VIRGINIA ASCD
Learn. Teach. Lead.

JOURNAL **2022**
Volume **19**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Officers

President
Julie Myers, Frederick

Parliamentarian/Historian
Tom DeBolt, Albemarle

Treasurer and Resource Committee Chair
Pat Griffin, Virginia Beach

Secretary
Jennifer Orr, Fairfax

Committee Chairs

ADVOCACY	**Daniel Smith, Loudon** **Joe Douglas, Colonial Heights**	**The Advocacy Committee works to influence state education policy and legislation in the interest of students and teachers.**
RESOURCE	**Pat Griffin, Virginia Beach**	**The Resource Committee establishes and monitors VASCD's budget and ensures responsible fiscal management.**
CONFERENCE	**Melissa George, Virginia Beach**	**The Conference Committee designs and executes Virginia's premier annual conference on teaching and learning.**
PROGRAMS	**Chelsea Kulp, Isle of Wight**	**The Programs Committee guides VASCD's professional learning activities to ensure high quality and positive impact.**
SERVICES	**Robin Hoffman, Virginia Beach**	**The Services Committee elevates the profession through give-back opportunities for appreciation, celebration, and recognition.**
AWARDS	**Arianne Hayes, Chesterfield**	**The Awards Committee creates criteria and oversees selection of VASCD's Impact, Leadership, and Team Awards as well as grants to support innovation in schools.**
BUSINESS MODEL	**Thomas Taylor, Stafford**	**The Business Model Committee seeks out and designs opportunities for monetization and strategic ventures to ensure fiscal stability.**
NEW TEACHER SUPPORT	**Roberto Pamas, George Mason University**	**The New Teacher Recruitment and Resources for Support Committee encourages and supports new teachers in the beginning of their careers.**

VIRGINIA ASCD
Learn. Teach. Lead.

VASCD's eight Regional Representatives are elected by members in their regions. They conduct outreach activities, keep VASCD apprised of regional needs and issues, and engage their constituents in network-building and professional learning efforts.

Regional Representatives

Region I
Peyton Anderson, Chesterfield
peyton_anderson@ccpsnet.net

Region II
Rashard Wright, Newport News
rashard.wright@nn.k12.va.us

Region III
Sarah Calveric, Caroline
scalveric@ccps.us

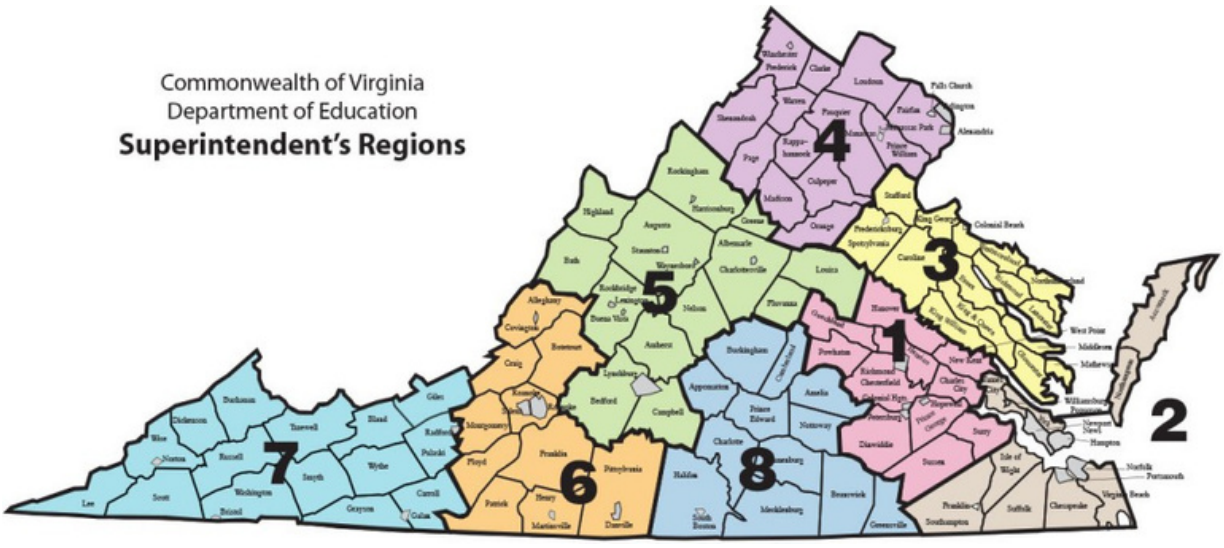
Region IV
Amy Acors, Fauquier
aacors@fcps1.org

Region V
Forrest Burgdorf, Augusta
fburgdorf@augusta.k12.va.us

Region VI
Janet Womack, Botetourt
jwomack@bcps.k12.va.us

Region VII
Ellen Denny, Radford City
edenny@rcps.org

Region VIII
Jan Medley, Amelia
medleyj@ameliaschools.com



VIRGINIA ASCD
Learn. Teach. Lead.

Virginia ASCD Membership

Our network is strong! When you join VASCD, you become part of a statewide network devoted to excellence in teaching and learning.

We'll provide you with helpful resources, access to outstanding professional learning opportunities, and monthly "members-only" content provided to us by ASCD.

You'll be among the first to access content and services developed by and for VASCD, such as *The Profile of a Virginia Classroom* and our collection of micro-credentials for teachers and leaders.

You'll be represented at the state level by a leading organization advocating for autonomy with integrity in the education profession.

You'll receive a discounted registration fee at our programs for professional learning offered throughout the commonwealth and online.

Click HERE to join!

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

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

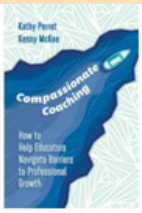
Click the Play Button below to view a message from our editor!

VIRGINIA ASCD
Learn. Teach. Lead.

VASCD'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Virginia's Premier Conference for Teaching and Learning

INFO



Pre-Conference

Kathy Perret:
Compassionate Coaching

Day 1 CLOSER

Gloria Ladson-Billings:
LEARN

DAVE SCHMITTOU
BE BOLD. BE BRAVE. BE VULNERABLE. BE HUMBLE.
MAKE LEARNING LAST A LIFETIME.

Conference Opener

Dave Schmittou:
LEAD

Hi! I'm Kyle.

I am an artist, author, inventor, speaker, welder, animator, storyteller, and professional internet goofball.

CONFERENCE CLOSER

Kyle Scheele:
LOVE

From the Executive Director and President of the Board of Directors

Chris Jones
Executive Director
Virginia ASCD

Julie Myers
Director of Middle and Secondary Instructional Services
Frederick County Public Schools
President, Virginia ASCD (2022–2024)

It is a tremendous honor for us to present the 2022 VASCD Journal, our 19th volume! Our editor, Dr. Eric Carbaugh, has once again delivered on an outstanding resource for the members of VASCD and the educators throughout Virginia. We are also grateful for the educators who submitted their articles for publication; we have enjoyed reading their work and learning from their experience, expertise, and research.

The past two-and-a-half years have been challenging to say the least, and we are excited to see the renewal in hope, optimism, and promise in Virginia's educators, students, and families. As an organization, **we are proud to serve you**. We are proud to uncover the challenges, co-construct the goals, and develop the strategies needed to #Elevate the profession and advance teaching and learning for ALL of Virginia's students. We will continue to work for and with you as we co-author the next chapter in education.

Our priorities remain in our programs, services, and advocacy work. We are committed to designing and delivering high-quality professional learning that is based on research, experience, and a focus on market analysis rooted in your voices. We are committed to giving back to the profession through our content, awards, and support services. Finally, our Policy Team is strong and working to influence policy, legislation, and ultimately a system that defines your work.

Enjoy Volume 19 of the VASCD Journal, and we hope to see you at upcoming events advertised throughout these pages!

VIRGINIA ASCD
Learn. Teach. Lead.

nwea believe in what's possible

NWEA® is a mission-driven, not-for-profit organization that supports students and educators in more than 146 countries through research, assessment solutions, policy and advocacy services, professional learning, and school improvement services that fight for equity, drive classroom impact, and push for systemic change in our educational communities. For more than 40 years, NWEA has developed innovative teaching and learning solutions including our flagship interim assessment, MAP® Growth™; our personalized learning tool, MAP® Accelerator™; and our reading fluency and comprehension assessment, MAP® Reading Fluency™. Visit NWEA.org to learn more about how we're partnering with educators to help all kids learn.

map GROWTH

MAP Growth is the most trusted and innovative assessment for measuring learning and growth in K–12 math, reading, language usage, and science. MAP Growth is available in English and Spanish.

map Reading Fluency

MAP Reading Fluency is an online, adaptive benchmark, universal screening, and progress monitoring assessment that efficiently measures oral reading fluency, literal comprehension, and foundational skills—for both English and Spanish speakers. It uses advanced technology to enable group testing, automatically record and score each student, and deliver instructionally useful data.

map Accelerator

powered by Khan Academy

Developed jointly with Khan Academy™, this innovative online tool simplifies math differentiation for grades 3–8. MAP Accelerator uses MAP Growth math scores to automatically generate personalized learning pathways of standards-aligned Khan Academy content.

nwea Professional Learning

NWEA professional learning helps our partners build the high-impact alignment among curriculum, instruction, and assessment that drives improved outcomes for students and ensures that all stakeholders in a school system are focused on building growth and mastery for each student. Our offerings support four broad categories of professional practice:

- Data to support instruction
- Responsive teaching and learning
- Content focused learning
- Creating supportive environments

nwea School Improvement

NWEA partners with schools and districts to improve student learning outcomes by designing and delivering tailored, holistic school improvement service plans. Our framework is deeply embedded in the proven-effective 5Essentials® system from UChicago Impact®. This framework centers around a unique coaching model that empowers school leaders as central agents of change in creating and sustaining the most essential, evidence-based conditions that make schools successful.

Ready to get in touch?

Contact Andy Guidici at
864.616.4638 or andy.guidici@nwea.org

Table of Contents

Articles

What is a Micro-Credential? A Micro-Credential is a Performance Assessment; essential, assessment of, for, and as learning. Participants explore resources and make decisions for implementation in their classrooms and gather evidence from student work to submit for review by an assessor. The assessor scores the evidence using a rubric and provides feedback and opportunities for revision, if needed. Each Micro-Credential is worth 30 points for professional development toward license renewal requirements.

Why Micro-Credentials? Micro-Credentials provide a direct link between a change in practice and student learning outcomes; they are self-directed and self-paced, personalized, authentic and job-embedded, and verified by an assessor.

Cost: $120 per Micro-Credential

Review the catalog for the 2022-2023 school year **HERE**.

For group enrollment, please email Bev Winter at bev@vascd.org.

Chris Gareis, Ed.D.

Chris Gareis, Ed.D., is Professor of Education at William & Mary. A former English teacher, varsity soccer coach, and principal, Chris regularly works with schools, divisions, and educational organizations in Virginia and internationally on performance-based assessment, curriculum development, and instructional leadership. He is the co-author of *Teacher-Made Assessments: How to Connect Curriculum, Instruction, and Student Learning* (Gareis & Grant, 2015) and *Assessing Deeper Learning: Developing, Implementing, and Scoring Performance Tasks* (Wren & Gareis, 2019). Chris received the VASCD Curriculum Leader Award in 2017.

Amelie Smucker, M.A.T.

Amelie Smucker, M.A.T., is a doctoral student in Curriculum and Learning Design at William & Mary, as well as Field Placement Coordinator and Adjunct Instructor of Education at Sweet Briar College. Amelie is a National Board Certified Exceptional Needs Teacher whose research focuses on inclusive practices, including collaborative teaching between general and special educators, inclusive curricula, and least restrictive environments. She works with Virginia educators on designing and providing high quality services to students with disabilities, as well as mentoring and evaluating pre-service teachers.

Abstract

"Good news" and "assessment" are rarely said or heard together, especially during these past few decades of high-stakes standardized assessments, but the advent of "student growth assessments" is a refreshing spot of good news! Based on the premises that (a) not all students learn at the same rates, (b) the point of learning is growth, and (c) mandated assessments should not unintentionally take too much time away from teaching, growth assessments are showing promise as helpful components of a balanced approach to assessment. In this article, we introduce what growth assessments are and why we should use them for teaching and learning, as well as several important cautions, so that we can use them wisely and effectively.

Getting in Under the Hood of Growth Assessments

Here's a simple fact: Humans don't grow at the same rate. Walk into any classroom, from kindergarten to twelfth grade, and the evidence is right in front of you: You'll see kids of the same approximate age but varying heights. But this doesn't worry us. We know that there is a very broad range of what pediatricians consider "normal height." We also know that young people grow at different rates—some in a slow and steady rise over several years and others seemingly overnight with a "growth spurt." This doesn't worry us either…as long as we can see that each young person is growing and thriving.

How we physically grow as young humans is a helpful analogy for how we "grow" in our academic learning, as well. Children's learning journeys are not prescribed, predictable pathways, nor do their movements on those journeys take place at precisely the same rate. We certainly wouldn't expect a classroom to be populated by children all of the same height. Similarly, it's not reasonable to expect all students to be at the same point in their learning at the same time. The important criterion is that each child is learning and thriving—that is, the important thing is that each student is showing *growth*.

This notion is not new; humans have long known it. However, we haven't, heretofore, had particularly effective ways to gauge learning growth, at least not in useful, efficient, fair, standardized ways. But that is changing here in the early decades of the 21st century as the field of educational assessment has begun to move from conventional paper-pencil, multiple-choice assessments to computer-adaptive growth assessments. These are exciting times with much promise. So, here is a quick introduction to what growth assessments are and why we should use them, as well as a few important cautions so that we don't unintentionally misuse them. After all, a basic principle of good assessment is that assessment progresses student learning (Gareis & Grant, 2015; McMillan, 2019).

It is an important point:
Not all growth assessments are equally robust.

What Are Growth Assessments, and Why Should We Use Them?

There's a good chance that you are already familiar with growth assessments. School divisions across Virginia have been experimenting with them in recent years, and commercially produced growth assessments, such as Achieve 3000, Edmentum, iReady, MAP Growth, and Star 360 (among others), are in widespread use across the Commonwealth. We even know of a number of divisions that have piloted several different growth assessments over the course of a few years (sometimes to the consternation of classroom teachers!), and a few other divisions that are simultaneously using different growth assessments at different school levels. Despite some of the confusion this can create for "end-users" (namely, classroom teachers), these are well-intentioned efforts by school divisions to determine the growth assessment that will best serve their division's needs. It is an important point: Not all growth assessments are equally robust. (A bit more on that later.) But there are several common characteristics of growth assessments.

***Measures of growth over time*.** Growth assessments are designed to measure student learning over time. They are curriculum-based diagnostic tools that depend upon at least two administrations of the assessment, providing information about an individual student's learning at some initial point in time (such as during the first quarter of a new school year) and again at some other point in time after a progression of learning experiences (such as the end of the second quarter). Growth assessments measure the change in learning between points in time. Learning, by definition, is a change in knowledge, skills, or dispositions (Wren & Gareis, 2019); thus, well-designed growth assessments help us to measure learning! Furthermore, assessing student learning a third or fourth time over the course of a year typically strengthens the confidence we can have in the inferences we are drawing about student "growth." Used over multiple years, growth assessments can help us gauge cumulative patterns of student learning, since learning occurs both within and across grade levels. (A caution: As the old adage goes, you don't fatten a pig by weighing it. So, we have to be careful not to assess so often that we catastrophically diminish time for teaching and learning. Assessment matters, but teaching and learning matter more.)

Assessments for learning. By gauging students' learning over time, growth assessments can help to identify where students (individually and collectively) are progressing and where they might be struggling. State-of-the-art growth assessments are computer-adaptive tests (CATs). CATs use statistically driven algorithms to create a unique testing event for each student by using that student's real-time response to the current item to determine the difficulty level (which is sometimes pegged to "grade level") of the next test item. With a robust algorithm (and a sufficiently deep item pool!), a growth assessment can identify areas of relative strength and weakness for a test-taker. Combine this with a timely, clear report of student performance, and a teacher can use student results to guide curricular and instructional decisions (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020), including targeted intervention, flexible grouping, and differentiated instruction (Yeagley, 2007). That is "assessment for learning" in action, which is a very good pedagogical practice!

Growth Assessments

Predictive of performance on accountability tests. While growth assessments are intended to be diagnostic tools for teaching and learning, they are unquestionably designed to help predict performance on high-stakes assessments, as well. For example, the MAP Growth assessments have been correlated to student performance on the SAT, the ACT, and to state accountability tests of the Common Core curriculum (Jones, 2015; Klingbeil et al., 2015; NWEA, 2016, 2020). However, it should be noted that not all commercial test producers have validated the predictive validity of their growth assessments in Virginia where we use our own SOLs rather than the Common Core standards. Also, at least one study found that students can be misclassified and represent false negatives based on MAP Growth scores predicting below-benchmark performance on state assessments (Mitchell, 2019). Nevertheless, well-designed growth assessments can serve as an important tool in meeting accountability demands and can replace less effectual benchmark assessments developed in and used by many school divisions. This makes growth assessments an important keystone in a comprehensive and balanced division-level assessment system (Brookhart et al., 2019).

How BEST to Use Growth Assessments

Growth assessments can be important, powerful tools that support teaching and learning, but, as with any tool, we need to use them with caution. In the midst of the first full year of the pandemic when we were all trying to get a handle on how to gauge student learning (and even "learning loss"), the state commissioned a validation study of the MAP Growth assessments for reading and mathematics, spanning primary grades through early high school. Our study team consisted of four university faculty from three universities and two doctoral students, as well as five central office level directors and 22 school-based instructional leaders and teachers from four Virginia school divisions. The study got us "under the hood" of a widely used growth assessment, namely NWEA's MAP Growth assessment series (Gareis et al., 2021). Our purpose here is not to present the findings of that study, per se, but we want to conclude with three important

recommendations we gleaned about how to make the best use of growth assessments, regardless of which growth assessment your division uses.

Commercial assessments rarely account for the pace nor depth and breadth of content taught within individual school divisions (or, for that matter, individual classrooms).

Check the alignment of your local curriculum pacing to the growth assessment. Growth assessments can be well aligned to national and state standards. For example, we reviewed 2,400 items in our study and found very strong alignment to the content of the Virginia standards. However, while growth assessments can be well aligned to standards, that's not the same as being well aligned to the local curriculum. In other words, commercial assessments rarely account for the pace nor depth and breadth of content taught within individual school divisions (or, for that matter, individual classrooms). This is important to keep in mind when students take a growth assessment because it can be discouraging to be assessed on something you have not had the opportunity to learn. It is also important to keep this in mind when interpreting students' score reports.

Keep in mind that growth measures are statistical predictions of learning. As mentioned above, growth assessments are CATs (computer-adaptive tests), which are able to be responsive in real time to the unique test-taking event of an individual student. In essence, students take "equivalent forms" of the same assessment. All students are being assessed on the same intended learning outcomes, but the particular combination of items can differ from student to student.

Typically, adaptivity is based on an algorithm that accounts for the "difficulty level" of items. This is where something called "item-response theory" (IRT) comes into play. Test developers use IRT to predict how students would perform on an item tagged to a specific standard, even though the student did not actually respond to that item.

Growth Assessments

A hypothetical example might help. Let's say that Isabella is taking a Grade 5 math test. The algorithm is sampling items from a content strand of "Probability & Statistics." There are 10 key standards within that strand. Isabella's particular testing experience has her respond to four items aligned to four of those 10 standards. Using IRT, the test report algorithm will statistically predict how Isabella would have likely performed on the six standards that were not assessed. That predicted result would be based upon a statistical sample of students who had taken the items that Isabella had not, as well as items that Isabella had taken, such that Isabella's performance on the items to which she did not personally respond (had they been given) can be predicted.

This is a powerful way that CATs (including growth assessments) leverage IRT, because it allows growth assessments to take less time to administer while still providing data on a broad scope of content and skills. However, there are a couple of cautions to keep in mind. First, we cannot assume that the algorithms for all CATs are equally robust and reliable. It is important to get "under the hood" and judge how strong the engine is, so to speak. Second, while robust algorithms can be strong predictors of student performance in the aggregate, we need to be cautious when interpreting the results of an individual student. We need to keep in mind that a score report on a standard might be based upon a prediction rather than actual performance. This doesn't mean we shouldn't use CAT-based results, but it does mean we need to be fully cognizant of the delimitations of interpreting the results. We need to make decisions about student learning and needs based on a balanced assessment system that includes multiple points of data.

Don't rely on a growth assessment alone; make use of complementary assessments. In our study of MAP Growth assessments, we found strong evidence of the "technical adequacy" of the tests, and we also found good evidence of alignment to the Virginia Standards of Learning. While we cannot generalize our findings to other growth assessments, it is encouraging to see concrete evidence of the evolution of such assessments. On the other hand,

we also found that the alignment was less than complete. In our review of a stratified random sample of items, 68% of elementary reading SOLs were represented, 76% of secondary reading SOLs, 86% of elementary mathematics SOLs, and 92% of secondary mathematics SOLs. This means that roughly 8% to 32% of subject area standards are not assessed.

Another limitation of growth assessments is that they do not adequately assess the highest levels of cognitive demand. In our analysis, we used Webb's (2007) Depth of Knowledge (DoK) framework, which is comprised of four levels of cognitive demand, including recall, application of skill/concept, strategic thinking, and extended thinking (see Table 1). The majority of the 2,400 items we reviewed tapped Levels 1 and 2, while a much smaller percentage tapped Level 3, and no items tapped Level 4 thinking. In fairness to the MAP Growth developers, their test specifications report clearly acknowledges this limitation. It is simply the case that multiple-choice and technology-enhanced items cannot assess higher-order thinking. We have to use performance-based assessments, such as extended-response items, on-demand writing, lab practicals, presentations, performances, and projects (all well-designed with close attention to principles of validity and reliability), to assess any of the more complex, higher-level standards in our curriculum. In short, we need to complement our use of growth assessments with the use of other types of assessments that, in tandem, provide a complete portrait of student learning.

We need to clearly understand what growth assessments are, why they are important, and how we can best use them both to measure and to progress student learning.

Table 1

Levels of Webb's Depth of Knowledge and Example Activities

Level 1: Recall and Reproduction	Level 2: Application of Skills and Concepts	Level 3: Strategic Thinking	Level 4: Extended Thinking
Recall elements and details of story structure, such as sequence of events, character, plot, and setting. Conduct basic mathematical calculations. Label locations on a map. Describe the features of a place or people.	Identify and summarize the major events in a narrative. Use context clues to identify the meaning of unfamiliar words. Solve routine multiple-step problems. Describe the cause/effect of a particular event.	Support ideas with details and examples. Determine the author's purpose, and describe how it affects the interpretation of a reading selection. Apply a concept in other contexts.	Analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources. Apply mathematical models to illuminate a problem or situation. Conduct a project that requires specifying a problem, designing and conducting an experiment, analyzing its data, and reporting results/solutions.

