, develop strategies in order to accomplish those goals, and implement an action plan that solves the identified problem that larger numbers of students failed to learn key elements of curriculum in a virtual learning environment. The team "should be able to develop a list of specific questions to have in mind as [they examine] the data" (Boudett, 2018, p.71).

Although data-informed intervention practices have been utilized by many schools prior to the pandemic, it would be useful for demographic data, including language proficiency, learning abilities, or ethnicity to be collected in order to determine if any patterns can be identified within the subgroups. This is even more critical as educators navigate new gaps in learning. This team should review specific student work such as student growth measures, performance on formative and summative assessments, and teacher feedback on assignments in order to analyze student progress or potential learning loss while identifying

trends in their performance. Additionally, student attendance records would be a useful data source. Chronic absenteeism is a contributing factor to why more students were failing—student attendance records indicate that those who were not attending their [virtual] classes missed too much instructional time. As the team reviews the data sources they are able to identify specific demographics that need additional support or which content areas need the most improvement. It would also be beneficial to consult surrounding schools or divisions to determine if similar patterns exist within their students' performance and what support interventions have been or are to be implemented.

The phrase "it takes a village" rings true in the realm of education and it is vital that educators utilize all of their stakeholders to support all students. While student data is analyzed, the team should involve the student and parents/guardians in an open dialogue to better understand conclusions surrounding the students' performance as well as generate potential solutions. This encourages transparent communication when determining potential external factors that may be impacting student performance and resulting in failing grades. To further interpret 'next steps' based on the data, the team could wrap-in additional support staff such as division content specialists, testing coordinators, or reading specialists.

Furthermore, there are several political or legal implications that impact accreditation and funding. The increased student failures or chronic absenteeism may put a particular school in jeopardy of losing its accreditation. These concerns may be incorporated into a Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) or School. We will know that we have been successful in implementing these actions as student grades improve and their names are removed from the generated student performance database. Additionally, as student performance and grades improve, they will not be in jeopardy of being retained in a particular class or grade level.

Step 3: Communicate with & Engage Stakeholders

In order to effectively implement this plan, it is vital to engage stakeholders in the process. As previously stated, educational leaders would need to involve teachers, counselors, parents, and the students themselves in any interventions to improve student performance and grades. Additional stakeholders at the division level may become involved if the school's accreditation levels have fallen due to student performance. Teachers or administrators should establish clear lines of communication with parents or guardians to ensure they are aware of the student's performance, that they understand what is expected of their student, and what assignments are missing or earned a low score. Teachers should also provide students with opportunities for tutoring or remediation. Additional support services may include one-on-one appointments with school counseling to determine if there are any underlying concerns that warrant the school's intervention. It will be necessary to also include Special Education case managers or LIEP case managers to provide any additional interventions.

Throughout this pandemic, families have been inundated with unexpected messages from school divisions surrounding the severity of this pandemic and contingency plans to remain operational. To combat this growing issue of failing grades, team members should establish relationships with their students' families, via phone calls, emails, or parent-teacher conferences. Then, in the event a student begins to perform poorly in a class, the teacher has an established connection with the family. Strategic data collection and analysis, paired with open communication between parents and teachers ensures that student needs are being met in and outside of the classroom.

To conclude, this three-step mitigation strategy - (1) form a team of services to support students, (2) have team members analyze student data regularly, and (3) ensure communication is transparent in order to engage all stakeholders should

be implemented over the next several years as educators continue to resolve the ongoing impacts of COVID-19.

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