Note. Adapted from "Webb's Depth of Knowledge," by iDesign, n.d., The iDea Book: Educational Research and Practice Examples for Distinctive Course Design (https://openpress.usask.ca/ideabook/). CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Wrapping Up

Growth assessments are an important component of a comprehensive and balanced assessment system. But, since no single assessment can serve all purposes, we—as professional educators—need to clearly understand what growth assessments are, why they are important, and how we can best use them both to measure and to progress student learning.

NOTES:

- If you are interested in reviewing a copy of the MAP Growth validation study, you can view and/or download a copy from the ERIC database at https://eric.ed.gov/?q=Gareis HYPERLINK "https://eric.ed.gov/?q=Gareis&id=ED618690"& HYPERLINK "https://eric.ed.gov/?q=Gareis&id=ED618690"id=ED618690.
- In Virginia, legislation (HB 2027 and SB1357) now requires growth assessments in reading and mathematics in grades three through eight, and the state has developed the Virginia Growth Assessment (VGA) to serve as the fall and winter growth assessments. For more information on Virginia's required growth assessments, visit the VDOE webpage at https://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/test_administration/growth-assessment/index.shtml.

Jump to Table of Contents

References

Brookhart, S. M., McTighe, J., Stiggins, R., & Wiliam, D. (2019). *The future of assessment practices: Comprehensive and balanced assessment systems*. Learning Sciences International.

Gareis, C. R., & Grant, L. W. (2015). *Teacher-made assessments: How to connect curriculum, instruction, and student learning (2nd edition)*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Gareis, C. R., McMillan, J. H., Smucker, A. D., & Huang, K. (2021). *Validation study of MAP Growth Assessments*. Study undertaken and report prepared for the Virginia Department of Education.

iDesign. (n.d.). The iDea book: Educational research and practice examples for distinctive course design. University of Saskatchewan. https://openpress.usask.ca/ideabook/

Jones, S. L. (2015). Predicting performance on the Georgia criterion referenced competency test based on the Measures of Academic Progress in mathematics and reading. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Capella University.

Klingbeil, D. A., McComas, J. J., Burns, M. K., & Helman, L. A. (2015). Comparison of predictive validity and diagnostic accuracy of screening measures of reading skills. *Psychology in the Schools*, 52(5), 500–514. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21839.

Kuhfeld, M., & Tarasawa, B. (2020, April). The COVID-19 slide: What summer learning loss can tell us about the potential impact of school closures on student academic achievement. NWEA. https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2020/05/Collaborative-Brief_Covid19-Slide-APR20.pdf

McMillan, J. H. (2017). *Classroom assessment: Principles and practice that enhance student learning and motivation*. Pearson.

Mitchell, M. (2019). Academic screening in middle school: How well do AIMSweb Measures of Oral Reading Fluency, and NWEA Measures of Academic Progress, predict future performance on state exams. [Unpublished educational specialist degree thesis]. University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire.

NWEA. (2016, March). Linking the Virginia SOL assessments to NWEA MAP Growth tests.

NWEA. (2020a). Linking study report: Predicting performance on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) mathematics assessments based on NWEA MAP Growth scores.

NWEA. (2020b, February). MAP Growth instructional areas: Standard alignment—Virginia mathematics (Math 2-5 VA 2016).

NWEA. (2020c, February). MAP Growth instructional areas: Standard alignment—Virginia mathematics (Math 6+ VA 2016).

Webb, N. L. (2007). Issues related to judging the alignment of curriculum standards and assessments. *Measurement in Education*, *20*(1), 7–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/08957340709336728

Wren, D., & Gareis, C. R. (2019). Assessing deeper learning: Developing, implementing, and scoring performance tasks. Rowman & Littlefield.

Yeagley, R. (2007). Separating growth from value added. *School Administrator*, *64*(1), 18–21. https://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=7348

Jump to Table of Contents

Information and Registration

Equity in Data Use Framework: Applications to Mathematics Pathways in Virginia Using State and Local Data

Ryoko Yamaguchi, PhD

Dr. Yamaguchi has 30 years of experience in K-12 education as a special education teacher, researcher, and parent advocate. She specializes in utilizing, explaining, and communicating research, data, and the junction of policy, practice, and research to improve schools for equity.

Deborah L. Jonas, PhD

Dr. Jonas has 15 years of experience as a state, regional, and national leader in education, and currently serves as the Director of the IES-funded Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia. She specializes in integrating research, capacity building, and dissemination to create new evidence, and facilitating the use of evidence-based practices across the educational pipeline, from preschool, K12, and higher education to the workforce.

Abstract

The Equity in Data Use (EDU) framework is a three-step process to improve instructional practices through data use, self-reflection guided by data, and data action so that each student reaches their full academic and social potential. In the first step, educators use readily available data to explore how the current educational system is providing access, opportunity, and learning experiences for every student. In the second step, educators expand their data use to include different types of data, at multiple levels and perspectives, to examine students' learning experiences more holistically. In the third step, educators extend their use of data to proactively design and improve instructional practices. In addition to describing the EDU framework, we show how its application in Virginia school divisions supported improvements to the local approach to placing students in middle school mathematics courses.

Equity in Data Use

Data use, such as using student performance data (grades, state assessments, and benchmark assessment data) to monitor student progress (Rumberger et al., 2017; Tierney et al., 2009), to screen students for services (Gersten et al., 2009), or to use data to support instructional practice (Hamilton et al., 2009), has shown minimal evidence of impact on student performance. A few randomized controlled trials have resulted in mixed results (Carlson et al., 2011; Supovitz & Sirinides, 2018), leaving a dearth of evidence despite a well-developed theory and multiple interventions focused on data use. Meanwhile, case studies suggest that schools and districts often struggle to use data effectively (Schildkamp et al., 2017). What's worse, without an equity mindset, data use can actually perpetuate biased behaviors (Eberhardt, 2019; Starck et al., 2020). In education, the failure to bring an equity mindset has led to inequities in who receives special education services (Blanchett, 2006; Fish, 2019; Zhang et al., 2014), who receives gifted services (Card & Giuliano, 2015; Ford & King, 2014; Grissom & Redding, 2016), who is suspended or expelled (McIntosh et al., 2020; United States Government Accountability Office, 2018), and who succeeds through school to graduate college and career ready (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016; Harris, et al., 2021; Hussar et al., 2020; Jonas et al., 2012; Muller et al, 2010; Yamaguchi et al., 2020;).

Data use must go hand-in-hand with an equity mindset so that data are used to proactively redesign a system for equity. Bringing an equity mindset with action-oriented data use contributes to empowering educators to develop each student's full academic and social potential (Grissom, et al., 2021; Pollock, 2008), and ultimately, transforming and redesigning an education system to one that provides the services and supports needed for each student to reach their potential.

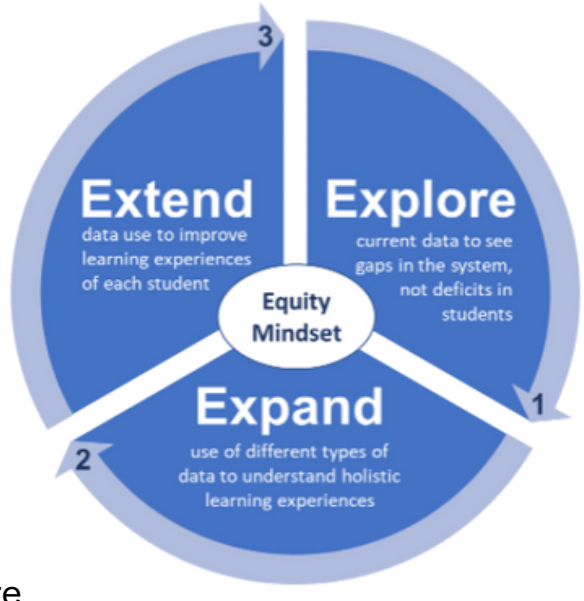
Our paper highlights the Equity in Data Use (EDU) framework and its application on mathematics pathways in Virginia at the state and local levels. Over the last few years, we had the opportunity to apply the EDU framework in a series of research and technical support activities in Virginia, partnering

with Charlottesville, Harrisonburg, Staunton, and Waynesboro school divisions.

Equity in Data use (EDU) Framework

The Equity in Data Use (EDU) framework integrates an equity mindset (Aguilar, 2020; Anaissie et al., 2021; National Equity Project, n.d.) with improvement science (Bryk et al., 2015; Chardin & Novak, 2021; Datnow & Park, 2015) that provides educators with a comprehensive approach to use data to improve deep learning experiences for every student. At the core of the Equity in Data Use framework is an equity mindset that infuses everything we think, feel, and do.

Figure 1: Equity in Data Use Framework



Educational equity is a system where each student receives what they need to develop their full academic and social potential (National Equity Project, n.d.; Anaissie et al., 2021). For educators, an **equity mindset** is a conviction that every student achieves (and therefore, there is no such thing as an achievement gap) with a singular focus to develop each student's full academic and social potential. Educators enact equity, where the process of teaching is not about merely relaying academic content aligned with state standards, but about continually improving our instructional practices through data use, self-reflection guided by data, and data action so that each student reaches their full potential. With this equity mindset at the center of the framework, the EDU framework uses data to explore, expand, and extend (figure 1) to provide deep learning experiences for every student. This, in turn, will lead to improved academic, social and emotional, and behavioral outcomes for students.

Equity in Data Use

Step 1: Explore. In the first step of the EDU Framework, we use current data to explore the educational system and how it is or isn't working for students—from access, opportunity, and learning experiences across the educational pipeline. The goal is to use data to see gaps in the system, not deficits in students. To explore current data, ask critical questions about the access, opportunity, and learning experiences with:

- Who. Who is represented in the data? Who is left out in the data? Who are we centering? Who are we marginalizing?
- What. What is (really) being measured? What is not being measured? What else needs to be measured?
- Where. Where are the data collected? Where is they not collected?
- When. When are the data collected? When are the data not collected?
- Why. Why is access not equal? Why are opportunities and learning experiences not equitable?

While not sufficient to maximize data's potential to empower students, answering these questions can provide actionable information. For example, by examining data about access, you may find structural, instructional, and curricular barriers to remove, and can then design solutions to expand access to opportunities and learning experiences to maximize students' success.

Step 2: Expand. In the second step of the EDU Framework, we expand data use to include different types of data, at multiple levels and perspectives, to fully understand the holistic learning experiences of students (Safir & Dugan, 2021). The goal is for educators to gather information to enact equity by asking—What is it like to be a student in your classroom, in your school, and in your district? The only way to answer that question is to expand the types of data we collect, including any systemically collected qualitative and quantitative information such as reviews of lesson plans, teacher logs and interviews, student feedback on climate and culture surveys, student empathy interviews, and observation notes from student shadowing. To expand data, ask critical questions about additional data needed to fully understand student learning experiences, not just student summative performance, with the following areas:

- Educator instructional practices. How are educators supporting each student to develop their academic and social potential? Data can include review of lesson plans, assessments, self-reflection protocols, student feedback and formative assessment. Consider how these data contribute to an understanding about whether expectations are equally high for each student, and whether instructional practices and supports are both effective and aligned with each student's needs.
- Educator relational practices. How are educators creating a trusting relationship with each student so that they can develop their full academic and social potential? Data can include student perspectives and behaviors that exhibit trust towards the educator (such as asking questions or seeing the teacher for extra help) and teacher perspectives and behaviors (such as following up with students, meeting with each student, noticing students' social emotional statuses).
- Student learning behaviors. How are students developing their academic and social skills? Data can include self-reflection of learning and scaffolding information to learn, self-regulation with revising exams, and active engagement in classroom discussions.

By centering the day-to-day student learning experience, you'll start to see the need to collect fine-grained "street" data (Safir & Dugan, 2021) to identify and remove barriers that students face in learning and proactively design and improve instructional practices.

Step 3: Extend. In the third step of the EDU Framework, we extend data use to proactively design and improve instructional practices in order to better support each student in developing their full academic and social potential. Rather than a monthly school discipline report (McIntosh et al., 2020), or annual accountability reports with annual yearly progress, extending data use is about designing, enacting, and sustaining equitable instructional practices through data. Improvement science offers the process for using data in continuous improvement cycles to ideate and test solutions for improved access, opportunity, and learning experiences (Bryk et al., 2015; Chenoweth, 2021).

EDU in action: Step 1- Explore data on mathematics pathways in Virginia to see gaps in the system, not deficits in students

Like many states, Virginia encourages schools to offer Algebra I in the grade level in which each student is "ready" to succeed in the course, with the goal of ensuring all students successfully complete Algebra I in or before grade 9. To support this goal, starting in grade 5, students are placed into a pathway that results in them completing Algebra I in grade 7 (hyper-accelerated), grade 8 (accelerated), or in grade 9 (which has been the traditional pathway).

In our research study (Yamaguchi et al., 2020), we explored students' Algebra I course placement after completing grade 5 and earning an Advanced Proficient score on Virginia's Algebra I state assessment (figure 2). We also explored whether these students, who were identified as performing at an advanced level in grade 5, earned Virginia's Advanced Studies (college preparatory) diploma when they graduated high school. Providing each

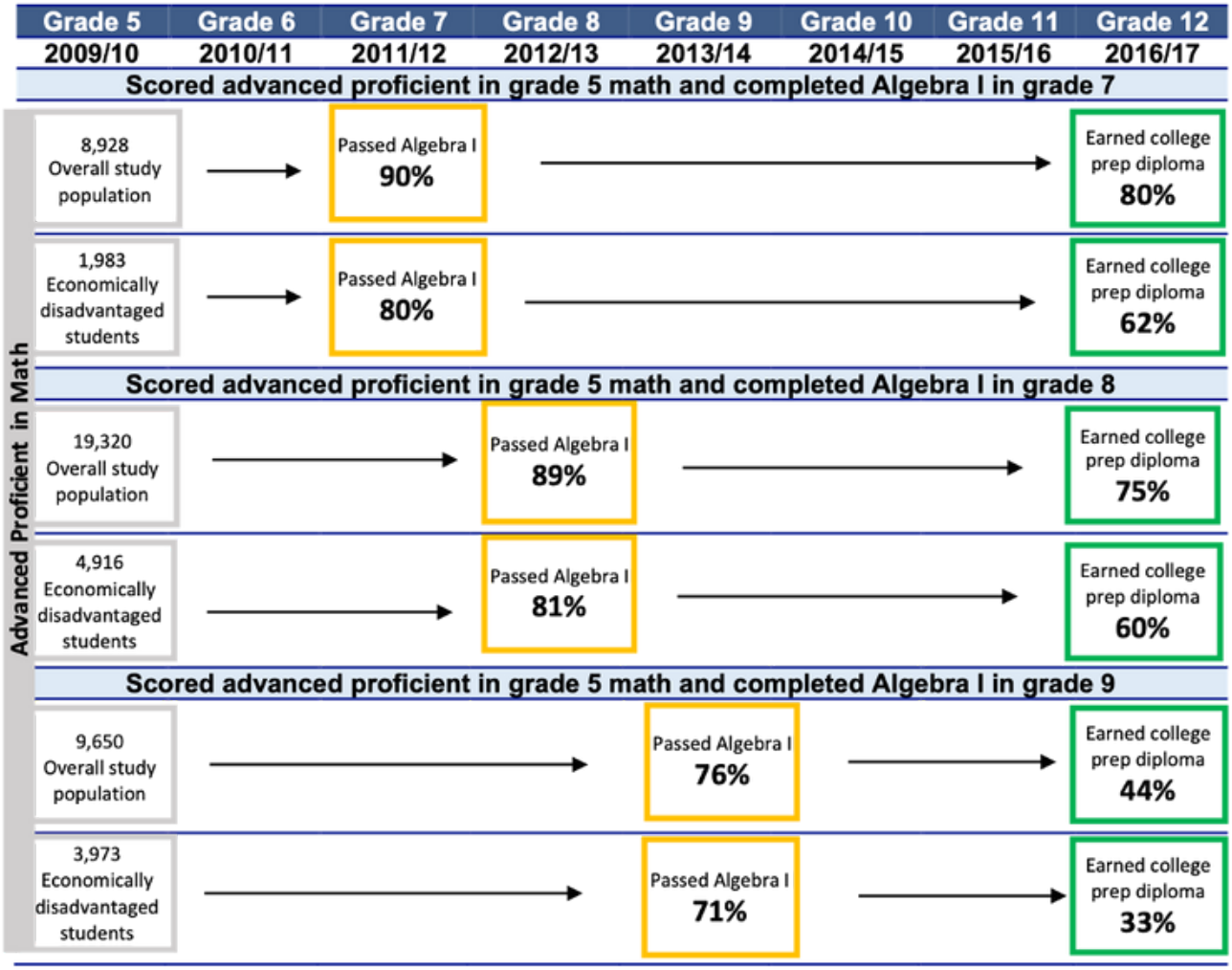
To expand data, ask critical questions about additional data needed to fully understand student learning experiences, not just student summative performance.

student with the courses and instructional support they need to earn this diploma supports students' and families' ability to make choices about their post-high school pursuits, regardless of the grade level in which students complete Algebra I.

By examining who was represented in the different pathways, we explored whether students were placed equally (placement was the same) and equitably (placement was to support each student's needs) into Algebra I. By thinking through what to measure, we explored whether groups of students with comparable 5th grade performance also had similar performance outcomes upon completing Algebra I and in preparing for college and

careers. Unfortunately, the data show several troublesome trends that demonstrate the system is not equal nor equitable in serving students. Access was not the same, where although 75 percent of all students who earned Advanced Proficient scores on the 5th grade mathematics assessment completed Algebra I in grade 7 or 8, only 63 percent of students who received services for economic disadvantages completed Algebra I in the same grades. Performance was not the same, suggesting inequitable instructional practices because even when students earned Advanced Proficient scores in 5th grade, students who received services for economic disadvantages passed Algebra I and graduated with an Advanced Studies (college preparatory) diploma at lower percentages than all students.

Figure 2: Why do students with the same advanced proficiency in grade 5 mathematics have very different mathematics pathways?



Equity in Data Use

With this information, it is important to ask additional questions and dig deeper in order to redesign a system for equity. Why did students have very different course placement and Algebra I performance even after demonstrating advanced performance in grade 5? Why are such a large percentage of high-performing students not graduating college ready, even when they are on an accelerated pathway? Answering these questions can help the system address inequities and importantly, improve the access, teaching, and supports that each student receives to optimize their learning.

EDU in action: Step 2- Expand data use to include different types of mathematics pathways data

In our partnership with Charlottesville, Staunton, Harrisonburg, and Waynesboro school divisions, educators were interested in gaining a deeper understanding of learning experiences when their students were hyper-accelerated (completed Algebra I in 7th grade). The assumption of hyper-acceleration is that it provides more opportunities for students to take advanced-level courses through high school (including for college credit through AP, IB, and dual enrollment). However, Virginia educators, particularly high school mathematics teachers and leaders, have raised questions about the value of hyper-acceleration for supporting students' long-term success. They worried that completing Algebra I too early can lead to students having a shallow understanding of complex algebraic concepts critical for success in later courses in high school and in post-secondary education. Further, clearly, the data showed significant inequities in access, opportunities, and success, even among students deemed high-performing and academically ready (Yamaguchi et al., 2020).

To support our partners to expand data use, we developed a data tool for school divisions to delve deeper into course-taking pathways after Algebra I (Yamaguchi & Schmidt, 2021). The data tool expanded the types of data by including mathematics courses that students completed after Algebra I. The school division leaders also gathered data on the grades and state assessments students received in the mathematics courses; reviewed policies, programs, and services; and even interviewed math educators. The

expansion of data was to delve deeper into their concerns on the learning experiences of hyperacceleration of Algebra I.

Unfortunately, the data show several troublesome trends that demonstrate the system is not equal nor equitable in serving students.

In Staunton, using the data tool, the division leader focused on 15 students who enrolled in Algebra I in grade 7 (2011–2012 SY) and 12 students who enrolled in Algebra I in grade 8 (2012–2013 SY). All 27 students graduated with an Advanced Studies diploma. However, by expanding data use to the math courses students completed, the division leader noticed that students who completed Algebra I in grade 8 (as opposed to grade 7) had the same mathematics course taking. In Harrisonburg, using the data tool, the division leader focused on 31 students who enrolled in algebra I in grade 7 (2011/12 SY) and 74 students who enrolled in Algebra I in grade 8 (2012/13 SY). What he found surprised him. Among the 31 hyper-accelerated math students, 52 percent scored proficient on their Algebra SOL assessment in grade 7. Furthermore, 42 percent of these students did not take any math courses in their senior year of high school. In fact, one student stopped after 10th grade.

With similar patterns of mathematics course taking across the other two school divisions in the partnership, the school divisions started to question the purpose and assumptions behind hyper-acceleration in math and began focusing on quality math learning experiences so that each student (regardless of placement) can experience deep learning of mathematics.

EDU in action: Step 3- Extend data to improve mathematics access, opportunities, and deep learning for all students

To support our partners to extend data use to improve learning experiences

for all students, we provided technical assistance on professional learning models (Buffington et al., 2021). The school divisions expanded data use to include teacher practices and behaviors with observing mathematics classrooms using a "look-for" protocol; asking math teachers to do teacher logs, reflections, and goal setting; and taking systematic notes during collaborative learning team (CLT) meetings on teacher descriptions of math tasks.

School divisions also worked with math teachers to review student learning behaviors, from looking at student unit quizzes and exams to probing teachers on student learning during CLT meetings. Through understanding the holistic learning experiences in the math classroom, school division leaders identified key areas for teacher professional development. This is an important part of the EDU framework—rather than continue to focus on "deficiencies" of student learning, the school division leaders focused on how to better support educators. The school divisions then implemented a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle to extend data use to improve their professional learning models to support math teachers' instruction and vertical alignment of standards. For Staunton, this led to instructional improvements through 1) Re-evaluating the math progression (beginning in the 2018/19 SY), 2) establishing criteria for math acceleration, and 3) continually communicating reasons to staff, students, and families. For Harrisonburg, this led to 1) adjusting the program of studies options for the post-virtual learning year (2021/22), 2) creating templates to explore additional data, and 3) communicating with parents about changes to the program of studies with no push back from the community.

It is important to remember that data use only adds value when it includes taking actions that improve students' deep learning experiences.

Conclusion

The Equity in Data Use (EDU) framework offers a consistent and systematic approach to using data to proactively redesign the schooling experience so that each student receives the supports they need to reach their full academic and social potential. In applying the EDU framework, it is critical for division leaders and teachers to ask questions about student experiences with the purpose of learning more about how the system is and isn't serving students equally, equitably, and effectively.

Jump to Table of Contents

References

Aguilar, E. (2020). *Coaching for equity: Conversations that change practice*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

Anaissie, T., Cary, V., Clifford, D., Malarkey, T., & Wise, S. (2021). Liberatory Design. Retrieved from https://www.liberatorydesign.com/

Blanchett, W. J. (2006). Disproportionate representation of African American students in special education: Acknowledging the role of white privilege and racism. *Educational Researcher, 35*(6), 24–28.

Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Buffington, P., DePiper, J. N., Yamaguchi, R., Kassner, L., & Chiang, A. (2021). *Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia: Student success in mathematics partnership resource collection*. Arlington, VA: Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia at SRI International.

Card, D., & Giuliano, L. (2015). Can universal screening increase the representation of low income and minority students in gifted education? (NBER Working Paper 21519). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Chardin, M., & Novak, K. (2021). *Equity by design: Delivering on the power and promise of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Carlson, D., Borman, G. D., & Robinson, M. (2011). A multi-state district-level cluster randomized trial of the impact of data-driven reform on reading and mathematics achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 33, 378–398.

Chenoweth, K. (2021). *Districts that Succeed: Breaking the Correlation between Race, Poverty, and Achievement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Datnow, A., & Park, V. (2015). Data use for equity. *Educational Leadership*, February (2015), 48–54.

DeAngelo, L., & Franke, R. (2016). Social mobility and reproduction for whom? College readiness and first-year retention. *American Educational Research Journal*, *53*(6), 1588–1625.

Eberhardt, J. L. (2019). *Biased: Uncovering the hidden prejudice that shapes what we see, think, and do*. New York: NY: Viking.

Fish, R. E. (2019). Standing out and sorting in: Exploring the role of racial composition in racial disparities in special education. *American Educational Research Journal*, *56*(6), 2573–2608.

Ford, D. Y., & King, R. A., Jr. (2014). No Blacks allowed: Segregated gifted education in the context of Brown v. Board of Education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *83*(3), 300–310.

Gersten, R., Beckmann, S., Clarke, B., Foegen, A., March, L., Star, J. R., & Witzel, B. (2009). Assisting students struggling with mathematics: Response to Intervention (RtI) for elementary and middle schools (NCEE 2009-4060). Washington DC: US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.

Grissom, J. A., & Redding, C. (2016). Discretion and disproportionality: Explaining the underrepresentation of high-achieving students of color in gifted programs. *AERA Open*, *2*(1), 1–25.

Hamilton, L. S., Halverson, R., Jackson, S. S., Mandinach, E., Supovitz, J. A., & Wayman, J. C. (2009). Using student achievement data to support instructional decision making (NCEE 2009-4067). Washington DC: US Department of Education National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

Harris, J., Jonas, D.L., and Schmidt, R. (2021). Virginia high school graduates' career and technical education credentials: Top credentials over time and across student groups (REL 2021-063). Washington DC: US Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock, M.F., Barmer, A., and Dilig, R. (2020). The condition of education 2020 (NCES 2020-144). Washington DC: US Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences.

Jonas, D., Dougherty, C., Ware Herrera, Al., LaTurner, J., Garland, M., and Ware, A. (2012). High school predictors of college readiness: Determinants of high school graduates' enrollment and successful completion of first-year mathematics and English college courses in Virginia. Richmond, VA: Virginia Department of Education.

McIntosh, K., Smolkowski, K., Gion, C. M., Witherspoon, L., Bastable, E., & Girvan, E. J. (2020). Awareness if not enough: A double-blind randomized controlled trial of the effects of providing discipline disproportionality data reports to school administrators. *Educational Researcher*, *49*(7), 533-537.

Muller, C., Riegle-Crumb, C., Schiller, K. S., Wilkenson, L., & Frank, K. (2010). Race and academic achievement in racially diverse high schools: Opportunity and stratification. *Teachers College Record*, *112*(4), 1038-1063.

National Equity Project. (n.d.). Educational equity: A definition. Retrieved from https://www.nationalequityproject.org/education-equity-definition

Pollock, M. (2008). From shallow to deep: Toward a thorough cultural analysis of school achievement patterns. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, *39*(4), 369-380.

Rumberger, R. W., Addis, H., Allensworth, E., Balfanz, R., Duardo, D., & Dynarski, M. (2017). Preventing dropout in secondary schools (NCEE 2017-4028). Washington DC: US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

Safir, S., & Dugan, J. (2021). *Street data: A next generation model for equity, pedagogy, and school transformation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Schildkamp, K., Poortman, C., Luyten, H., & Ebbeler, J. (2017). Factors promoting and hindering data-based decision making in schools. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *28*(2), 242–258.

Starck, J. G., Riddle, T., Sinclair, S., & Warikoo, N. (2020). Teachers are people too: Examining the racial bias of teachers compared to other American adults. *Educational Researcher*, *49*(4), 273-284.

Supovitz, J., & Sirinides, P. (2018). The linking study: An experiment to strengthen teachers' engagement with data on teaching and learning. *American Journal of Education*, *124*(2), 161–189.

Tierney, W. G., Bailey, T., Constantine, J., Finkelstein, N. D., & Hurd, N. F. (2009). Helping students navigate the path to college: What high schools can do. A practice guide. (NCEE #2009-4066). Washington DC: US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

United States Government Accountability Office. (2018). K-12 education discipline disparities for Black students, boys, and students with disabilities (GAO-18-258). Washington DC: US Government Accountability Office.

Yamaguchi, R., Jonas, D., Lynne, Schmidt, R. A., Sieber, M., Buffington, P., Neumayer DePiper, J., & Araoz, C. (2020). Algebra I and college preparatory diploma outcomes among Virginia students who completed Algebra I in grades 7–9 (REL 2021-038). Washington DC: US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

Yamaguchi, R., & Schmidt, R. A. (2021). How-to analysis resources: A review of high school mathematics course taking pathways among students who completed Algebra I in grade 7. Arlington, VA: Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia at SRI International.

Zhang, D., Katsiyannis, A., Ju, S., & Roberts, E. (2014). Minority representation in special education: 5-year trends. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 23, 118-127.

Jump to Table of Contents

These courses are available...with more on the way!

- Build Classroom Community: Cultivate a learning environment where a strong sense of community contributes to deeper learning
- Create and Communicate Clear Learning Targets: Create and use learning targets in planning, instruction, and assessment
- Facilitate Respectful Student to Student Conversations: Develop and support students' ability to engage with each other in respectful conversation, both speaking and listening, in a variety of settings
- Using Routines and Procedures to Strengthen Learning: Establish classroom routines and procedures that create the conditions for deeper learning

Information and Registration

Messaging Apps and Pandemic Induction: Supporting Newly Hired Teachers in Our Current Times

Angela W. Webb, Ph.D.

Angela W. Webb, Ph.D., is an associate professor of science education in the College of Education at James Madison University where she teaches graduate and undergraduate science methods courses, curriculum theory, and internship seminar. Her scholarship centers on the preparation and early career development of secondary science teachers, with a specific focus on meaning making and identity development during induction. She has provided professional development on inquiry, the nature of science, project-based learning, and co-teaching in science to middle and high school science teachers. She has also planned and facilitated mentoring workshops for K–12 teachers and university faculty. Before earning her Ph.D., she taught high school biology, physical science, and AP Environmental Science. Dr. Webb maintains a current teaching license in North Carolina and Virginia. Twitter @angelawwebb or webbaw@jmu.edu.

Abstract

Teacher educators have a key role in championing better beginnings for our graduates in the classroom. We can accomplish this in a variety of ways—serve as mentors to newly hired teachers, facilitate induction programs and professional learning communities, be available to provide resources and answer questions, etc. For many of us, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted the ways in which we support the newly hired teachers that graduate from our teacher education programs. I discuss the ways in which I used the group messaging app GroupMe to provide instructional and emotional support to recent graduates of the JMU Noyce Scholarship Program during their student teaching and first year in the classroom. Specifically, I will connect their needs and questions over the course of the pandemic with shared resources, current events, and Moir's (1999) stages of first-year teaching.

Even with the best preparation, newly hired teachers must gain significant knowledge and skills on the job (Bartell, 2005). This is true for well-started (i.e., exemplary) beginning teachers in ideal circumstances and truer still against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. As newly hired teachers grapple with gaining knowledge of their students, curriculum, and school contexts; designing and implementing responsive curriculum and instruction; enacting a beginning repertoire of practice in purposeful ways; creating a classroom learning community; and developing a professional identity (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, pp. 1027-1029), it is unsurprising that this phase of their careers can be overwhelming (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; see also Curry et al., 2016). Yet, school administrators, mentors and coaches, and university-based teacher educators are uniquely positioned to support newly hired teachers during the induction phase of their careers for better beginnings in the profession (Luft & Dubois, 2015).

Many programs, such as the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program, focus on the direct support teachers receive during teacher education and induction in an effort to increase the recruitment and retention of secondary science and mathematics teachers. James Madison University (JMU) was awarded an NSF Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship grant in 2018. We welcomed our first cohort of seven Noyce Scholars—all, at the time, students in either the senior year of their undergraduate degree (i.e., a content-area major and pre-professional secondary education minor) or their graduate year of the dual-degree secondary teacher education program—in fall 2019, and since then have developed and facilitated specific professional learning opportunities for the 28 Noyce Scholars and Teachers (i.e., program graduates who now work as full-time teachers) who participate in our program. The professional learning opportunities and induction supports planned and facilitated for our Noyce Scholars and Teachers have been discussed elsewhere (Cresawn et al., 2021; Higdon et al., 2020; Webb et al., 2021; Webb et al., 2020). So, here I focus on an often-overlooked piece of our Noyce community: a GroupMe chat thread set up with a subset of our first cohort of Scholars as they entered the final year of their dual-degree (bachelors & masters), initial

teacher licensure Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program.

Teacher Induction

When we consider the induction of newly hired teachers, it is easy to skim over the multiple ways induction is ever-present in their lives. According to Feiman-Nemser and colleagues (1999), the term induction is used to refer to (a) a unique stage or phase of teacher development, (b) a process of socialization into the teaching profession, and (c) a specific and formal program. Yet, "thinking about induction as a phase in teacher development and a process of teacher socialization reminds us that, for better or for worse, induction happens with or without a formal program" (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999, p. 4-5)—and, as we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, even when physically absent from the school building. Therefore, when thinking about working for better beginnings in the classroom for newly hired teachers, the multiple meanings of induction cannot be ignored. That is, these ways of considering induction are always-already intertwined for newly hired teachers and they are inducted into the teaching profession regardless

The GroupMe chat discussed here provides a more informal, community-centered, responsive context in which [new teachers] work their way through transitioning into their new roles.

of prevailing circumstances. It is from this premise that I consider the use of the group messaging application, **GroupMe**, as a means of supporting the induction of our JMU Noyce Scholars. The way in which GroupMe became a source of community and support for this group was somewhat unintentional, yet it speaks to the power of connection and camaraderie during challenging times—the first year of teaching in general and the first year of teaching during a pandemic specifically.

When it comes to support for teacher development, induction that includes a range of "teacher learning opportunities, such as mentoring, coaching, and networking" (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015, p. 164) provides a structure within which newly hired teachers engage in the central learning tasks of this phase of their careers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Specifically, during this time in their careers, newly hired teachers grapple with gaining knowledge of their students, curriculum, and school contexts; designing and implementing responsive curriculum and instruction; enacting a beginning repertoire of practice in purposeful ways; creating a classroom learning community; and developing a professional identity (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, pp. 1027-1029). Various components and activities of our Noyce Scholarship Program offer specific and structured ways for Noyce Teachers (i.e., program graduates who now work as full-time teachers) to engage in these learning tasks. For instance, Noyce Teachers participate in a week-long induction academy during the summer between their teacher education program and their first year as classroom teachers (Higdon et al., 2020; Webb et al., 2021; Webb et al., 2020). Throughout their first year of teaching, they also have opportunities to engage in structured and just-in-time professional learning community meetings within and across cohorts (Cresawn et al., 2021; Webb et al., 2021). Yet, the GroupMe chat discussed here provides a more informal, community-centered, responsive context in which Noyce Teachers can think and work their way through transitioning into their new teacher roles with fellow Noyce Program graduates and two members of the Noyce team, both former high school science teachers.

Stages of a First-Year Teacher

Over two decades ago, Moir (1999) noted distinct patterns in how over 1,500 newly hired teachers perceived and responded to the first year of teaching. These patterns fell into five different phases—(a) anticipation, (b) survival, (c) disillusionment, (d) rejuvenation, and (e) reflection—that can be used to help us better understand this unique and challenging time in a teacher's career trajectory. A brief overview of these five phases (Moir, 1999) follows:

- *Anticipation phase* extends from the practical, field-based experience of teacher education (i.e., student teaching) into the beginning weeks of the school year. At the beginning of the anticipation phase, newly hired teachers tend to hold an idealized view of their teaching role and are highly committed to their chosen career; anticipation continues until the newly hired teacher acclimates to the daily routine of being a teacher.
- *Survival phase* occurs from a few weeks into the first semester until about two months into that semester. During this phase, newly hired teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time on curriculum planning, their sense of work-life balance fades, and they begin to feel overwhelmed by the demands of their work. The survival phase is also marked by an increasingly apparent disconnect between teacher education and the reality of school life.
- *Disillusionment phase* extends from the middle of the first semester to winter break. During this time, newly hired teachers' stress increases as the expectations of their jobs ramp up; efficacy and esteem drop as they face increasing stress of criticism from a variety of stakeholders.
- *Rejuvenation phase* occurs after the winter break when the newly hired teacher has had time to rest and refresh, returning to the school environment refocused. In this phase, newly hired teachers experience increased optimism and confidence, and a new focus on being more strategic in their classroom instruction and planning for the subsequent year.
- *Reflection phase* occurs in the later months of the second (spring) semester. During this time, newly hired teachers assess the year's challenges, as well as their strengths and accomplishments. They begin envisioning their futures and the changes they will make to improve their own and students' success.

Moir's (1999) descriptions of these phases have been used to help school administrators, mentors and coaches, university-based teacher educators, and others better conceptualize the experiences of novice teachers so that

positive interventions for support might be planned and developed. In the context of our Noyce GroupMe chat, understanding these phases of the first year of teaching also informed, to an extent, some of the resources we shared and when we shared them.

Technology use in classrooms has ballooned in recent decades, with the pandemic sparking rapid adoption of digital tools and technologies to support teaching and learning.

Using GroupMe with Noyce Scholarship Program Graduates during COVID

Technology use in classrooms has ballooned in recent decades, with the pandemic sparking rapid adoption of digital tools and technologies to support teaching and learning. As technology continues to become ubiquitous in education, "it is critical that we begin to take a look at how we can use technology to improve communication and collaboration among teachers, parents, staff, and members of the community" (Cosier et al., 2015, p. 357). For instance, text messaging use among colleagues within the same school can enable collaboration for adapting instruction, communicating about student behavior, and reviewing student progress toward goals (Cosier et al., 2015). Social media and messaging apps can also support interactions among teachers beyond individual schools to foster community and promote professional learning and reflection (Carpenter & Green, 2017; Choo et al., 2016; Xue et al., 2021).

Our GroupMe chat first started when then-Scholars engaged in August Experience in the summer before their final year in the teacher education program. During August Experience, Scholars shadowed local high school science and mathematics teachers on the last teacher workday and first day of school to learn more about the preparations behind effective first-day plans that focus on setting up the cooperative learning environment and establishing what is expected of students in that environment (Brooks, 1985; Wong & Wong, 2018). This critical time sets the tone of the school year for students and teachers alike; yet this piece of teachers' work is often unseen

by preservice teachers during their teacher education program. To support Scholars' sense-making of their time at the local high school, each of the two days of August Experience began and ended with discussion and reflection among our small learning community. This small learning community consisted of three Scholars in our first cohort* (one science teacher candidate; two mathematics teacher candidates) and two members of the Noyce team (one science teacher educator and one chemistry lecturer; both former high school science teachers). GroupMe was used during August Experience by our small learning community to communicate with Scholars about logistics (e.g., where and when to meet) and ask/answer just-in-time questions. After August Experience, the GroupMe chat was quiet during the fall semester. As one of the Noyce team members facilitating this group chat, I posted a message of good luck in January 2020 at the start of the Scholars' student teaching semester. Questions of managing self-care and the expectations of student teaching soon followed. Resources were shared and then we went about our spring semesters as usual. That is, until March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States and its educational institutions full force.

It is conceivable that this global event changed the trajectory of our collective GroupMe chat as the pandemic unfolded, though we can never know the true extent of this. Figures 1 and 2 showcase the topics discussed in our GroupMe chat alongside milestones in Scholars' teacher education program and careers as well as major events in our country. Specifically, the timeline begins in January 2020 with the start of Scholars' student teaching semester (Figure 1) and ends in August 2021 as they begin their second year of teaching (Figure 2).

As student teachers and then first-year teachers with the Noyce Scholarship Program, participants engaged in the GroupMe chat in these ways: (a) posed questions related to science/mathematics instruction, logistical aspects of

*Note: The remaining four Scholars in our first cohort were not yet in the last year of their teacher education program in August 2019 and, therefore, did not participate in August Experience during the time discussed here.

teaching, and self-care; (b) responded to one another's questions and shared relevant resources; (c) posted memes; and (d) shared good news as well as worries. The Noyce team members that functioned as facilitators in this space—again, one science teacher educator and one chemistry lecturer;

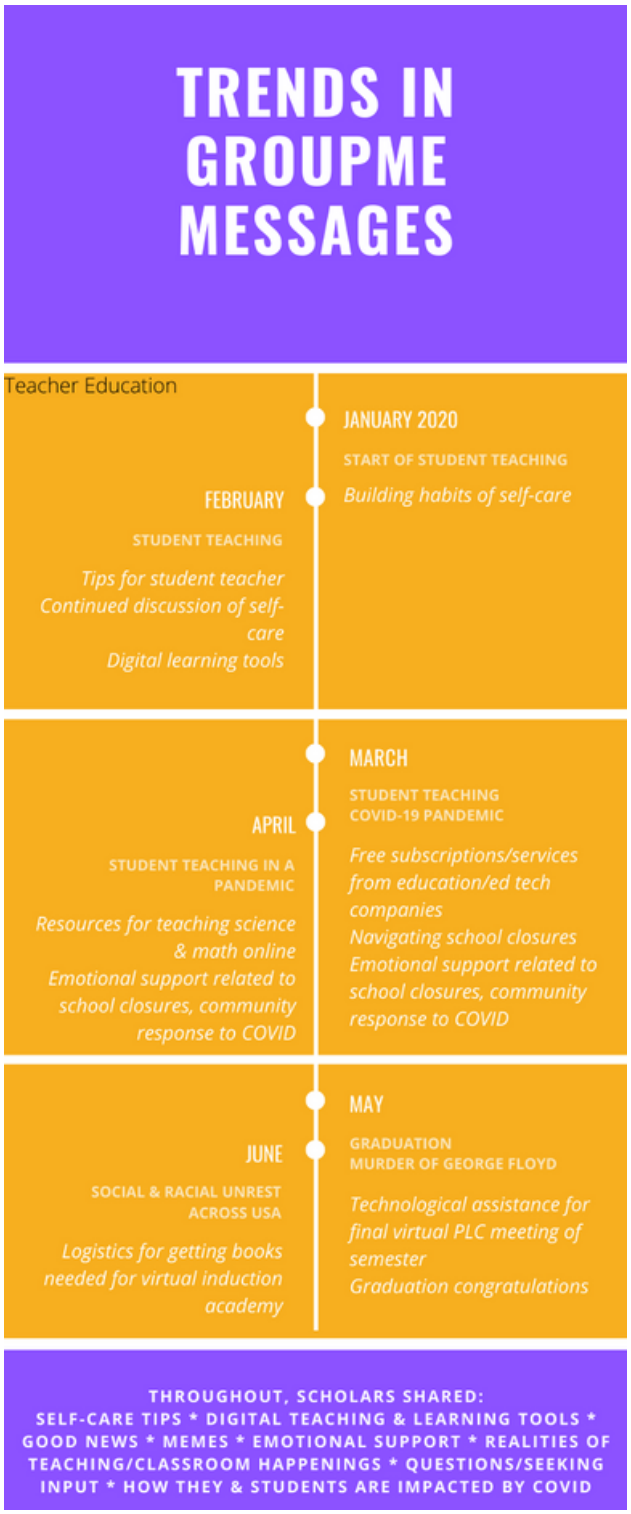


Figure 1

Trends in GroupMe Messages during Student Teaching

Messaging Apps and Pandemic Induction

Figure 2 *Trends in GroupMe Messages during First Year of Teaching*. The timeframes in this figure are grouped by Moir's (1999) stages in the first year of teaching, as identified in the upper left corner of each section. This is done to highlight the ways in which teachers' concerns—as evidenced by themes in GroupMe messages—did and did not align with Moir's stages.

both former high school science teachers—responded to questions and shared just-in-time resources that could be used immediately by the Noyce Teachers. For instance, when teaching—and thus, student teaching—pivoted to online or remote instruction in March 2020, I shared the link to an **article** detailing what teachers in the Unites States could learn from teachers in China about navigating pandemic teaching and learning. After the January 6, 2021 attack on the United States Capitol, I posted to the GroupMe an **article** of resources for teaching on the coming days.

It would stand to reason that the topics of participants' questions and posts might follow Moir's (1999) phases of the first year of teaching. Yet, those connections seemed loose at best. This is likely a direct consequence of the pandemic itself. Teachers, regardless of years of experience, were abruptly asked to do their jobs in notably different ways than they were prepared. Concurrently, teachers also faced unfolding racial and political unrest as they navigated the turning tides of society's opinions of them and their work (e.g., Strauss, 2021; Will, 2021). In this sense, it could be argued that the newly hired Noyce Teachers oscillated between anticipation, survival, and disillusionment (Moir, 1999) as the pandemic continued to unfold, never having a chance to benefit from sufficient stability to move from survival and disillusionment to rejuvenation and reflection.

As recently graduated Noyce Teachers tried to prepare for their first days in the classroom (Fall 2020), they faced fraught anticipation with ever-changing COVID responses and school reopening plans. There were few opportunities to acclimate to daily routines due to pandemic disruptions to their lives, students' and colleagues' lives, and instructional plans. The survival phase (Moir, 1999) experienced by Noyce Teachers was likely extended as they struggled to plan (what they felt was) effective and caring instruction across a variety of formats (e.g., remote, virtual, hybrid) and find a sense of balance in their pandemic lives. Rather than moving through distinct anticipation, survival, and disillusionment phases (Moir, 1999), Noyce Teachers undulated among waves of anticipation, survival, and disillusionment, at times co-existing in more than one of these phases. Given this, the experiences of

newly hired teachers during the pandemic beg the questions: As we move forward in supporting newly hired teachers across the Commonwealth, how might their needs be different than what, based on prior research (e.g., Moir, 1999), we tend to assume, and how might induction take shape within our new, post-COVID realities? Do somewhat unconventional means of building supportive teacher networks and communities, such as by utilizing group messaging apps, have a place in teacher induction moving forward?

Our shared, group messaging space blossomed during the pandemic into a space for just-in-time resources, connection, and community.

Takeaways

It is not always possible to predict the ways in which newly hired teachers will engage with the various supports offered to them during induction—especially during a global pandemic. The GroupMe chat we set up with then-Scholars ahead of their August Experience in fall 2019 became a familiar, supportive community that this group came back to again and again as (a) the pandemic disrupted their student teaching and cast doubt on how the student teaching experience would "count" for their teacher licensure; (b) they started their first year of teaching with ever-changing divisional back-to-school plans; and (c) navigated, along with their colleagues and students, the pandemic as well as racial, social, and political unrest in our country. Our shared, group messaging space blossomed during the pandemic into a space for just-in-time resources, connection, and community.

Although I have shared here one example of how university-based teacher educators can use group messaging apps to support their program graduates, the practical possibilities of using GroupMe or similar messaging apps are extensive and the barriers to engagement are low. With schools back in full swing and without significant barriers to in-person learning, a

GroupMe chat could be used similarly with newly hired teachers (within a department, school, or division) to offer a space and community for questioning and reflecting on one's practice. It is common for first-year teachers to begin to realize the differences in their idealism and the realities of teaching (Hoy & Spero, 2005); this may be in even sharper contrast against our new, pandemic-shaped realities. A welcoming, accessible, and low-stakes space afforded by group messaging applications like GroupMe enables newly hired teachers to grapple with these realizations in a safe space, while also receiving support to teach in ambitious and equitable ways (see Xue et al., 2021).

As a science teacher educator, the additional examples I offer below are specific to supporting science teachers. However, I invite readers to consider these examples in light of their specific role and context and with regard to the specific teacher population they aim to support. Other uses of GroupMe or similar group messaging apps can also include:

- Instructional leaders within a school's science department setting up a GroupMe group for all the newly hired science teachers. Teachers in the group could ask and respond to questions or share resources and ideas, such as from STEM Teaching Tools, about teaching science equitably or using the core practices of ambitious science teaching.
- Division science coordinators using GroupMe to connect and support teachers across school sites who might not have subject-like colleagues at their schools (e.g., physics teachers). This could increase community and collaboration for teachers who might otherwise feel isolated.

Once norms for engagement in the group messaging app are co-constructed among participants, the seeds of potential will be planted for a burgeoning space of connection, support, and community.

Acknowledgements

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1758433. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

I sincerely appreciate my colleague and co-facilitator, David Wilson, for the value he added to the GroupMe chat by answering questions, addressing concerns, providing resources, and celebrating the successes of our Noyce Teachers. Additionally, I gratefully acknowledge my other colleagues with the JMU Robert Noyce Scholarship Program for their contributions to our grant activities and their advocacy and support of science and mathematics teacher education (in alphabetical order): David Carothers, Kerry Owens Cresawn, Jenny Gibson, Robbie Higdon, Scott Paulson, Eric Pyle, Barbara Reisner, and Mike Renfroe.

Jump to Table of Contents

References

Bartell, C. A. (2005). *Cultivating high-quality teaching through induction and mentoring*. Corwin.

Brooks, D. M. (1985). The first day of school. *Educational Leadership*, *42*(8), 76–78.

Carpenter, J. P., & Green, T. D. (2017). Mobile instant messaging for professional learning: Educators' perspectives on and uses of Voxer. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 68, 53–67.

Choo, Y. B., Onn, H., Nawi, M. A. M., & Abdullah, T. (2016). Supporting and improving reflective practice among pre-service teachers through Whatsapp. *Jurnal Pendidikan Nusantara*, *2*(1), 53–72.

Cosier, M., Gomez, A., McKee, A., & Maghzi, K. S. (2015). Smart phones permitted: How teachers use text messaging to collaborate. *Education and Information Technologies*, *20*(2), 347–358.

Cresawn, K., Webb, A., & Higdon, R. (2021, September). Building community and creating professional learning opportunities for Noyce scholars during the pandemic. Presentation at the Mid-Atlantic Association for Science Teacher Education Regional Conference, Blowing Rock, NC.

Curry, J. R., Webb, A. W., & Latham,S. J. (2016). A content analysis of images of novice teacher induction: First semester themes. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, *6*(1), 43–65. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/jerap/vol6/iss1/4/

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 103, 1013–1055.

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2003). What new teachers need to learn. *Educational Leadership*, 60, 25–29.

Feiman-Nemser, S., Schwille, S., Carver, C., & Yusko, B. (1999). A Conceptual Review of Literature on New Teacher Induction. National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED449147.pdf

Higdon, R., Webb, A., & Pyle, E. (2020, September). Induction into the great unknown: Supporting newly hired science and mathematics teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Presentation at the Mid-Atlantic Association for Science Teacher Education Regional Conference (virtual conference). https://voicethread.com/myvoice/thread/15474180/96669164

Hoy, A. W., & Spero, R. B. (2005). Changes in teacher efficacy during the early years of teaching: A comparison of four measures. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *21*(4), 343-356.

Luft, J. A., & Dubois, S. L. (2015). A better beginning: Supporting our newly hired science teachers. In J. A. Luft & S. L. Dubois (Eds.), *Newly hired teachers of science: A better beginning* (pp. ix-xii). Sense Publishers.

Moir, E. (1999). The stages of a teacher's first year. In M. Sherer (Ed.), *A better beginning: Supporting and mentoring new teachers*. ASCD

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2015). Science Teachers Learning: Enhancing Opportunities, Creating Supportive Contexts. Committee on Strengthening Science Education through a Teacher Learning Continuum. Board on Science Education and Teacher Advisory Council, Division of Behavioral and Social Science and Education. The National Academies Press.

Strauss, V. (2021, September 27). School superintendent asks: 'Who would want to be a teacher right now?'. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/09/27/pandemic-teacher-shortage-nationwide/

Webb, A., Higdon, R., & Cresawn, K. (2021, November). Supporting science teachers during and after COVID-19. Presentation at the 2021 Virginia Association of Science Teachers Professional Development Institute, Harrisonburg, VA.

Webb, A. W., Higdon, R., & Pyle, E. J. (2020). Induction into the great unknown: Supporting newly hired science and math teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. VASCD Journal. http://vascd.org/uploads/fall-2020.pdf

Will, M. (2021, January 25). Has the public turned on teachers? At first deemed pandemic heroes, some now feel like villains. EducationWeek. https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/has-the-public-turned-on-teachers/2021/01

Wong, H. K., & Wong, R. T. (2018). T*he first days of school: How to be an effective teacher*. Harry K. Wong Publications, Inc.

Xue, S., Hu, X., Chi, X., & Zhang, J. (2021). Building an online community of practice through WeChat for teacher professional learning. *Professional Development in Education*, *47*(4), 613–637. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1647273

Jump to Table of Contents

Thank You to Our SPONSORS

Virginia Educators' Quick Start Guide to General Assembly Advocacy

Laurie McCullough, EdD

Dr. McCullough's experience includes teaching at all levels from elementary school to University, as well as both building and division leadership in Albemarle, Waynesboro, and Charlottesville Public Schools. She served for 9 years as Executive Director of Virginia ASCD. Since retiring in early 2022, Laurie has been consulting with schools and organizations on design and implementation of microcredentials as well as on strategies for instructional coaching.

H. Alan Seibert, EdD

Dr. Seibert served as VASCD President from 2020-2022 and was recently appointed to the State Board of Education. He has 32 years of public education experience in Virginia at the elementary, middle, secondary and division levels, including 15 years as Superintendent in Salem City Schools. Upon retirement, Alan began serving part-time in Roanoke City Schools where he established the Constituent Services and Government Relations Office. Dr. Seibert earned his masters at Radford, his bachelors and doctorate at Virginia Tech, and serves as an adjunct instructor for both universities.

General Assembly Advocacy

As public educators, we often find ourselves on the receiving end of policy decisions that, at times, may seem unproductive, counterproductive, or even nonsensical. At the same time, we are bemoaning the apparent lack of understanding of "real school" by decision makers, we may shy away from engaging in policy work ourselves. Our plates are already full, our attention is on our students, and the political arena may be an unfamiliar or uncomfortable place for us.

In most Virginia communities, there are teachers and administrators who attend and participate in local school board meetings, often advocating for resources and programs that will benefit their students. Learning to navigate the policy landscape at the state level is less familiar and a bit more challenging to navigate, but we would suggest that even small actions can make a difference.

This Quick Start Guide is intended for those who aren't yet familiar with the workings of the Virginia General Assembly, but who are interested in making a difference through advocacy. We'll briefly address five steps you can take to become effective advocates: *understanding where decisions are made; building relationships with legislators; preparing for the legislative session; staying informed during the legislative session; and following up to sustain your influence*. Learning the ropes of policy making can be time consuming. Understandably, many educators see this as a barrier to engagement. We hope that this guide will be helpful to those who are interested in advocacy and need a starting point.

Understand Where Decisions Are Made

Effective advocacy may require a civics refresher for some educators who are understandably focused on their students and considerable regular responsibilities. Understanding the roles of various governing bodies ensures that advocacy efforts are directed toward the appropriate representatives.

Like the US Government, the Virginia government has three branches: Executive (Governor), Legislative (the Virginia General Assembly) and Judicial

(the Courts). And like the US Congress, which consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives, the Virginia General Assembly is also bicameral. It includes the Virginia Senate and the House of Delegates. When both houses of the General Assembly pass a bill and it is signed by the Governor, it becomes Virginia Law as part of the **Code of Virginia**.

Once the legislative session begins, each proposed bill is assigned to a committee in the House or Senate- wherever the bill originated. These committees have subcommittees where bills make their first stops. Subcommittee meetings are where bills can be discussed in most detail, and where most changes are made. Those that pass in subcommittee go next to the appropriate committee. In the House of Delegates, education-related policies are considered (and often changed or defeated) in the Education Committee. In the Virginia Senate, legislative proposals are first debated in the Education and Health Committee.

Great ideas only become reality if they are funded! These decisions are made in the Appropriations Committee (House) and Finance and Appropriations Committee (Senate). Bills that survive the Committee process and are approved for funding (if needed) will "cross over" for consideration by the other house; if passed by both House and Senate, they go to the Governor's desk for his signature.

The **Virginia Board of Education** (BOE) makes policy within the parameters of law. The BOE has regulatory authority as long as their decisions do not violate the Virginia Code. **BOE Members** are appointed by the Governor to four-year terms. Though they come from various geographic regions, they are not representative of specific districts. Any Board member should be responsive to issues from any Virginia resident.

Tips:

- When you contact your representative about an issue of concern, make sure that the responsibility for that issue lies with the appropriate governing body (for example, avoid the embarrassment of lobbying your

US Senator about a mandate in the Code of Virginia).

- Make sure you know whether the policy of interest to you is legislative (General Assembly) or regulatory (Board of Education). For example, the Code of Virginia mandates achievement and growth measures as part of the accreditation standards for schools, but it is Board of Education regulations that specify what those measures are and how they are used to calculate accreditation ratings.

What You Can DO

Know the district you live in and who your representatives are. You can get that information here by simply entering your address.

Watch public meetings of the Virginia Senate and House Education Committees and the Board of Education online to become familiar with their processes and issues.

Build Relationships

The Virginia General Assembly is a "part-time" legislature, meeting for sixty days in even years and 45 days in odd years. Things move fast; during the session may not the best time to introduce yourself to your legislators. Educators know the importance of relationships and building trust; these are as important in advocacy work as they are in our classrooms. Reach out to your legislators each summer or fall when they have some time and bandwidth outside of the General Assembly Session for a more relaxed conversation. Use this outreach to introduce yourself, share where you serve, and establish yourself as a thoughtful and engaged professional.

Every Delegate and Senator is important to the future of public education, but connections with those who serve on the education and money committees listed in the section above are particularly important. You can see the

committees and subcommittees on which your legislators serve by clicking on their names here.

Tips:

- Make appointments with your legislators before you have a concern to discuss with them. Introduce yourself as a constituent, a voter, and a professional who is working on behalf of Virginia students and educators.
- If the legislator is not available but a Legislative Aide (LA) can meet with you, do it! The LAs are often the people who are drafting proposals and sifting through all the noise to relay important information and perspectives (like yours!) to Senators and Delegates.
- Establish yourself as a helper, not a critic! Share something about yourself that makes you a valuable resource. Perhaps you teach in an innovative program, work with English Language Learners, or lead a school that is in improvement. Experiences like these give you insight that can be important for legislators to understand. You may want to extend an invitation for a visit to your school or classroom. Most legislators welcome insights and experiences of professionals who understand education issues better than they do. You can help them make good decisions by sharing what you know.

What You Can DO

Once you have a meeting scheduled, find out the Committees on which your representative serves. Go to this link and click on the member's name.

Begin the meeting by introducing yourself as a constituent and educator, and someone who is interested in helping the representative by providing research, information, and/ or perspectives from your school.

Ask about the legislator's education-related concerns. If these are issues where you have interest and/or expertise, offer to provide research, information from your school, or experiences of your own that may be helpful.

At the end of the meeting, leave your name and contact information, and ask if you may follow up with a call or email. This gives you an opportunity to stay in touch and maximizes the opportunity to influence legislative proposals.

General Assembly Advocacy

Prepare in the Fall for the New Season

Don't wait until the next General Assembly Session! The time between sessions is when legislators are "at home," which is often the best opportunity for them to receive and consider opinions, issues, and perspectives for their use to craft proposals and look for support among fellow representatives.

By the time the session begins in January, proposals have already been crafted. Your influence can make a difference if you have an established relationship with your representatives and provide input early in the process. Find out about issues of concern in your community by talking to division-level administrators. For example, Directors of Testing are well-informed about potential changes in the assessment system, and content area specialists often know about concerns surrounding SOL revisions. Human Resources staff will be aware of licensure changes, and your local school board will know about- and possibly be advocating for- funding proposals.

Tips:

- Understand education-related concerns in your school/community to determine which are best addressed through state-level policy changes vs. local issues that should be entrusted to local school boards.
- Your local school board, superintendent, and local government will likely establish local positions. Offer them your professional experiences and context. Stay informed as they share their positions with legislators, so that you can follow up to support or offer additional perspective.
- Remember that your perspectives are as a constituent and an educator. Check for local school board policies that likely require you to be clear that your views are your own.

What You Can DO

Contact your legislators in the fall to inquire about what they are thinking/hearing about possible education policy and to (again) establish yourself as a resource. Listen and share issues of concern or interest to you.

Subscribe to VASCD policy updates here to get information and alerts about issues of concern.

Stay Informed During the Session

Once the General Assembly convenes, the legislative process moves at very high speed.Bills are rapidly amended, defeated, or passed so "real time" information and insight are necessary to engage in a timely manner and to avoid missing opportunities entirely.

Following the work of the General Assembly during the session is facilitated by employing multiple techniques, including bill tracking using the Legislative Information System (LIS), following livestreams of meetings of particular interest (or watching the recordings on your own schedule), and subscribing to updates from professional organizations for alerts.

Tips:

- Legislative lingo" can be confusing. Here is a resource to assist you in familiarizing yourself with the terminology used in the General Assembly: https://sgr.virginia.edu/frequently-used-terms.
- Follow bills of interest closely. Use the Legislative Information System (LIS) to track bills of interest, identify committee members, and committee meeting dates/times. Committee meetings are livestreamed and recorded.

General Assembly Advocacy

- The Education Committees receive public comment on all bills, and public comment can be provided via email, live online/remote testimony, or in-person comments. If you are able to speak in committee, be aware that your time will be limited to anywhere from 1-3 minutes, depending on how many speakers there are.
- Your best opportunity for influence through public testimony is in subcommittee meetings, where most of the discussion and debate happens, and where proposals are most often revised. However, be aware that full committees will likely not hear your testimony on a given bill if you have already spoken in subcommittee.

What You Can DO

Follow VASCD's Bill Tracker for real-time updates on the status of bills in process. Watch for a link to the bill tracker in your fall VASCD newsletters.

Engage by contacting your legislators by phone or email. Even if you can't talk to anyone, leave a clear message including a bill number and your position on the bill-legislative offices keep track of these calls!

When you can, show up to subcommittee and committee meetings, and sign up to testify.

Encourage colleagues to write, call, and testify as well. Numbers matter!

Follow Up

When the General Assembly session ends, your work as an advocate should continue! We recommend staying in touch with your legislators. Perhaps you can thank them for their support of a proposal you advocated for; if not, perhaps you can thank them for their time and their work. It's likely that the General Assembly will have taken at least some actions you opposed; all the more reason to continue nurturing relationships and staying in touch.

General Assembly Advocacy

In the months following the close of the legislative session, attention to the Board of Education's work becomes particularly important. Bills that pass the General Assembly and are signed into law by the Governor generally require regulations promulgated by the Virginia Board of Education (BOE) to implement. Often how a bill is implemented is just as important as what the bill requires. It is very important to follow the implementation of legislation by staying informed on BOE actions. The Board of Education meets monthly. Agendas are published in advance, and meetings are livestreamed and recorded for later viewing. Meeting information and links to view are available here.

Tips:

- BOE agendas are published prior to meetings **at this link**. Public comment is taken at the beginning of each business meeting. Comments may also be submitted via **this public comment** form and will be distributed to all Board members.
- Staff at the Department of Education have a great deal of background knowledge and expertise related to Board policies. If you have questions or need information that will help you formulate well-informed communication to the Board about a particular issue, do not hesitate to contact the appropriate staff at VDOE. A directory by department can be found **here**.

What You Can DO

Sign up for Board of Education email alerts. They will remind you of upcoming meetings and include links to view meetings and send comments.

Use your voice! Comments that are submitted by email are shared with all Board members, and there are also opportunities at every public meeting to speak live.

Encourage colleagues to join you, providing their own input to Board members. Remember……numbers matter!

General Assembly Advocacy

The most effective advocacy isn't showing up for a protest or attending a rally for your preferred candidate. Those activities may be important to you and they send a message, but they don't shape policy. Highly emotional (or even hostile) communications, like firing off an angry email in ALL CAPS to a legislator, can in fact have an effect that is opposite the one you desire. Advocacy is about building ongoing relationships with policy makers in a bipartisan manner that leverages your professional expertise, so that when things do heat up, you are a trusted voice.

Jump to Table of Contents

VASCD's Policy Priorities for 2022-2023

Outstanding Educators for Virginia's Students

- Recruiting and retaining the very best educators requires coordination and collaboration
- Decision makers must align their actions with evidence regarding the factors that actually influence teachers' decisions to enter, stay, and grow in their positions

We must **elevate the profession** and champion **autonomy with integrity** from policy to the practitioner.

Modernizing Virginia's Assessment System

- Virginia's Profile of a Graduate must serve as a beacon to align the written, taught, and assessed curriculum
- A comprehensive and aligned assessment and accountability system is essential and must include multiple measures of proficiency, growth, and performance

Virginia's student assessment **system** must **support and align** with today's **student learning goals**.

Personalized Learning for Educators

- Students' demonstration of learning must reflect real-world contexts
- Educators' learning must be immediately relevant to their jobs and able to be demonstrated in the ways they plan, deliver, and assess learning for their students

Educators must have **relevant, competency-based professional learning** opportunities.

WHO WE ARE

Virginia ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), an affiliate of ASCD, is a membership organization dedicated to advancing excellence in Virginia's schools. We have 1,800 members in Virginia who are teachers, superintendents, teacher educators, building leaders, students, and central office administrators. We represent a variety of roles and share a single purpose - ensuring a world-class education for every Virginia student.

VIRGINIA ASCD Advocacy

2023 VASCD AWARDS

IMPACT LEADERSHIP TEAM

VIRGINIA ASCD
Learn. Teach. Lead.

NOMINATIONS DUE DECEMBER 16!
https://bit.ly/2023VASCDAwards

You know outstanding educators.
We want to recognize, support, and celebrate them.

VASCD's **Impact Award** is presented to multiple Virginia educators each year to recognize their positive impact on colleagues and/or students. Impact award recipients may serve in any capacity in education, as long as there is evidence that their work exemplifies great teaching and a significant positive influence on others.

VASCD's **Leadership Award** is presented to one Virginia educator annually for outstanding leadership in curriculum, instruction, and/or assessment. Nominees are those leaders whose understanding of and dedication to best instructional practice is reflected both in the nominee's own work and in the work of those (s)he leads.

VASCD's **Team Award** is presented to a group of 3 or more Virginia educators who work collaboratively to achieve specific goals that have a significant positive impact on student and/or educator learning. These teams may be teachers, building administrators, central office staff, or some combination of these categories. These teams influence, impact, and inspire others to implement innovative practices that improve learning.

Nominations due December 16, 2022.
bit.ly/2023VASCDAwards

2022 VASCD Leadership Award Recipient

Melissa "Missy" Hensley

Melissa "Missy" Hensley is principal of Harrisonburg High School in Harrisonburg City Public Schools. She has been the Lead Learner at every school she has served. She gives her best every day and expects nothing less from her staff. She is a talented leader and cultivator of leadership and excellence from students and those with whom she works. Her passion for instruction creates great determination to improve teaching and learning. This passion, along with her sense of humor, respectful manner, and openness to new ideas, creates an ability to develop strong connections to adults and students. These connections are the foundation for her work to drive innovation and change toward a new vision of education. Her push for change includes creating innovative and collaborative work and learning spaces, hands-on – minds-on pedagogy, teacher autotomy, student ownership, and a mindset around learning by doing. Missy balances these practical approaches to change with data informed decision-making. As data driven has become a major focus in some schools, Missy has remained student driven but data informed. utotomy, student ownership, and a mindset around learning by doing. Missy balances these practical approaches to change with data informed decision-making.

2022 VASCD Impact Award Recipients

Robert "Peyton" Anderson

Peyton Anderson is currently the Coordinator of Professional Learning for Chesterfield County Public Schools. The many roles in his career --- some of them being middle school teacher, PBL specialist, Learning and Leading Design Specialist, and now Coordinator of Professional Learning --- have increased his impact on teaching and learning. As PBL specialist, he developed institutional capacity for PBL through recruitment, training and coaching. While working as a Learning and Design Specialist he supported multiple programs that deepened learning for teachers and leaders. As Coordinator of Professional Learning he launched an employee badging program to ensure the annual professional development requirements would build capacity of all teachers across all 65 schools. In addition, his efforts to strengthen his department with additional staff allowed the division to redesign their annual CCPS Leadership Academy to be conducted virtually and to provide virtual professional development opportunities to all teachers.

Sierrah Chavis

Sierrah Chavis is a Curriculum Specialist/Instructional Coach at Samuel P. Morton Elementary School in Franklin City Public Schools, where she provides coaching for K-5 teachers on curriculum and best teaching practices. She also coordinates cross-content integrated opportunities for an instructional program that may include reading, writing, math, science, social studies, STEM, service learning, and/or instructional technology. While working with Centura College she created a program for young women with low self-esteem. She is someone who displays a passion for educating students and has proven herself to be a remarkably responsible, organized, tenacious and confident leader.

2022 VASCD Impact Award Recipients

Abigail (Abby) French

Abby French is a 7th grade social studies teacher at Frederick County Middle School in Frederick County Public Schools. She is a teacher who focuses on the whole child. As an instructional leader across the Commonwealth, Abigail regularly presents on equity and high quality project-based learning practices. She has presented at various conferences. A strong supporter of the value of micro-credentials as a means for advancing personalized professional growth, she has taken advantage of this opportunity provided by VASCD. A leader on a national level, Abigail has been recognized as an ASCD Emerging Leader and routinely engages with colleagues across the nation related to providing students with high quality and authentic learning opportunities.

Debbie Gilbert

Debbie Gilbert is principal of Parry McClure Middle School in Buena Vista City Public Schools. Her entire career has been within Buena Vista. She is a life-long learner who actively seeks opportunities to increase and improve her skills as an educator and leader. Throughout her career she has maintained high expectations for everyone, including herself. She has mentored many educators. At times she appears to be very stern, but she looks out for everyone. Her influence has engaged her community to impact the students of the division. Her efforts have included donations of everything from a pick-up truck, to appliances, to birthday cakes for students to have at school and to take home. She has worked to assure that every student and his/her family within the whole division, not just her school, have a Thanksgiving dinner. At her own school she established a school store, "The Giving Tree," where students can shop --at no cost -- for clothing, shoes and personal hygiene items.

Andrea Ross

Andrea Ross is the Director of Federal Programs in Caroline County Public Schools. Andrea's leadership has enabled the county to receive approximately $10,000 in grants during her time within the division. She forms and shepherds collaborative teams through grant writing and demonstrates great attention to detail throughout the process. Andrea's effective use of communication, collaboration, critical, and creative thinking has resulted in additional funds to allow Caroline County to provide enhanced programs such as the Caroline Summer Academy/Extravaganza; staffing to support before/after school programs and tutoring; professional development for staff; funds to support family engagement; and many other needed items. In addition, she provided leadership for the adoption of a decentralized Family Engagement Program by establishing a family engagement coordinator at each of the five schools in Caroline County. Her vision was to increase emphasis on engaging and empowering families to support their students academically, behaviorally, and socially-emotionally. She built on these efforts by creating a community bus known as the Caroline Cruiser which goes out to families, sharing free educational resources, school supplies, clothing, books, learning kits, and connecting parents, families and students to wrap-around services to ensure all learners are successful in school and in life. The impact of her work is seen throughout Caroline County Public Schools and its community.

2022 VASCD Impact Award Recipients

Laura "Paige" Swaim

Paige Swaim is a Special Education Teacher who works with students on the Autism spectrum at Western Branch Middle School in Chesapeake Public Schools. Currently, Mrs. Swaim serves as a teacher for students with Autism in a self-contained model. All of her students have significant developmental, academic, and social needs. While many may find teaching students with special needs challenging, Ms. Swaim is a devoted teacher who has a strong passion to work with students who require time and endless attention. She works to provide individualized educational opportunities for each of her students. She has created sensory hallways within the school and a sensory garden on its grounds to enhance the experiences not only of her students, but of all students in the school.

Sundar Thirukkurungudi

Sundar Thirukkurungudi, is a teacher at the Academies of Loudoun in Loudoun County Public Schools. Sundar or Mr. T teaches MultiVariable Calculus; mentors Engineering Research; advises the VEX Club and QuartNet; serves as CLT Leader of Integrated Science I and II; is the New Teacher Coach for Integrated Science I and II, Math 9 and Engineering Research; is the Equity Lead; and serves as the PTSA secretary. Sundar possesses a depth of knowledge and dedication to his students. He is a master of inquiry-based pedagogy and always utilizes a student centered and student driven approach to instruction in all of his courses. He regularly meets students before and after school for additional help.

Jennifer Wall

Jennifer Wall is the Administrator of Mathematics Curriculum in Montgomery County Public Schools. Jennifer is an outstanding leader in all aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and she works continuously to increase her knowledge and hone her skills. She has served Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) for more than twenty years, modeling and promoting best instructional practice at the classroom, school, and division levels. Over the past five years, her positive influence on teachers and students throughout the school division has grown steadily as she transitioned from coaching the math teachers at two schools to supporting all 300 MCPS math teachers. Each year she hosts a full-day meeting with a team of math teachers from each grade level or course. During that meeting, teachers collaboratively develop, review, refine and expand pacing guides, assessments, chapter guides and resources. Her expertise in curriculum development and instructional practices in all areas led to her being selected to lead development of the Alternate Model for Professional Studies (AMPS) program developed to which provides ongoing training and support to enable provisionally-licensed teachers to complete their professional studies requirements through job-embedded learning.

CONGRATULATIONS, Impact Award Recipients!

2022 VASCD Team Award Recipients

Common Formative Assessment Team - Henry County Public Schools

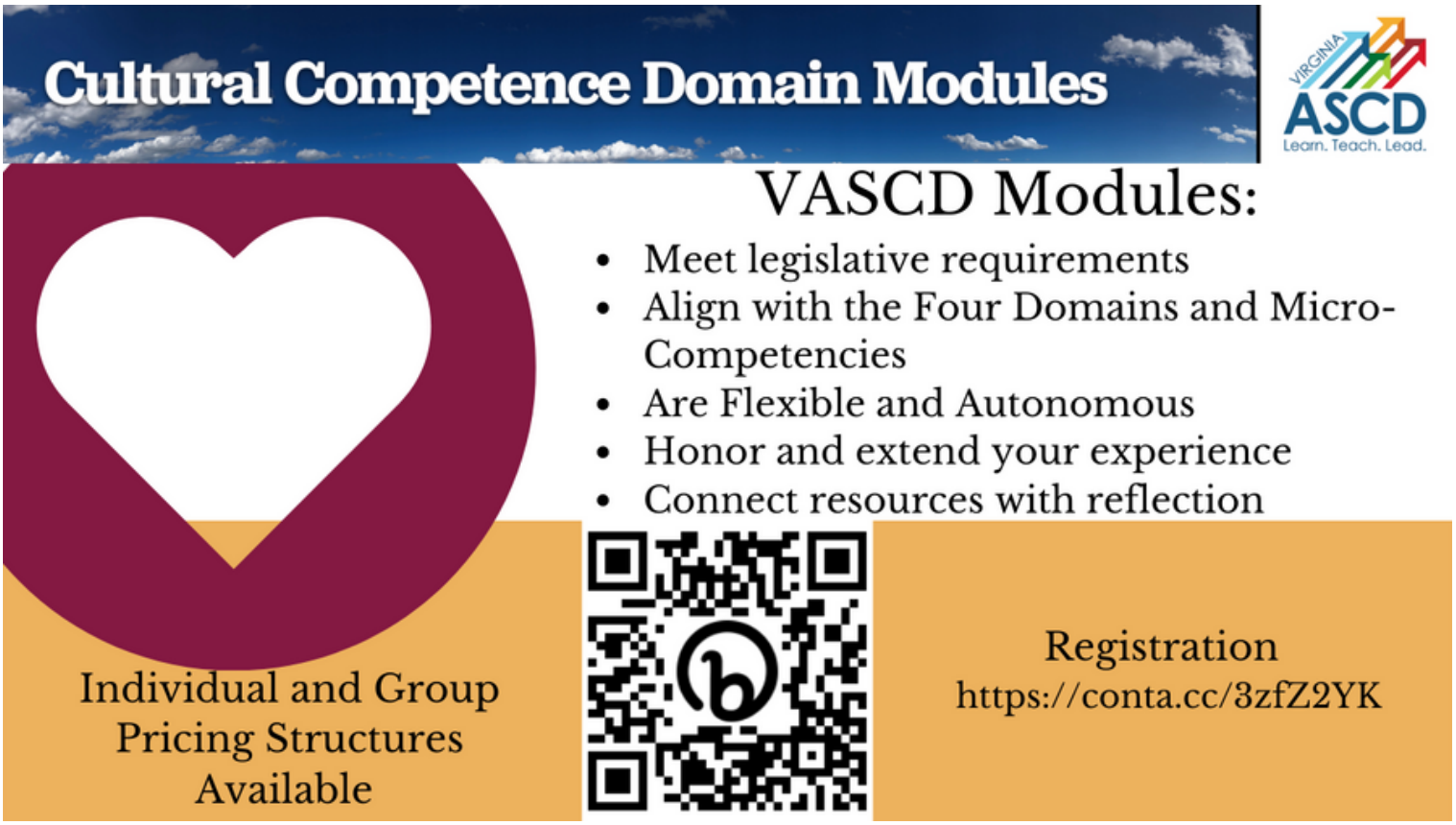
The Common Formative Assessment Team from Henry County Public Schools, consisting of numerous teachers within the county, began in the 2018-19 school year and continues to evolve to meet the needs of the teachers and students of the county. Its original goal was to create equitable, targeted, and rigorous formative assessments for K-12 mathematics. After unpacking the SOLs, the committee not only created the assessments but also supported the use and interpretation of these assessments. When the assessments were first given, the results were disaggregated by the committee who then taught the teachers how to use the data to improve their instruction. Over time, the committee has not only continued to create, verify, and update the common formative assessments, it has also revised curriculum documents, created pacing guides, and connected a large number of resources to these documents. In addition, teachers began creating performance assessments to provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills.

In 2020, acknowledging the impact that COVID had on student learning, the Common Formative Assessment committee began working to create diagnostic formative assessments (DFAs) for each Standard of Learning in order to have a better understanding of where each student was within their learning. Each assessment item correlates directly with specific performance-level descriptors to accurately pre-assess and/or assess students' readiness levels. DFA documents allow for students to track their own progress in learning. Additional professional development for classroom teachers was provided on how to use DFA data to create differentiated lesson plans, including small group instruction based on students' needs. This ongoing work has positively impacted math instruction across Henry County.

2022 VASCD Team Award Recipients

Algebra Functions and Data Analysis Collaborative Learning Team - Garfield high School, Prince William County Public Schools

Shannon Miller, David Postlethwait, Jeanette Newman, and Neal Oakman work together as a collaborative learning team for the course of Algebra, Functions, and Data Analysis (AFDA) at Gar-Field High School, in Prince William County Public Schools. They utilize team norms and mutual expectations to implement innovative and highly effective practices to ensure that students are engaged in aligned, relevant, and rigorous learning experiences. This collaboration, shared commitment to students, and highly effective communication has resulted in positive change in pass rates, as well as more student discussion about math and engagement in the classroom, according to the assistant principal of the school. This team has worked especially hard to shift the mindset of many of their students, who based on previous experience, believe that they are "not very good at math" by providing more project-based and student centered instruction that makes real world connections for their students. Not only have they impacted instruction at their own school, but they have also shared their expertise within the division and have been selected to present at state and national conferences.



Information and Registration

Envisioning the Work: Team Roles, Responsibilities, and Strategies for Performing

Gregory MacDougall

Gregory MacDougall is a Science Specialist for the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). He began his educational journey as a secondary science teacher in Virginia Beach City Public Schools where he taught a variety of secondary science courses over eight years. He then attended the University of Virginia for three years where he worked on his doctorate, taught courses, and supervised preservice teachers before returning to Virginia Beach as the High School Science Coordinator. He then became a Science Specialist working with the South Carolina Department of Education where he worked on state science standards, a state-wide coaching initiative for mathematics and science teachers, support for schools and school divisions, and a Title I professional development program that merged evidence-based practices in project management, professional learning communities, and instruction. He moved back to Virginia and was an instructional coach for the Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center under the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice for over two years prior to his current role at the VDOE.

Abstract

Starting a new school- or division-level project is a time for teams to form and storm. It is a time for even experienced team members to envision the work and their role in new projects as they jockey for positions. The strategy of creating team foundational documents is one way leaders can move team members in a highly collaborative way towards being productive as they team to learn and learn to team.

The project is clear. You are tasked with creating a professional learning plan that is designed to increase teacher effectiveness in a specific content that will result in increased understanding for all students. You and your team members are excited as the first meeting begins. But then excitement fades as chaos grows.

This is a common occurrence even among high functioning teams. Why is this? Likely, it is because each new project is a unique opportunity for going through the phases of team development – forming, storming, norming, and performing. Team members may have disparate visions of the project and how they can utilize their strengths to accomplish the tasks.
As team leader, your role is to implement processes that minimize the storming time and maximize the performing time. Between these is the norming phase. Conzemius and O'Neill (2002) tell us that this is a time for team members to identify individual issues and come together as a team. Edmondson further states that teaming is a learning process. As such, leaders must create meetings in which there is time and space for members to identify individual issues through teaming to learn as they learn to team (Edmondson, 2012).

Each team member comes to the team with a variety of backgrounds and preferences. It is often imagined that team members have a similar understanding of the research required to address a new project. This naïve realism is at the root of problems with members envisioning the work: team members have different visions of the project and their roles within the work. Identifying team foundational documents is one process strategy that can be used to addresses this problem. This strategy can be used for members to learn from each other and in the process, learn to team.

The process requires at least three meetings with time between each meeting for individual work. During meetings, team leaders must choose and utilize strategies that result in psychologically safe spaces where team members work interdependently and collaboratively through a divergent phase that is characterized by team dialogue, and a convergent phase that is characterized by team discussions and decisions.

Envisioning the Work

Meeting 1 Individual Foundational Documents-Potential Foundational Documents (Diverging to Converging)

Garmston and Wellman state that "dialogue is a reflective practice in which group members seek to understand each other's viewpoints and deeply held assumptions" (Garmston & Wellman, 2016, p.4). This is the goal of the first meeting.

The first step in this process is for each team member to bring two to four individual foundational documents (IFDs) to the first meeting. The IFDs are documents, books, and articles that they consider essential to their understanding for addressing the project. These documents generally fall into two categories: (1) documents that members consider to be useful for project management (i.e., initiating, planning, executing, and monitoring the project), and (2) documents that members believe are essential to understanding the content of the project. For example, one team member might have a document that summarizes standards for professional development that were created by a reputable educational organization. Then again, another member may bring a document that reflects evidence-based instructional practices or theoretical frameworks that they feel would be useful in attaining the intended outcome.

It is a time for members to ask non-judgmental clarifying questions as they seek to understand why each IFD is valued by each team member.

During the first meeting, each member shares each of the documents they brought by giving a two- to three-minute summary of each document and their reasons why each document is foundational to their beliefs for addressing the tasks at hand. This is a divergent phase of the process where "ideas are placed on the table" (Garmston & Wellman, 2016, ch.3). It is a time for members to ask non-judgmental clarifying questions as they seek to understand why each IFD is valued by each team member. It is not a time to judge or make decisions about the documents. Team leaders may need to

remind members of team norms and/or redirect the meeting towards the goal of this phase. A meeting strategy called parking lot (Garmston & Wellman, 2016, Appendix A) or the use of sticky notes might be used to capture important but tangential ideas that can be revisited at a later time. The result of this part of the process is that team members better understand each other's viewpoints towards addressing the project.

After reviewing all of the IFDs, the next step is to discuss and identify potential foundational documents (PFDs). PFDs are documents that will be read by all team members prior to the next meeting. Of the identified IFDs, it is common to see at least one document (and oftentimes more) that all team members will have read, even if not brought as an IFD by other members. These documents are considered PFDs since they have already been read by all team members.

The meeting now moves from a divergent phase characterized by team dialogue to a convergent phase that is characterized by team decisions on identifying the PFDs. A suggested decision-making strategy at this point might include multi-voting (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2002). In this process, each team member gets a number of sticky dots equal to one-third of the total number of IFDs, plus one hot-dot of a different color. Team members vote for the IFD they value most for addressing the project using the hot-dot, and then identify other documents they consider useful using the rest of their dots. In the case of having 10 IFDs, each team member gets three dots and one hot-dot. Alternatively, a rank-order voting can be employed where each team member votes for their top three IFDs where 3 is their highest ranked IFD, 2 is their second highest IFD, and 1 is their third IFD. Whether multi-voting or rank-order voting is used, the IFDs with the highest scores become the PFDs.

At the conclusion of this process, the list of resources is reviewed to ensure that the list of PFDs includes at least one IFD from each team member. If a team member does not have an IFD on the list, the team member should have the option to place at least one IFD on the PFD list. In this way, all team

members contribute to the process of team learning through their active engagement in decision-making and, perhaps more importantly, know that each person contributes and is valued in the process of teaming to learn.

The meeting concludes with all members agreeing to read all of the PFDs prior to the next meeting.

Meeting 2 Foundational Documents (Converging)

Tschannen-Moran (2014) states that "(p)eople make trust judgements in part on the basis of the assumption of shared values" (p. 49). In this case, the goal of the second meeting is for all members to understand the value of each PFD in potentially addressing the project. The second meeting is characterized by discussions among members as they continue teaming to learn.

This focus on a third point increases psychological safety and trust among the members by depersonalizing the process.

During this phase, members share their understanding of each PFD using the strategy third point conversation (Lipton & Wellman, 2007, p. 33). In third point conversations, the documents are the focus of the conversation and not who brought which IFD. This focus on a third point increases psychological safety and trust among the members by depersonalizing the process. Again, the facilitator may need to redirect conversations that are perceived to be negative or coercive. Additional strategies such as round robin brainstorming (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2002), chalk talk (Harvard Graduate School of Education Teaching & Learning Lab, 2017), and focusing four (Garmston & Wellman, 2016) may be useful for creating a collaborative and productive meeting.

As the meeting evolves, members may start to discuss in general terms how each PFD may be useful in addressing the project. Therefore, homework for the next meeting is for team members to individually brainstorm ways that each PFD can help the team address the project.

Meeting 3 Reframing of the Work

Edmondson (2002) states that "(f)raming is a critical leadership action for enrolling people in any substantial behavior change" and that this "facilitates understanding of new performance expectations" (pp. 83–84). The goal of the third meeting is to have members reframe their individual visions for addressing the project and create a common vision. The result of this work is that members not only have a common vision, but also identify their roles in the project.

The meeting starts by members sharing their ideas about how the different PFDs may be useful in addressing various tasks and ends with a common vision, identified team foundational documents (TFDs), a storyline for completing tasks, and roles assigned. It requires, however, a team leader/facilitator who can draw from a variety of strategies, utilize specific strategies, and shift to other strategies if needed in order to meet the needs of the team members to produce the desired outcomes. If the facilitator sees that members are working collaboratively towards the identified results of the meeting, the facilitator need not interject. However, if the facilitator sees a potential problem such as team members spending too much time on a topic, or a person dominating discussion, the facilitator will need to execute a strategy that the facilitator knows will positively address the problem.

In the third and final meeting, team members again place their ideas on the table, or in some cases, on the wall, sharing ideas about how the different PFDs may be useful in addressing the project. Depending on the members and identified project tasks, the facilitator may wish to provide a framework, logic model, storyboard template, school planning template, team charter, or timeline within which members place their ideas. In other cases, the facilitator may wish to implement a brainstorm and grouping strategy such as an affinity diagram (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2002) in which a framework or other template is created based on the grouping of ideas. The strategies chosen by the facilitator are important, and should involve all members in the process.

Envisioning the Work

The team members will discover that some documents might be useful for creating a logic model that shows how pieces of the project fit together, while other documents might be useful for identifying specific parts of the project. For example, Guskey and Sparks' model showing the relationship between professional development and improvements in student learning (Guskey, 2000) may be used to help team members understand how and why various pieces of the project fit together to produce the expected outcome (i.e., improved student performance), whereas information gained from a researcher might provide guidance for identifying specific instructional strategies that teachers are expected to learn. Note that these example documents, although important to the team members, may not be well received by teachers. As such, some documents may be identified that would be useful for the teachers as part of the professional development plan. For example, teachers may not find the work of a researcher to be inspiring, whereas a teacher-friendly article or book from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics or the National Council of Teachers of English might be needed as part of the project.

The team moves into a performing stage as ideas flow and are captured from all members. Each person is drawing on their individual strengths and providing important insights into addressing various tasks. As pieces of the project come together, team foundational documents are identified, a common vision is built, and roles are assigned.

Conclusion

Like the skillful teacher who masterfully plans a student-centered lesson, the skillful facilitator needs to know a variety of strategies, how each strategy is used, and when a strategy is and is not needed in order to create and propel team momentum efficiently towards the expected results of each meeting. As a unit plan provides structure and guidance for the teacher in creating a series of lesson plans, the creation of team foundational documents provides structure and guidance for a series of meetings. Additionally, as a lesson plan provides a focus for the teacher in choosing, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of a strategy, a results-oriented agenda (Garmston &

Welsh, 2007) is one tool that provides a focus for the facilitator.

The table below provides an overview of the three meetings. Note that the results of each meeting may include a specific product, action completed (or partially completed), or a result that is aligned to the goal. Each result may be seen as a stepping stone towards the expected outcome of the series of meetings, which in this case is a common team vision and roles identified for team members.

Table 1. *Goal, Result, and Useful Strategies/Tools for Each Meeting*

	Goal	Result	Useful Strategies and Tools
Meeting 1	Team members know each other's viewpoints for addressing the project.	-IFDs reviewed and viewpoints shared -Team members better understand each other's viewpoints towards addressing the project -PFDs identified	-Round Robin -**Team Norms** -**Parking Lot** -Multi-voting -Rank Order Voting
Meeting 2	Team members understand the value of each PFD in addressing the project.	Members have basic understandings of how PFDs are of value for addressing project tasks.	-Third Point Conversation -**Chalk Talk** -**Focusing Four**
Meeting 3	Team has a common vision and member roles are assigned.	-TFDs identified -Common vision identified -Framework created -Timeline created -Roles assigned	-Brainstorm and Group (**Affinity Diagram**, Card Sort, etc.) -Framework/Storyline (created or identified) -**Team Charter** -Planning Template -Timeline/Gantt Chart

Envisioning the Work

The strategies listed in the table are suggestions that a leader may use in the process of creating a safe space for productive collaborative work. Edmondson (2012) reminds us that "levels of psychological safety vary … from work group to work group. This means that psychological safety is … a feature of the workplace that leaders can and must work to build" (pp. 123–124).

The task in this case was to create an effective professional development plan; however, the processes used here are beneficial to a wide array of projects. The strategies and tools that the team leader chooses and utilizes within each phase of the process are critical and highly dependent upon the needs of team members as they work towards intended results. As with the classroom teacher choosing the best strategies to accelerate learning, it is not the strategy that is important but the cognitive and affective activity induced by the strategy that is important as it accelerates team learning and learning to team.

Jump to Table of Contents

References

Conzemius, A & O'Neill, J. (2002). *The handbook of smart school teams: Revitalizing best practices for collaboration*. Solution Tree.

Edmondson, A. (2012). *Teaming: How organizations learn, innovate, and compete in the knowledge economy*. Jossey-Bass.

Garmston, R. & Wellman, B. (2016). *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups (3rd ed.)*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Kindle ed.

Garmston R. & Welsh, D. (2007). Results-oriented agendas transform meetings into valuable collaborative events. *Journal of Staff Development*, *28*(2), 55-56.

Guskey, T. (2020). Flip the script on change. *The learning professional: The Learning Forward Journal*, *41*(2).

Harvard Graduate School of Education Teaching & Learning Lab (2017). Discussion Protocols. Retrieved from https://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Protocols_Handout.pdf

Lipton, L & Wellman, B. (2007). How to talk so teachers listen. *Educational Leadership*, *65*(1), 30-34.

Sparks, S. K. & Many, T.W. (2016). Reproducible: Interactive Tools and Strategies. Found in How to cultivate a PLC. Solution Tree. https://cloudfront-s3.solutiontree.com/pdfs/Reproducibles_HCCPLC/interactivetoolsandstrategies.pdf

Tschannen-Moran, M. (2014). *Trust matters: Leadership for successful schools*. Jossey-Bass.

Worsley, D., Fox, E., Landzberg, J., & Papagiotas, A. (2003). Changing systems to personalize learning: Teaching to each student. The Education Alliance at Brown University. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED518637.pdf

Jump to Table of Contents

Building Back the Pack: Integrating SEL and the Arts for Success in Middle School Science

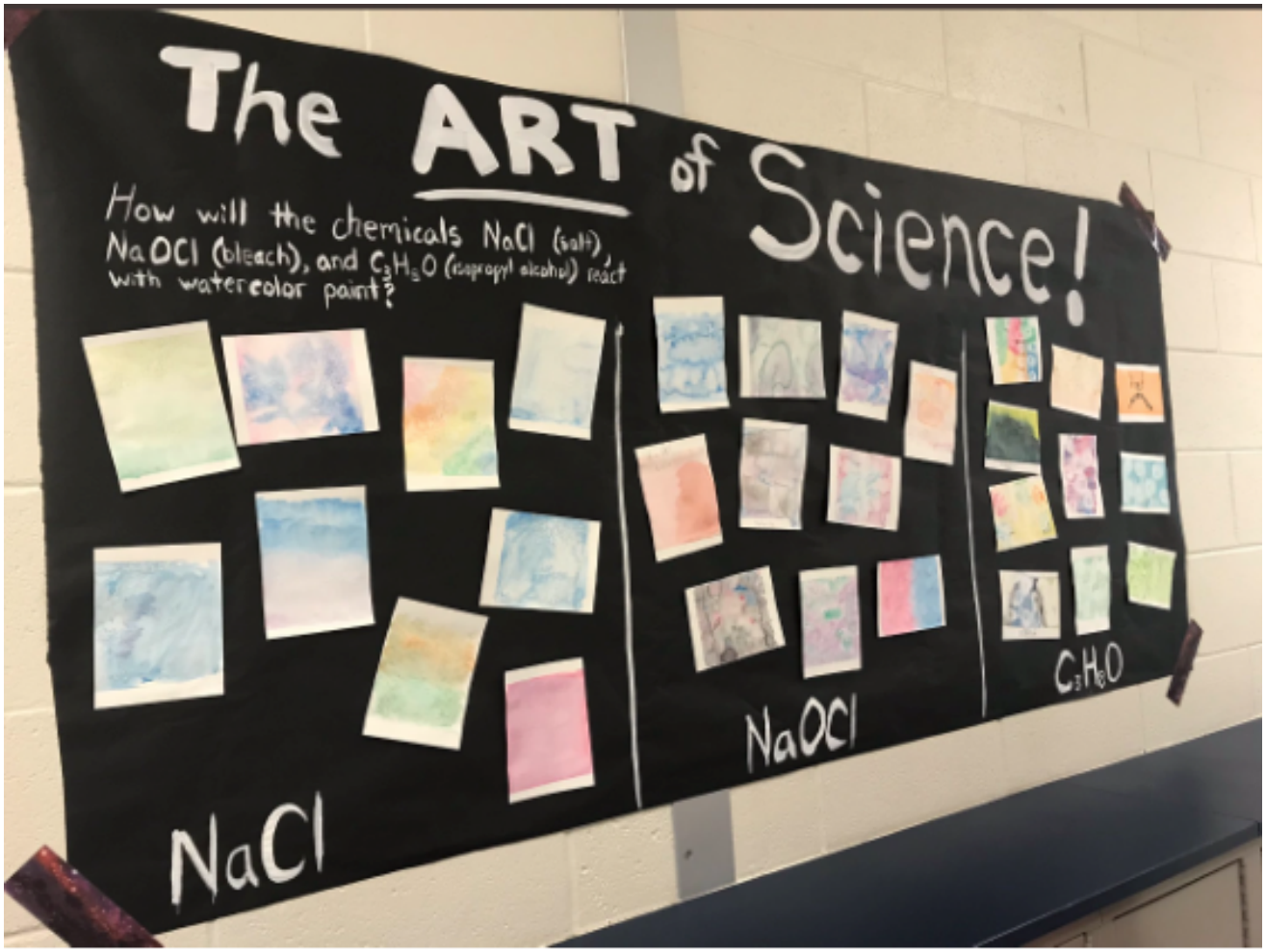
Nicole Rowland, Ed.S.

Nicole Rowland has been a middle school science teacher for 18 years, and began her teaching career in the program Teach For America as a corps member in Washington, DC. Mrs. Rowland has a Bachelor of Science in Biology, a Master of Arts in Teaching Secondary Science, and earned an Education Specialist degree from George Washington University. Mrs. Rowland lives with her husband and 3 children in Chesterfield County, VA. She has served on a School Board Advisory Committee for Environmental Stewardship for the past two years and was selected as the Chesterfield County Public School Teacher of the Year in 2019. Mrs. Rowland currently teaches 7th grade science at Tomahawk Creek Middle School in Midlothian, VA.

Abstract

Students returning to regular instruction after years of unprecedented disruptions in their education are facing challenges with mental health, social skills, and academic achievement to a greater degree than ever before. Innovative teaching practices that combine Social Emotional Learning competencies with projects that integrate the arts have the potential to provide support for developing social and emotional skills and increased academic success for students in the middle school science classroom.

The last 2 years of teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic have made it evident that the need for student support is at an all time high. The 2021 Office for Civil Rights report **Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students** lays out 11 observations of how students have suffered from the lasting educational impacts of the pandemic. Increased equity gaps and disparities in academic achievement for students of color, LGBTQ+, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities are evident due to pandemic related limitations on access to instruction and school-based services and supports. "Nearly all students have experienced some challenges to their mental health and well-being during the pandemic." (Department of Education – Office for Civil Rights, 2021, p. iv). As our students have moved back into the traditional school setting, teachers have found themselves in front of classrooms of struggling students, many of whom find it difficult to just get through a school day, let alone learn in the ways they have been traditionally taught.



Building Back the Pack

Social Emotional Learning

One method of addressing the mental health and academic issues worsened by the trauma of the pandemic can be found in Social Emotional Learning (SEL). SEL is the student's capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others (Elias, 2006). These abilities are clearly essential for student success, and research over the last few decades has shown that academic programs that provide opportunities for explicit instruction of SEL competencies have improved student academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) describes these competencies simply as Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making (see figure below and check out **this video by CASEL** to learn more about SEL competencies).

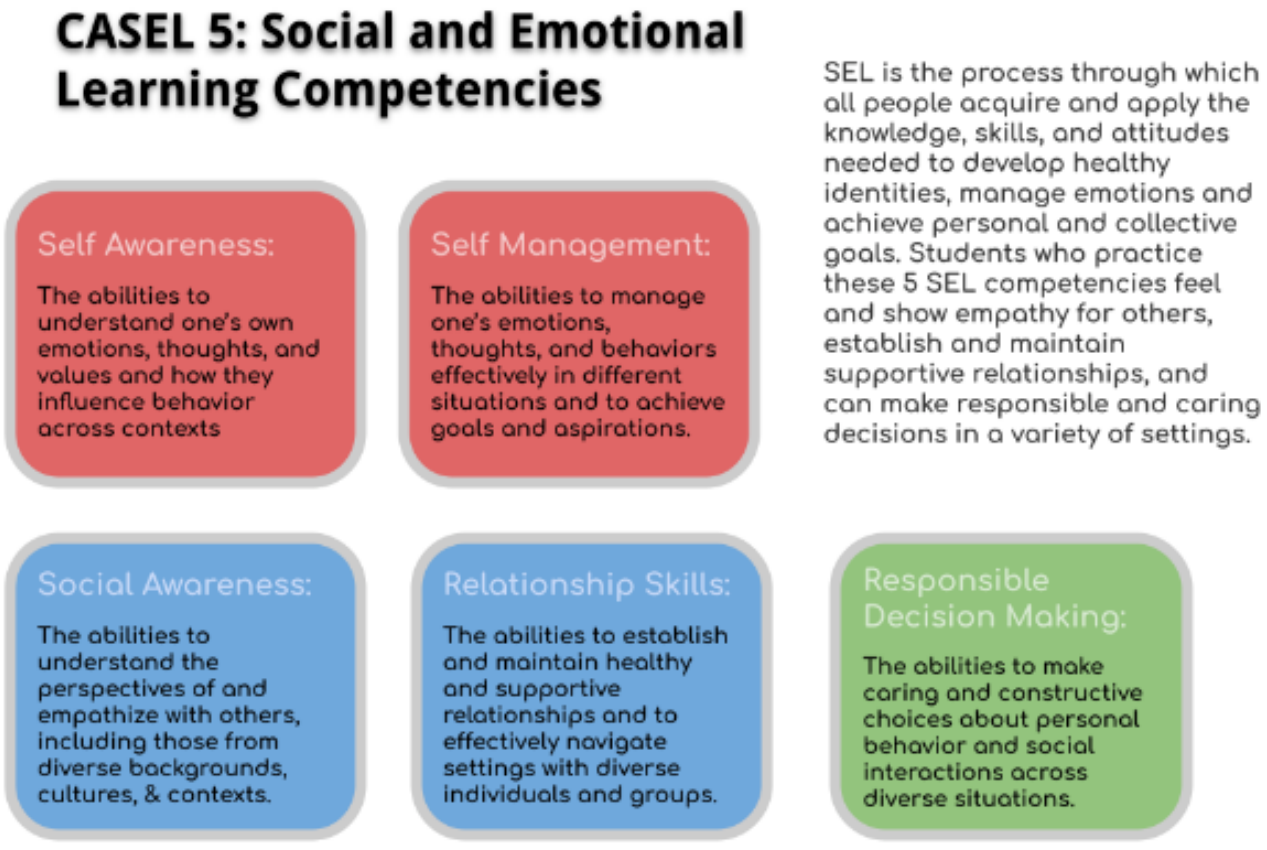


Image adapted from the CASEL framework available on Casel.org

After years of social isolation and experimental virtual and hybrid learning models across the nation, I have seen in my own classroom that an emphasis on SEL competencies is more important now than ever. Over the past two years my 7th graders have struggled to constructively interact with one another, collaborate on learning activities, and effectively manage their emotions in the classroom setting. Viewing these challenges through the lens of science instruction brings the problem into sharper focus, as communication and collaboration are essential skills for science literacy. The socially-distanced, "hands off" learning approaches necessary over the last two years have produced students who are now hesitant to even participate in lab experiences, which have traditionally been a source of reliable student engagement for me. I think teachers of many subjects would agree that we need a way to support and cultivate the mental health of our students and get them actively engaged in learning with each other again, while meeting the requirements of our standards of learning.

Arts Integration and SEL

The Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning has recently produced a **crosswalk matrix** of New Jersey SEL and Arts Education standards, which illuminates the natural connections that exist between SEL competencies and the creative processes of arts education. Participation in the arts requires students to create, perform, present or produce, respond, and connect. The SEL matrix lays out specific examples of how each of these processes aligns with the 5 SEL competencies. This groundbreaking work is a wonderful tool for arts educators to integrate SEL competencies, but why stop in the elective classrooms? Unfortunately, many students don't have equitable access to arts electives, or limitations on the amount of classes they can take during the school year prevents exposure to the arts for all students. A multitude of studies have shown that arts integrated instruction can produce increased student academic outcomes in science classes across a variety of age levels (Green, 2018). More than just fun for kids, recent brain-based learning research has proven that instructional methods involving the arts improve memory retention in general AND for science content specifically (Fernandes, 2018, Hardiman, 2019). It is my view that the

Building Back the Pack

SEL/arts correlation should be utilized in science instruction as a method to improve student mental health and academic achievement. In this article, I highlight a few opportunities for SEL and arts integration that I have curated through the 7th grade life science curriculum in my classroom in Chesterfield, VA, as well as some additional middle school science content opportunity ideas. I have had great success with these activities and plan to increase the amount of arts integration and opportunities for SEL growth I provide to students in the 2022-23 school year.

Arts Integration in the Middle School Science Classroom

Climate change is an issue recognized in the VA life science curriculum through the profound human impact it has on the environment and populations within ecosystems. In my classroom, students examined average daily temperature data for Richmond, VA from NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cag/statewide/time-series). The years we selected, 2018 and 1969, represented a 50 year change in climate. Our goal was to analyze this data to see if there has been a measurable impact on our local climate. Each student was provided with one month's worth of average daily temperatures, and our journey to make sense of the numbers through visualization began. While learning the science standards of weather and climate, and human impact on the environment, students created fiber art. Each student built a loom from cardboard and string, and we assigned each daily temperature to a specific color of yarn based on the international collective fiber arts project known as **The Tempestry Project**. Students measured a 14-inch section of yarn for each daily

temperature, tied them together, and weaved their month of temperature data. The months were then connected into each respective year and an overall picture of the trends of temperature change over time in Richmond became apparent. As part of our learning during this project, students were provided with the stories of different people from around the world and the class did a jigsaw to share about how the lives of different people and cultures are impacted by different aspects of climate change. The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts is a Social Awareness SEL competency. After evaluating the visual differences apparent in our completed fiber art and learning the mechanics of climate change and its impact around the globe, students wrote and produced a **wevideo** public service announcement they wanted to share with the world. Many students in this class were English Language Learners and were concerned about their English speaking abilities, but Self-Awareness and individual goal-setting was emphasized to help build confidence for performances on camera. As a class, we emphasized Relationship Skills as students watched and contributed edits to the class video. Throughout this project, students made the connection of how responsible decision-making can lead to changes in our environment. A multitude of SEL skills were effortlessly integrated into this project, and all students came together to show science mastery and produce a cohesive art installation and message to the world.

Building Back the Pack

This climate change example of the intersection of science, art, and SEL was a powerful project for my students and me, but it is only one possible opportunity of its kind throughout the life science curriculum. Students should be encouraged to recognize natural connections between the sciences and the arts as they perform science explorations in the classroom. Just as we teach our students to safely handle lab materials, we can show them ways they may produce art with those materials (e.g., making leaf rubbings after collecting and observing plant species). My students produced a Schoolyard Florilegium after conducting a bioblitz to analyze the diversity of plant species in our surroundings. Another example could be using droplets of slide stains to make abstract art. Noticing their own creative reactions to the materials they are exposed to in science builds upon the SEL competency of self-awareness.

Additional Ideas for Arts Integration and SEL Competencies in Science

Some additional ideas for exploration are outlined below, but this is by no means an exhaustive list:

- Cell function and storytelling with **Social Awareness** and **Responsible Decision Making**. One example of this was completed after reading *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, by Rebecca Skloot. Middle school students from KIPP Bridge Charter Academy in Oakland, California researched, wrote, and **performed a video** on the life of Henrietta Lacks after learning how her cells are continuously grown in culture for medical research today. As a black woman in the 1950's she was never asked or told about the use of her cancerous cells and had limited access to medical care due to segregation.

- Cell microscopy and digital art with **Self Management** and **Self Reflection**. The article ***Start with art: Using perspective to guide an interdisciplinary STEAM unit***, from the NSTA magazine Science Scope (March 2020) details a cross curricular unit during which students created digital art with photos they had taken of cells under a microscope. Students are required to manage their bodies to use equipment carefully and precisely to capture cell images and reflect on their personal preferences to create abstract digital images meaningful to them.

- Population change and block printing with **Social Awareness** and **Responsible Decision Making**. While learning about population changes and endangered species my students were introduced to the pop art style of Andy Warhol and produced block prints of an endangered species they researched. Students chose colors of ink and paper, decided on the amount of repetition to use in their art work, and created an installation to spread awareness for Endangered Species Day.

Building Back the Pack

- Species cataloging and soundart with **Self Awareness** and **Self Management**. Students performing a bioblitz on schoolyard species can simultaneously create soundart of their surroundings. An analysis of their soundart would bring self awareness and simultaneously show the refinement of artistic work is an iterative process that takes time, discipline, self-confidence, and collaboration.
- Biomes and collage with **Responsible Decision Making** and **Relationship Skills**. Students learning about biomes of the world could collaboratively produce a multimedia collage of textures or colors or sounds present in their assigned biome, exercising responsible decision making and relationship skills.

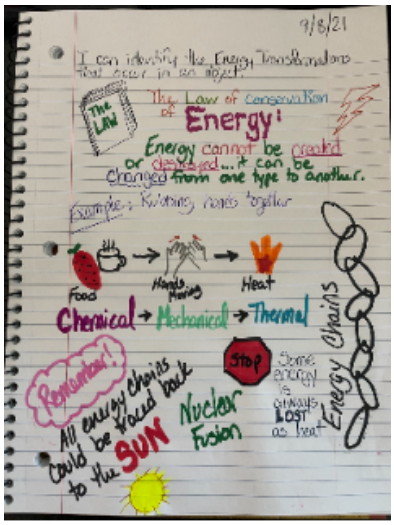
Considering science curricula more broadly, students could write and perform a slam poem about renewable energy sources, observe the effects of different chemical compounds on water color paints (project example shown left), demonstrate Newton's Laws of Motion with dance or use dance techniques to show the movement of electricity through conductors and insulators. Endless connections exist! A student performance or reflection response after each of these opportunities ensures that students exercise SEL competencies throughout the arts integrated science lesson.

Troubleshooting Concerns

Teacher concerns about using arts integrated methods in science are absolutely normal – common concerns might include resource procurement to time constraints, special needs accommodations, and anxiety about doing something so new (for both students AND teachers!). Each class, specific

curriculum, and school situation is different and instructors will need to consider what types of integrated projects might work for them and their students. Many times good old creative problem solving can help troubleshoot limitations.

- Incorporating technology by using **Flipgrid**, for example, to privately record and share performances, can help students who may feel **anxious about sharing publicly**. I have found that consistent engagement with various creative processes will help relationship building within the class and ease anxieties over time.
- Grant opportunities can provide **funding for art materials**, but don't forget about just using materials from nature, trash, or recyclables for projects. I have borrowed materials from the art department many times. Whatever you have easy access to can work!
- **Differentiation and scaffolded support** might be required depending on student needs, but in my opinion, creating art means there is no "wrong" answer or bad product. Students of all readiness levels can produce and contribute to the diversity of the overall installation and these differences are to be celebrated! Gallery walks and regularly reflecting and responding to the differences in the products students see made by their peers are additional opportunities to build SEL competencies.
- As far as **time constraints** related to the curriculum, projects don't have to be extensive or take multiple class periods to complete. Simply sketching what students observe or feel in a notebook can be a quick way to integrate the arts in science. What does energy look like? How does an atom sound? How could we show particle movement with our bodies? I use **sketchnotes** during direct instruction to get my students drawing on a regular basis.



Building Back the Pack

Professional development opportunities exist for teachers who feel overwhelmed by what I have described. The Kennedy Center offers a wide array of educator resources for art integration. The Joan Oats Institute for Partners in the Arts at the University of Richmond has been a wonderful resource for me as I have deepened my practice over the years. The Institute for Arts Integration and STEAM offers both free and paid online lesson examples and professional development opportunities throughout the year as well as an Arts Integration certificate program for teachers. Don't be afraid to jump in with just one idea and go from there. Start small to build confidence in your capacity for arts integration and SEL competencies. The ideas and connections will begin to flow for you as well as your students in no time!

Conclusion

No matter how we do it, educators must adapt our methods to reach the needs of our students during these unprecedented times. As COVID guidelines ease and schooling is "back to normal," I have found that my instructional methods need to be anything but. We have been on the cusp of a major change in education for years, based on technological advancements and the ways that information is shared in our society. Couple that with the intense needs of a shared traumatic event, and our methods of reaching students must evolve if we are to remain successful as educators of healthy, well adapted citizens. The creative spirit of mankind has existed right along with the scientific method throughout human history. Deliberately tapping into these organic methods of exploration and collaboration is an opportunity to get our students back on track academically, socially, and emotionally as we work to reevaluate educational methods in a post-pandemic world.

Jump to Table of Contents

References

Arts Education and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework. SELARTS. (2021, January 28). Retrieved August 1, 2022, from https://selarts.org/

Department of Education – Office for Civil Rights. (2021). Educating in a pandemic: The disparate impacts of Covid-19 on America's students. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, *82*(1), 405–432. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x

Elias, M. J., & Arnold, H. (2006). *The Educator's Guide to Emotional Intelligence and academic achievement: Social-emotional learning in the classroom*. Corwin Press.

Fernandes, M. A., Wammes, J. D., & Meade, M. E. (2018). The surprisingly powerful influence of drawing on memory. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *27*(5), 302–308. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721418755385

Green, K., Trundle, K. C., & Shaheen, M. (2019). Integrating the arts into science teaching and learning: A literature review. *Journal for Learning through the Arts: A Research Journal on Arts Integration in Schools and Communities*, *14*(1). https://doi.org/10.21977/d914140829

Hardiman, M. M., JohnBull, R. M., Carran, D. T., & Shelton, A. (2019). The effects of arts-integrated instruction on memory for science content. *Trends in Neuroscience and Education*, *14*, 25–32. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tine.2019.02.002

Jump to Table of Contents

CALL FOR 2023 JOURNAL ARTICLES!

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; and/or,
  - 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!

Manuscripts are due

August 1, 2023

and should be sent to our

Editor, Eric Carbaugh, at carbauem@jmu.edu.

Because the VASCD Journal is published in an online format, authors are encouraged to include videos, hyperlinks, podcasts, audio or animations to enhance their articles. Manuscripts should, as closely as possible, follow format and reference guidelines outlined in the Publication Manual of the American Psychology Association (APA).

Improving Student Reading Achievement through Structured Literacy and Data-Based Decision Making

Charlotte Martin, M.Ed.

Charlotte Martin earned a Bachelors Degree in Psychology from the College of William and Mary in 2013, and a Masters Degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from the University of Richmond in 2022. She taught Kindergarten for 9 years in the Chesterfield County Public School system and is now teaching first grade in a different school in CCPS. As a primary school educator, Charlotte is passionate about helping young students develop a strong foundation of literacy and communication skills.

Abstract

Student reading achievement is closely linked to success both in school and later in life. Therefore, low reading achievement—especially following the COVID-19 pandemic—has led many schools to adopt structured literacy. This approach is grounded in neuroscience and provides students with explicit, sequential reading instruction. In my experience as a Kindergarten teacher, structured literacy enables all students to find success in reading, regardless of their prior knowledge of letters and sounds. To implement structured literacy, schools may benefit from a collaborative, data-driven method in which plans for instructional improvements are organized into a manageable action plan.

Improving Student Reading

Introduction

Reading achievement is critical to the success of elementary schools and that of individual students. As a result, school districts have spent years wrestling with ways to improve student reading progress. Recently, as existing difficulties with reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, many students have experienced interruptions to their typical learning routines. Test results suggest that students need improvement in their abilities to recognize words and comprehend language. For example, in 2019, only 34% of fourth graders scored at or above the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) proficient level in reading (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). However, reading difficulties impact more than just test scores. Reading is a significant part of all core subject areas; for example, students must develop vocabulary skills to understand science and social studies curriculum, while they utilize comprehension skills to solve math problems. According to **The Children's Reading Foundation** (2022), 85% of curriculum is taught through reading, causing students reading below grade level to struggle in every class. Struggling readers, therefore, can develop feelings of low confidence and low self-esteem. Further, low reading achievement is also linked to issues with school discipline, poor attendance, school dropout, and juvenile crime (The Children's Reading Foundation, 2022).

However, these effects can be mitigated through effective reading instruction. According to the International Dyslexia Association (2022, para. 3), structured literacy provides students with "systematic, explicit instruction that integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing." Structured literacy is based on the science of reading, which has combined research in psychology and cognitive science to reveal the many processes involved in reading, where challenges may arise, and how best to support students through these difficulties. This approach benefits all students, but the research by the Hill Learning Center shows that structured literacy is "essential for students with learning differences, especially those with dyslexia" (2022, para. 1).

In the fall of 2021, my school—Hening Elementary—was one of a few in Chesterfield County to pilot structured literacy. Since it was not a required whole school initiative, not all teachers fully embraced or implemented the practice. For two years, educators had been shifting between virtual and in-person learning and keeping up with extra demands caused by teacher vacancies and a shortage of substitutes. When our teachers were told that we would be switching from balanced to structured literacy, many teachers understandably expressed concern with taking on yet another change. Balanced literacy, which centers around visual and contextual clues, was a practice utilized by our county for nearly a decade. However, current research now suggests that structured literacy is the best instructional practice for educators to utilize (Jiban, 2022). Structured literacy provides students with explicit phonics instruction, which is especially critical for students who lost learning time during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the first time in my nine years of teaching, every single student exceeded our Spring PALS benchmark, and all but one student exceeded our Spring GRA benchmark.

As a kindergarten teacher, literacy instruction is foremost among my professional responsibilities to my students, their families, and the community, because kindergarten is where students develop a foundation in reading. In my experience, the balanced literacy approach proved difficult for many students—especially students learning English and students with disabilities—as the focus was more on memorizing sight words, using picture clues, and relying on context rather than applying phonics skills. Heading into the 2021 school year, I modified expectations for all of my students, as I knew many children had either a disrupted Pre-K or no Pre-K experience. Many of my students started Kindergarten with little to no knowledge of letters or sounds. However, the structured literacy approach enabled all of

my students to find success in reading – for the first time in my nine years of teaching, every single student exceeded our Spring Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) benchmark, and all but one student exceeded our Spring GRA benchmark. Through explicit phonics and phonemic awareness instruction, they not only learned their letters and sounds, but were able to apply them to decodable texts and while sounding out words in writing.

As a result of this experience, I believe other schools can use structured literacy to help students make significant progress in reading and writing. Further, I believe that implementation through an intentional, proven method can help ensure whole-school engagement in the process. For my own instructional planning purposes, I like the Data Wise method. While my school did not officially adopt Data Wise, we incorporated many aspects of this collaborative approach: we prepared for data analysis, made inquiries regarding instructional improvements, and created an action plan to improve reading instruction and therefore, student success in literacy (Boudett et al., 2013).

Organizing for Collaborative Work

A strong system of teams is essential for collaborative work using the Data Wise method, as all participants must understand their individual and collective responsibilities. In my school, for example, each teacher is a member of a grade-level team that works in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and planning meetings to review student learning data and plan for instruction. Each team lead represents their grade level in the larger School Innovation and Improvement Plan (SIIP) team. The SIIP team also includes our administrators, reading and math teachers, Title I teachers, and curriculum and support specialists from the county. During monthly meetings, this group examines grade level data to determine whether we are making adequate progress towards our school improvement goals.

To improve student reading achievement, all staff members should be involved in the data discussion (Boudett et al., 2013). This can provide schools with a variety of informed perspectives, ensure decisions consider all

possible sources of data, and confirm that everyone is invested in the school-wide goal of improving reading instruction and student learning. Schools could make time for this collaborative work by dedicating weekly grade-level PLCs to discussions of data. Established team norms create "an atmosphere that supports productive data discussions" (Boudett et al., 2013, p. 22). Additionally, a strategic agenda will keep the discussion on track and give all team members opportunities to participate in the improvement process.

Data Sources and Data Analysis

As schools dive into their reading data, knowing teachers' preparedness for implementing structured literacy can help schools understand the impact it has on student reading achievement. Throughout our implementation process, we openly but informally shared our experience and comfort levels with structured literacy. In hindsight, a teacher survey **like this one** would have given us a clearer picture regarding knowledge of structured literacy, which components teachers were utilizing, and where they felt they may need additional support or training. I will recommend a survey for teachers this fall as we enter a new school year.

Time specifically dedicated to student data analysis is crucial to improving teaching and student learning (Boudett et al., 2013). In my school, we utilized grade level PLCs and monthly SIIP meetings to analyze student performance data. This included internal assessments such as anecdotal notes from reading groups, as well as external assessments such as the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), Guided Reading Assessment (GRA), Measure of Academic Progress (MAPS), and Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Collaborating through the data analysis process allowed us to develop a shared understanding of where students started, what they needed to know, what knowledge and skills they were missing, and where we wanted them to be. We focused primarily on the GRA, as this is administered in every grade level and provides a picture of reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. However, we also compared our findings to our other reading assessments to "look for both patterns and inconsistencies" in the data (Boudett et al., 2013, p. 99). Throughout the

process, we made sure to disassociate teachers' names from the data to avoid any feelings of blame or guilt regarding student performance. The intention of any class comparison was to start a conversation about how to improve student reading achievement schoolwide. Although we analyzed our data sources individually, in the future, I suggest the Data Wise process of compiling this data into one spreadsheet. Having this visual display could help schools identify their data's "story" and give a more global view of where to target instructional efforts.

Classroom Action Steps

After analyzing student reading data and identifying any potential areas for improvement, educators should work to find a link between learning and teaching. First, they should examine reading instruction and target their practices to improve the students' achievement. However, it is important not to assume causation between the use of structured literacy and student success in reading. At my school, teachers were reassured that reluctance to adopt structured literacy at the time was not considered a failure on their part. They were encouraged to implement this method based on current research of best practice, but our administrators understood that not everyone was ready for a shift at the same time.

Throughout our implementation, receiving feedback from my administrators helped me feel supported in my work and stay engaged in the process.

When creating an action plan for implementation, it is useful to focus on one instructional strategy at a time. My school began with utilizing our new structured literacy template for guided reading instruction. To make this change more manageable for teachers, we broke the template down and selected particular strategies to implement by specific dates. This plan was put in writing so teachers could easily see what tasks they were responsible for and when these steps should be accomplished. During PLCs, we

continued to discuss and model each structured literacy component prior to implementation. As teachers put each part of the lesson plan into practice, we monitored student progress to determine whether we had established appropriate goals. After reviewing the data, we set additional goals for student performance to maintain the culture of high expectations and accountability.

As implementation of a new initiative continues, schools should continue to refer to their action plan to make sure they are all on the same page and that students are making progress (Boudett et al., 2013). Teachers should collaborate with their grade level teams to support one another through this change, while school leaders should visit classrooms to observe teaching and learning and provide positive feedback. Throughout our implementation, receiving feedback from my administrators helped me feel supported in my work and stay engaged in the process. In hindsight, the only other support I would recommend is more formal professional learning about the different components of structured literacy. For example, training on how to **transition from a word wall to a sound wall** would have helped me improve my reading instruction and allowed students to better connect speech with print (Bottari, 2020).

Although action plans may require adjusting, it is important to celebrate both student and teacher successes along the way. This will keep the momentum going, keep the process centered around collaboration, and keep the focus on improving instruction and student learning (Boudett et al., 2013).

Stakeholder Involvement

As providers of literacy instruction, teachers are the most important stakeholders to engage in implementation. In my school, we built a culture based on open communication where teachers were able to share their concerns and celebrate their successes. Through this culture of open and honest feedback, teachers and school leaders worked together to create a clear, consistent plan for improving literacy instruction and therefore, student learning (Fullan, 2011).

Improving Student Reading

As recipients of reading instruction, students are also key stakeholders who deserve to have a voice in the implementation process. I like to give my kindergarten students a sense of purpose by explaining what they were learning, why it was important, and how they would achieve their goals. I also observed student participation in reading groups to determine whether students were actively engaged in learning. In the future, I plan to use student surveys to determine whether students understand structured literacy procedures and whether they are satisfied with reading instruction. These would be particularly useful for older students who may better understand the changes that have been made to literacy instruction.

As my school continues to implement structured literacy, I would like to involve our students' caregivers, as they are also major stakeholders in every child's education. Caregivers should be made aware of the change to reading instruction, along with a clear explanation of why, to help our students build a strong foundation of literacy skills. Schools can share information about structured literacy through weekly correspondence with families and give them strategies for working with their learners at home. Communicating these strategies with caregivers can help them better provide similar opportunities to read outside of school.

Conclusion

Strong literacy instruction is necessary for students to find success both in the classroom and later in life. Although teachers may be hesitant to abandon their current instructional practices and embrace change, structured literacy can help improve students' reading skills. I witnessed this growth during the 2021–2022 school year when, despite having a compromised Pre-K experience, all of my students passed both their PALS and GRA tests.

Using a data-based decision-making approach allowed me and my school to create a manageable implementation plan which could be adjusted as needed. While I like the Data Wise process, I believe that any approach centered around collaboration and student achievement data can aid in implementation of significant changes to instructional practices. Together,

data-based decision making and structured literacy can enable elementary teachers to improve reading instruction and provide students with the skills and strategies needed to become successful, lifelong readers.

References

Bottari, M. (2020). *Transitioning from word walls to sound walls*. Reading rockets. https://www.readingrockets.org/article/transitioning-word-walls-sound-walls#:~:text=A%20sound%20wall%20supports%20students,in%20words%20are%20co%2Darticulated

Boudett, K.P., City, E.A., & Murnane, R.J. (Eds.). (2013). *Data wise: A step by step guide to using assessment results to improve teaching and learning*. Harvard Education Press.

Fullan, M. (2011). *Change leader: Learning to do what matters most*. Jossey-Bass.

Hill Learning Center. (2020, April 6). *Structured literacy and the science of reading*. Hill learning center. https://www.hillcenter.org/structured-literacy-and-the-science-of-reading/#:~:text=Learning%20to%20read%20is%20a,differences%2C%20especially%20those%20with%20dyslexia.

International Dyslexia Association. (2022). *Structured literacy instruction.* International dyslexia association, Ontario branch. https://www.idaontario.com/effective-reading-instruction/

Jiban, C. (2022, January 25). *The science of reading explained*. Northwest Evaluation Association. https://www.nwea.org/blog/2022/the-science-of-reading-explained/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2022, May 18). *National assessment of educational progress*. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/

The Children's Reading Foundation. (2022). *What's the impact*? The children's reading foundation. https://www.readingfoundation.org/the-impact

Jump to Table of Contents

VASCD's Profile of a Virginia Classroom

The Profile of a Virginia Graduate describes the knowledge and skills that support students' readiness for life beyond school. For modern learners, this readiness requires deeper learning than standardized test-driven instruction provides. Deeper learning not only equips students with the understanding and skills needed to solve problems and explore questions they have not encountered before but also leads them to metacognition - awareness and understanding of how they think and learn. This deeper learning is transferable to new challenges and situations.

Planning for Deeper Learning
Implementing Quality Instruction
Creating a Culture of Respect
Redefining Teacher and Student Roles
Embedding Formative Assessment and Feedback

Access the Profile HERE

VIRGINIA ASCD
Learn. Teach. Lead.

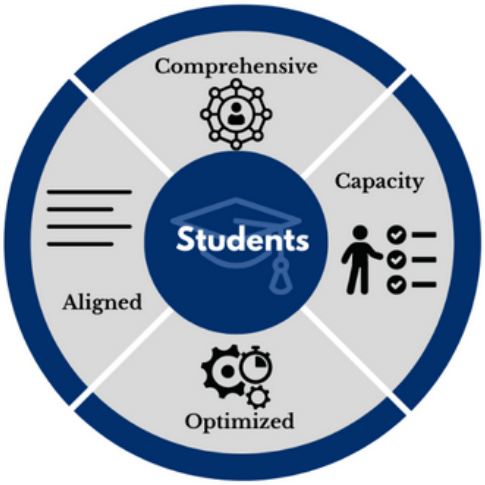
ASSESSMENT SUMMIT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*A **Comprehensive** accountability system consists of assessments from a variety of sources that capture a student's proficiency, growth, and performance to include Virginia's 5 Cs and durable skills.*

*A clearly **Aligned** system of accountability connects standards of learning, instruction, and assessment.*



*All stakeholders are engaged and informed, and have the **Capacity** to effectively use assessments and accountability to measure student learning and understand the data.*

*An accountability system is **Optimized** when the assessments inform instruction, data are purposeful and actionable, and time is maximized.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop stakeholder assessment and data literacy, efficacy, and engagement
2. Create a comprehensive accountability system that uses multiple measures of the most essential student learning outcomes
3. Reduce the number of required proficiency tests to an appropriate level
4. Improve the quality of data reporting so that they are actionable and can inform instruction
5. Explicitly align standards, instruction, and assessment throughout the accountability system using two-way development
6. Create a process for ongoing evaluation, revision, and iteration of assessment and accountability
7. Increase the value and role of teacher as assessor within the accountability system
8. Create flexibility for high-performing divisions through merit-based accountability measures and deploy resources to those divisions in need

Read the Full Executive Summary HERE

Closing the Literacy Gap: A Collaborative Data Based Approach for Supporting Third Grade Students in the 2022-23 School Year

Katelyn Wilkerson, Ed.S.

Katelyn Wilkerson is a Literacy Coach in Hanover County Public Schools in Hanover, Virginia. This is her 12th year in education. Katelyn earned her Master's in Education from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2010, an Educational Specialist Degree in Reading from the University of Virginia in 2015, and recently an endorsement in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from the University of Richmond. She is passionate about ensuring students' right to read and is purposeful in working with teachers to ensure students are able to lead productive literate lives.

Abstract

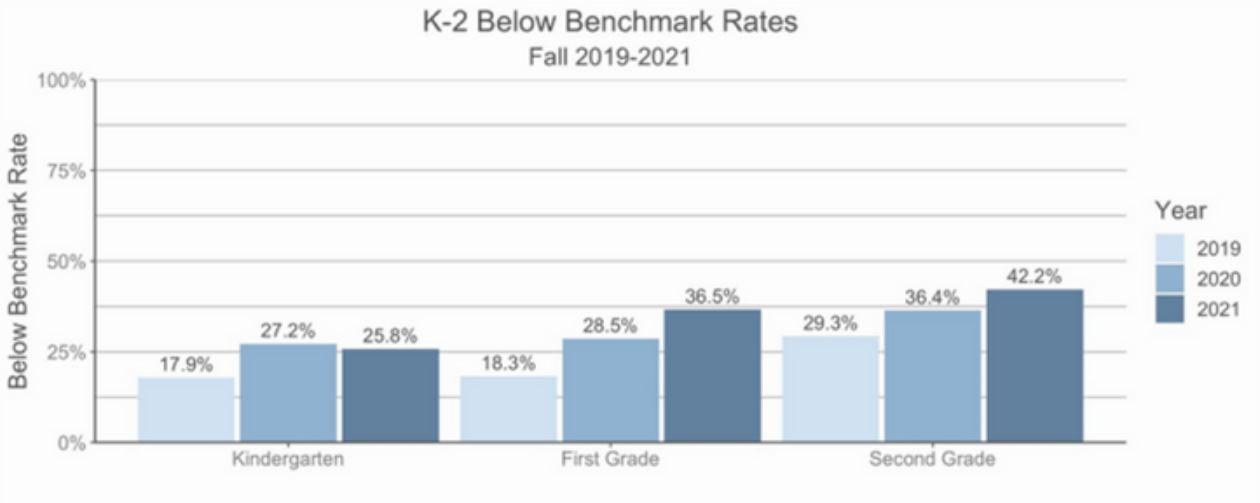
This article analyzes the effects of the pandemic on developing readers and proposes a plan to close the expanding literacy gap through a collaborative data based approach. This step-by-step plan was written prior to the 2022-2023 school year. With the school year now underway, I reflect and note some of the lessons I have learned while working through the steps. While this article focuses on current third grade students, the collaborative data based approach can be applied to support any group of students reading below grade level expectations.

Instructional Impact of COVID-19 on Early Elementary Students in Virginia

In March of 2020, schools closed with little warning in an effort to limit the risk of transmitting the highly contagious COVID-19 virus. Teachers were charged with adapting instruction and pivoting to an online learning platform with minimal resources. The students in kindergarten when the closures occurred continued to experience inconsistent instruction through first and second grade, a critical period for reading development. As these same students transitioned to first grade in the 2020-2021 school year and then second grade during the 2021-2022 school year, they continued to encounter lapses in instruction due to quarantine protocols, mitigation strategies, and fluctuating learning environments that impacted their access to literacy resources. Taken together, these factors led to the increase of students reading below the established grade level benchmark. Figure 1 below displays the reading benchmark rates for students that participated in Phonological Literacy Awareness Screening in the state of Virginia from 2019 to 2021 (**University of Virginia PALS Report**, 2021). Compared to pre-pandemic 2019, an increasing percentage of K-2 students are beginning the year below the expected reading benchmark.

Figure 1.

K-2 Below Benchmark Rates, Fall 2019-2021



Closing the Literacy Gap

Students learn to read by building upon their foundational understanding of phonological awareness. Instruction of this skill occurs in kindergarten and continues into first grade. While many students were able to attend school in person as first graders, teachers and students were required to cover their nose and mouth with a mask at all times. A mask muffles spoken language and disguises the mouth's position while articulating sound. Speaking while wearing a mask limits the ability to hear and manipulate word parts and inhibits the building of phonological awareness, one of the foundations of the reading process.

Data collected from PALS highlight the need for phonological awareness instruction; however, the reading process is multifaceted. To close the literacy gap we need to collect and analyze multiple data points in all aspects of reading to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses.

2021-22: Closing the Literacy Gap of Second Graders

Teaching students literacy concepts in elementary school expands beyond markings on a report card. Literacy is a conduit for communication. As a Literacy Coach in a K-5 Title 1 Elementary School, we believe in teaching students to read so that they experience successful literate lives and build a lifelong love of reading. In the fall of the 2021-22 school year, the reading team (consisting of district leaders, reading specialists, and literacy coaches) and I analyzed the data from the PALS. We noticed our second-grade students exhibited reading behaviors significantly below the established grade level literacy benchmarks. The data showed close to 50% of our second graders beginning the year below benchmark. This created a sense of urgency and propelled us to intentionally focus on supporting literacy instruction during second grade professional learning meetings. As the year progressed, teachers were intentional about addressing the students' literacy needs and closed learning gaps with the goal of providing students the opportunity to begin third grade in the 2022-23 school year on or above grade level reading expectations. Our students experienced success due to high-quality literacy instruction in a supportive

learning environment. Figure 2 below (Summed Score Benchmark Report) illustrates that 47% of our second graders did not meet the established PALS benchmark in Fall of 2021; however, in Spring 2022, that percentage decreased to 30% of students not meeting the benchmark.

Figure 2.

School Cohort for Second Grade Fall 2021 and Second Grade Spring 2022

School Cohort for Second Grade Fall 2021 and Second Grade Spring 2022
(77 students in this school cohort)

Second Grade Fall 2021	Second Grade Spring 2022
36 students below Summed Score Benchmark (ID or RA) (36 of 77 = 47%)	21 students *remained below Summed Score Benchmark* (ID or RA) (21 of 36 = 58%)
	15 students *now at or above Summed Score Benchmark* (15 of 36 = 42%)
41 students *at or above Summed Score Benchmark* (41 of 77 = 53%)	2 students *newly below Summed Score Benchmark* (ID or RA) (2 of 41 = 5%)
	39 students *still at or above Summed Score Benchmark* (39 of 41 = 95%)

Plan for 2022-23: Continuing the Work

The number of students reading below expectations in second grade decreased by 17% from September to May of the 2021-22 school year. Looking ahead to the 2022-23 school year, we will continue to use data to enact positive changes, as we still have 30% of our students entering third grade below the reading expectation established by PALS.

This fall, the focus will continue to be supporting students in meeting or exceeding the expected reading benchmark. In the 2022-23 school year, this group of students will be third graders, and required to reach a higher reading benchmark in the spring. To ensure we continue to move students towards reading independence, we will begin the school year with a plan in place. Starting with an informational session at Back to School Night, structuring professional learning communities, assessing the components of

literacy, understanding the data collected, and using data and continuous reflection to modify instruction. This plan can support any data based instructional change, but the focus of this article will be specific to the needs of third graders since they were kindergarteners at the onset of the pandemic.

Step 1: Sharing the Message at Back to School Night

Administrators play a crucial role in providing clarity of expectations, support, and facilitating space for conversation with valuable insights. As we prepare for the upcoming school year, the administration team will address families at Back to School Night during an informational session. The session needs to be recorded for accessibility to stakeholders who are unable to attend. The message will be concise and positive, valuing families' concerns and voicing commitment to developing students as readers, writers, thinkers, and communicators. At the conclusion of the session, the Literacy Specialists in the building will be available to speak with families if they have further questions about upcoming literacy assessments. We intend to keep the conversational momentum flowing by establishing a community culture of literacy through engaging social media posts and highlighting accessibility to free books.

Step 1 Reflection. Making families aware of upcoming assessments is important; however, the real impact on student learning comes from reviewing the outcomes of testing with parents/guardians. This information can be shared at the first parent/ teacher conference or with a phone call. Regardless of the method of communication, the importance is in the home and school collaboration. To ensure student success, all stakeholders need to be in alignment with a plan of support. Looking ahead to the 2023-2024 school year, Virginia students who demonstrate deficiencies on state reading assessment(s) will require a reading plan. According to the **Virginia Literacy Act**, "a reading specialist, in collaboration with the teacher of any student who receives such reading intervention services, develops, oversees implementation of, and monitors student progress on a student reading plan."

Step 2: Engaging in Professional Learning Communities

Third grade teachers acknowledge the intentional focus required to address reading concerns through active professional learning community (PLC) meetings. Teachers' engagement in the PLC process is critical to its success and will require the ongoing support of administrators and literacy specialists. Administrators are the instructional leaders in the building; they set the tone for expectations and work diligently to remove logistical roadblocks that prevent forward momentum. Literacy specialists have an in-depth understanding of the synchrony of literacy and acquisition of literacy skills. The third grade teachers, including special education teachers that support third grade, are the most valuable members of the PLC team. They know their students best and are able to make the most significant impact on student achievement.

As an expert in the field of reading, they have knowledge of literacy assessments, the progression and complexity of reading acquisition, and an understanding of evidence-based practices in literacy instruction.

A PLC environment needs to be conducive to collaboration and building collective efficacy. In this space, educators can use targeted data analysis strategies to promote instructional improvement. I am most familiar with the **Data Wise Improvement Process**, which consists of practical steps that guide collaborative work using student data through three stages: Prepare, Inquire, and Act. School leaders should begin the school year establishing a structure for this collaborative work with the support of norms and the ongoing use of protocols. Protocols are structures that support data analysis, collaboration, and reflection. A quick google search will provide many examples of protocols, but I tend to rely on the **National School Reform Faculty** website for protocols.

The attendees at PLC meetings may differ depending on the expertise

required; however, the meetings should consistently include: third grade teachers, a special education teacher, an administrator, and a literacy specialist. The literacy specialist's involvement in the PLC supports the team in building assessment literacy and data analysis. As an expert in the field of reading, they have knowledge of literacy assessments, the progression and complexity of reading acquisition, and an understanding of evidence-based practices in literacy instruction.

Step 2 Reflection. Special education teachers are skillful in meeting the needs of students and supporting their academic growth. We can all benefit from their insight, but with large caseloads and unfilled instructional aide positions, they are unable to attend grade level PLCs. Similarly, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers have valuable insight on language acquisition, but are underutilized by colleagues because they are overwhelmed with supporting the needs of their large caseloads and are assigned to support multiple buildings. In our building, the special education teachers and the ESOL teacher work diligently to communicate with general education teachers regarding shared students. However, I believe their insight is valuable for all learners and hope in the future they can attend grade level PLCs. In the meantime, I am working to be the liaison between regular education teachers, SPED teachers, and the ESOL teacher.

Step 3: Maintaining a Focus on Data

Dr. Hollis Scarborough, a senior scientist at Haskins Laboratories and leading researcher of early language development and its connection to later literacy, explains the complexity of a fluent reader using a **rope metaphor** (from the International Dyslexia Association).

Each component of literacy is represented by a single strand and when woven together creates a rope. This signifies the need of each individual skill to seamlessly intertwine to create a strong rope or skilled reader (Neuman & Dickinson, 2011). Diagnosing the deficiency area or strand requires teachers to collect and analyze multiple data points to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses. Assessments for third

graders need to be representative of the various components of literacy: encoding, decoding, fluency, comprehension, and written expression. The data from the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) will indicate students' spelling development. A comprehensive reading assessment will establish a reading level considering a student's fluency, accuracy, and comprehension of text. To complete the student assessments, a writing sample using a common holistic rubric will provide insight on students as writers. These assessments provide information from a snapshot in time, and could misrepresent a student's ability. The data provided by teachers through informal and formal assessments will be critical to understanding the areas of strength and weakness in literacy understanding.

Teacher surveys are an additional piece of data to collect and consider. This shifts the focus from student performance and readiness to teacher practices. Survey questions could probe into three categories: teachers' views of students and their reading and writing capabilities, belief and comfort level of their own ability to address learning gaps, and accessibility to engaging literacy resources to support the needs of their students. Disaggregating the survey responses provides the administration team insight into teacher thinking and current building culture. This also provides an opportunity for administration to intervene quickly, provide clarity, and support teachers who hold a negative mindset towards student learning or the impact of instruction (Katzenbach et al., 2012).

Comprehensive data should be collected on the strengths and weaknesses of students and staff as well as the accessibility of instructional resources. A thorough resource audit will examine the literacy materials available at each tier of instruction. Noting resources available to classroom teachers in alignment with standards and pedagogical practices is a valuable practice. School teams should also analyze intervention materials and categorize resources targeting the various components of reading difficulty. Another portion of the audit should focus on school and classroom libraries, observation of the number of new and relevant titles, reading abilities, diversified characters, and the volume of text accessible for students.

Closing the Literacy Gap

After the assessments, survey, and audit have been administered, the PLC team can move into stage two in the Data Wise Improvement Process: Inquire (Boudett et al., 2015). Acknowledging the limited weekly PLC time, a school's leadership team should collect the data from the various assessments, analyze outcomes, and create a data overview to bring to the third-grade team. The school's leadership team may need to seek outside expertise to clearly understand the assessment results. While interpreting data from the comprehensive reading assessment and PALS spelling data, include the building's or district's speech pathologist. They have a specific understanding of oral language and, in particular, the impact of masks on phonological development. Similarly, the school's librarian can support the leadership team in analyzing the literacy results from the resource audit. They are aware of students' check-out preferences and have a vast recall of book titles to meet a variety of needs.

It is essential to have a shared understanding of effective practice and establish a common understanding of student and teacher success in the development of the action plan.

As a leadership team, we will compile information and create a data overview of third grade students' strengths and weaknesses. The data representation(s) should be visually appealing, drawing attention to critical comparisons, and comprehensive enough to be able to identify trends (Boudett et al., 2015). **Canva** has a free account option that is a great resource for creating data representations. The created data representation will be displayed at the third grade PLC meeting and we will begin the process of analyzing the data. The crux of this work is to understand the information the data supply; it is the foundational component required to enact positive change. In consecutive meetings, we will analyze the data representation. We will use a protocol such as the **Data Driven Dialogue** protocol from the National School Reform Faculty. This protocol provides a structure to understand the data before attempting to use the data to work towards a solution.

Unfortunately, when students are unsuccessful, the relationship between teaching and learning can become a finger pointing blame game, looking to place fault with a guilty party. Let's shift the mindset! As educators, we enact positive change by identifying the learner-centered problem and respond through an adjustment in instruction to match the needs of students (Boudett et al., 2015). Dive deep into instruction using a root cause analysis protocol such as The Five Whys for Inquiry from National School Reform Faculty. Through this type of protocol, the PLC team can examine instruction and pinpoint the instructional problem of practice. The literacy specialist will facilitate the development of an action plan to address the instructional problem of practice, moving into the third step of the Data Wise Process: Act.

It is essential to have a shared understanding of effective practice and establish a common understanding of student and teacher success in the development of the action plan. As the third-grade team implements the action plan, they will need to bring student work samples and common formative assessments to PLC meetings. This will help to gauge student understanding and reflect on the impact of implemented instructional strategies. This action plan is successful when our data show the third-grade students moving toward grade-level literacy expectations. This topic will be the focus of PLC meetings throughout the year. As additional assessment opportunities arise, we will explore the data and make instructional adjustments as necessary.

Step 3 Reflection. At the time of writing this article, we are in the process of assessing and collecting data. A developing trend observed by classroom teachers is the misalignment in our students as readers and what they are able to produce as writers. Many are reading and comprehending significantly higher than they are able to encode (spell) and compose (write).

Step 4: Providing Administrator Support

Administrators monitor the consistency of the action plan implementation through walkthroughs or informal observations. They have the opportunity to see the big picture, the work in action across the grade level. They are able to ensure the effectiveness of the PLC work, noting similar experiences or common misunderstandings. Last, they can support teachers in practicing the recent learning through timely and relevant feedback. Meaningful feedback is concise, but descriptive in connecting the specific behaviors relative to the PLC learning (Skretta, 2007). In certain situations, an administrator's presence in the classroom determines the need for a difficult conversation. Constructive conversations clarify teacher expectations and provide support to ensure the implementation of the effective practice co-created during PLC.

Step 5: Celebrating Success!

As students' literacy skills develop towards grade level expectations, take the time to celebrate accomplishments. Recognize colleagues for their dedication and engagement during PLCs and faculty meetings and encourage teacher leaders to highlight instructional successes. Celebrate individual student growth milestones with phone calls home, reassuring families that their student is making progress. The use of data to enact positive change in the literate lives of these third-grade students will put them on the track to graduate high school, enter the workforce, and reach their full potential as socially responsible members of society.

Reflection and Suggestion

Creating this plan prior to the school year had its benefits. It provided a clear focus and created a sense of forward momentum. But as the saying goes, even with the best laid plans sometimes things go wrong. Consider these steps as a map guiding you in the right direction, not a rigid guideline to follow. By nature, educators are planners but also have the superpower instinct to pivot in a second's notice to meet the needs of their students. Take the time to reflect on what is making an impact on students and adjust accordingly.

References

Boudett, K. P., City, E. A., & Murnane, R. J. (2015). *Data wise: A step-by-step guide to using assessment results to improve teaching and learning*. Harvard Education Press.

Katzenbach, J., Steffen, I., & Kronley, C. (2012). *Cultural change that sticks*. Harvard Business Review.

National School Reform Faculty. (2022, July 13). Retrieved July 29, 2022, from https://nsrfharmony.org/

Neuman, S. B., & Dickinson, D. K. (2011). *Handbook of early literacy research*. Guilford Publications, Incorporated.

Scarborough, D. H. (n.d.). *Many strands are woven into skilled reading*. International Dyslexia Association. Retrieved from https://dyslexiaida.org/event/a-20th-year-celebration-of-scarboroughs-reading-rope/.

Skretta, J. (2007). Using walk-throughs to gather data for school improvement. *Principal Leadership*, *7*(9), 16–23.

University of Virginia PALS Report. (2021). *Examining the impact of COVID-19 on the identification of at-risk students: Fall 2021 literacy screening findings*. University of Virginia. https://literacy.virginia.edu/sites/g/files/jsddwu1006/files/2022-04/PALS_StateReport_Fall_2021.pdf

Jump to Table of Contents

New Teacher Retention: What Principals Are Doing That Works

Robin Shrum, EdD

Dr. Robin L. Shrum is an elementary principal at W.W. Robinson Elementary School in Shenandoah County, Virginia. She graduated in May, 2022 with her Doctoral Degree from Shenandoah University. This is her 26th year in education, having served as a teacher for 12 and in building leadership for 14. She is a member of the VASCD Conference Committee and a WELV Regional Leader. She has a presence on Twitter (@PrincipalWWR) and would love to learn from you!

Abstract

Teacher retention has been a concern for the last 15 years. Now, with the addition of the challenges introduced due to the pandemic, we are at a crisis point with filling open teaching positions. My dissertation research on new teacher retention is the foundation for this article. I looked at what elementary school principals in Virginia were doing to retain new teachers, and what they felt had the biggest impact in new teachers' decisions to stay.

Teacher Retention and Its Impact on Schools

Teacher turnover has been an increasing problem in the field of education. Add the effects of the pandemic from the last two years, and we have an epidemic of teacher shortages. In the state of Virginia, school systems are struggling to fill open positions. In their 2018 report, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) stated that unfilled teacher positions had risen by 40% since 2007, leaving some school systems with hundreds of openings at the start of the 2019–2020 school year. This shortage is a huge concern for student achievement and growth, as school systems scramble year after year to hire, train, and support new teachers. In order to decrease the number of teachers school systems need to hire each year, leaders must identify what practices are effective in developing and keeping new teachers.

The Role of the Elementary School Principal. Principals are the instructional leaders in the building and have the most impact on climate and many of the conditions teachers cite as reasons for leaving. Chisolm's (2008) qualitative study examined the impact principal behaviors, principal leadership, school climate, professional development, and teacher mentoring programs had on teacher retention. Chisolm stated, "The role of the principal is a pivotal factor in teacher retention and principals have the tremendous task of providing support and direction for first year teachers and also inducting them into the teaching profession" (p. 50). The ability to foster a collaborative environment, where teachers learn from one another, and create growth opportunities has also been identified as integral to affecting new teacher attitudes towards teaching (Brown & Winn, 2009).

In this time of teacher shortages and high rates of turnover, principals need to know what it takes to help new teachers be successful. The time and energy spent on developing programs and supports that reduce turnover will, in the long run, positively influence building culture and student growth.

What Can Be Done to Provide Support

Teacher turnover and teacher retention have become popular topics for research and discussion over the past 10 years. This challenge in the

education system, however, is not new. In their 2014 report, the Alliance for Excellent Education identified that, over the past 20 years, there was increased turnover among beginning teachers, despite large growth in the teaching workforce. "The annual attrition rate for first year teachers has increased by more than 40 percent over the past two decades" (p. 3). While this is a growing concern across the United States, there has been limited research on how elementary school principals can better support new teachers. Let's take a look at how administrators can provide that support.

Teacher Induction Programs. Federal government requirements include induction for all new teaching and administrative staff for the first 2 years, mentor training, release time for mentor teachers, opportunities for mentor pairs to communicate and provide feedback, and new teacher professional development (New Teacher Center, 2016). They do not, however, require a formally written plan or program. In June 2020, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) released information about their New Teacher Support Program, which would provide mentoring to 500 new teachers across the state. With 6.2% of teachers in Virginia considered "inexperienced" in the 2018–2019 school year (VDOE, 2020, March) and a total of 96,615 teachers employed in the state (VDOE, 2020, June), 5,990 teachers would have met the criteria for the new program but only 500 would have benefitted from it.

Mentoring. Harris (2015) identified mentoring as a component in most new teacher induction programs. These mentors serve many roles, including providing emotional support, and performing formal observations of their mentees. There is much talk about how mentors should be skilled in observing, and experts in effective instruction, but very little regarding the training systems that should be provided to these mentors so that they are able to meet those expectations. McCann et al. (2012) stated that "leadership in a school district should provide standard training that aligns with the research about common concerns among beginning teachers and emphasizes a coaching model for the work that mentors will do with protégés" (p. 71).

School Culture. Kaplan and Owings (2013) defined school culture as "the shared orientations, values, norms, and practices that hold an educational unit together, give it a distinctive identity, and vigorously resist change from the outside" (p. 2). These shared beliefs and practices can positively, or negatively, affect the working climate and, in turn, student achievement. Building principals play an important role in developing, enhancing, and maintaining the school culture.

A collaborative culture provides a foundation for development of the teacher as a practitioner, resulting in increased self-efficacy. When teachers had high self-efficacy, they were more likely to contribute to the group, work collaboratively, consider new resources and teaching approaches, and be better able to handle stressors in the workplace (Sehgal, Nambudiri, & Mishra, 2017). As a result, they were more likely to stay in the profession.

A collaborative culture provides a foundation for development of the teacher as a practitioner, resulting in increased self-efficacy.

What Elememtary School Principals Say Is Working

I was interested in finding what elementary school principals in Virginia were doing to retain and support new teachers. I interviewed 13 principals across 7 Superintendent's Regions to find out what they were doing and what they found to be most effective. The findings of this study were organized in three themes. The first theme centers on relationships. The second theme focuses on new teacher supports. The final theme centers on principal preparation.

Relationships. Relationships came up repeatedly throughout the study and were identified as the single most important factor in retaining teachers. The comments shared around this topic covered relationships within the school building that can be grouped into three subthemes: new teacher to teacher, new teacher to administration, and schoolwide relationships.

New Teacher to Teacher. Although the role of instructional coaches can vary

across schools, four principals spoke to how meaningful the coach–new teacher relationships could be. All principals talked about the impact mentor teachers could have on new teachers. The mentor role varied greatly from school to school and division to division, but every principal referenced an assigned mentor for at least the first year of teaching. The role varied from a fellow teacher who provided building expertise regarding where to go for what, to a collaborative partner in planning who observed and gave feedback to the mentee. Not only did the role of the mentor vary, but the qualifications and expectations for those mentors varied as well. Patterns were not evident in the qualifications required of mentors, nor in the training of mentors.

Principals mentioned collaborative teams. Those teams included grade level teams, professional learning communities (PLCs), and leadership teams. All of these referenced the opportunity for new teachers to plan and learn alongside veteran teachers. Seven of the principals referenced collaborative planning as grade levels, emphasizing the opportunity for all teachers, new and veteran, to work through the plans, talk about students, share resources, and problem solve.

New Teacher to Administrator. Participants frequently mentioned that administrators needed to be approachable and available. Two principals expressed a need to recognize human value, not just as teachers, but also as people. Modeling is an important tool in education, and one that the principals recognized as impactful in their relationships with their teachers. Principals explained that they sought out feedback, as that helped them to get better and demonstrate a growth mindset for their new teachers. An emphasis on solutions-based thinking, rather than a focus on the problem, was identified as important when working with new teachers. This helped them become more solution-focused problem solvers.

Schoolwide Relationships. All principals referenced the culture in their building. They expressed that teachers were people first and needed to be encouraged and supported. Principals shared that relationships needed to be a primary focus, whether among specific teams or building wide.

Participants talked about the importance of sharing expectations, not micromanaging, and how creating a place where teachers have autonomy and feel safe taking chances is particularly important. Teachers must trust that they have the principal's support should they need it but should have the autonomy to make decisions in the best interest of their students. Principals also identified honest conversations as factors in retention in their buildings. Having a balance of encouragement and honest feedback was considered most impactful.

Supports. Supports, in this case, refer to programmatic support, rather than the human supports discussed in the previous section. These supports include the sub themes of systems, new teacher support programs, mentoring programs, and division supports aimed at helping new teachers become acclimated and be successful. There is overlap in this area due to mentoring programs typically being a part of the overall new teacher support program.

Systems. Most principals spoke of the systems in place as a support to new teachers. All principals had systems in place; however, what those systems included was not universal. These systems included those for monitoring new teacher growth through frequent observations and check-ins, and engaging teachers in regularly scheduled professional conversations. They also included the development of support systems that help teachers understand and respond to data, show support for teachers' ideas and a desire to try new things, and support staff as more than workers, but as people.

Principals emphasized the importance of transparency and communication, being a part of the learning environment, and modeling expectations. They also identified the need for teachers to feel safe asking for help, asking questions, and asking for support. This support was described as ongoing in the form of feedback and learning conversations.

All participants described a collaborative model and grade-level teams that contributed to embedded supports within the building. The principals

identified a need to step back and delegate to teacher leaders in the building to help develop a collaborative environment, as well as recognize one another's strengths so people know whom to go to for specific support.

New Teacher Support Programs. One of the most popular new teacher supports is the induction program. When discussing the new teacher programs in their buildings and division, principals referenced a division-based new teacher induction program and mentoring program, rather than a school-based program. This is in direct contradiction to what principals stated was most effective.

Creating an environment where relationships are valued and teachers feel supported is pivotal to keeping teachers in their positions and in advancing student growth.

All principals referenced supplementing the division program within their building to address more specific needs. That sometimes meant doing more than the division requirements and expectations, such as additional support from the instructional coach, in-building teacher leaders, monthly meetings with building administration, team building opportunities, and social events. Principals asserted that the new teacher training provided was more impactful if it was based on things the new teachers identified as needing or wanting to learn more about, rather than monthly assigned topics.

The majority of principals identified feedback as a large and important part of new teacher support. This feedback was given in a variety of ways to include formal observation feedback, informal feedback after walk throughs, and regular check-ins with teachers. The focus was not specifically on evaluative feedback, but on opportunities for interactions with the new teacher to gauge how they felt they were doing.

Mentoring. Throughout discussions about new teacher programming, the only common support mentioned was the assigned mentor. All but one principal stated that they had a specific school-based mentoring program in place. Mentor training was common across all schools, but principals were not knowledgeable about what that training looked like or the extent of the training. The training was provided by the division and varied from training as a clinical faculty member in the local consortium, which provides specific training at a local university in order to be eligible to host a student teacher, to a four session mini professional development. There was also a lack of consistency regarding the qualifications to become a mentor. Across buildings, these qualifications included "best fit," fully certified, continuing contract, 3 to 5 years teaching experience, and clinical-faculty trained.

Division Supports. One of the questions in both the focus groups and the individual interviews referenced specific support that the school division provided in hiring, retaining, and supporting new teachers. Principals reported that the majority of support they received when hiring new teachers was in recruitment and first year supports. They shared that the division office provided the structure for the new teacher induction program, which typically included a mentoring component. Other supports included division wide professional development, and participation in division wide interviews when hiring.

Elementary School Principal Preparation. Principals expressed that they did not come to their positions with an understanding of how to support new teachers. They identified a lack of preparation in their graduate level administrative preparation programs. The training they did receive was on-the-ground training once they were in an administrative role.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Considering these findings, it is suggested that central office staff in school divisions across the state of Virginia make the following adjustments to current practices.

- School systems should consider their interview processes and protocols to ensure that they ask the right questions. Principals shared that, in order to develop and sustain a collaborative culture, their focus in hiring is on personality rather than on instruction. They shared that people can learn the content, but they can't learn how to be a team player.
- Mentor training must be a priority, with a focus on how to provide feedback to mentees so that new teachers have access to regular quality feedback and support. Currently, many mentor programs require mentors to observe and give feedback. The challenge is that mentors do not receive training on how to coach or give feedback, which can result in a less effective experience.
- When teachers resign, exit interviews must be performed with a focus on uncovering gaps in supports. Teachers' perceptions of how effective the new teacher program was are vital to the ongoing development of a successful induction program. Human resources should then share this information with building principals, which will enable them to improve their practices.
- School systems and building administrators that work together to implement a school layer of supports that tie into, but are not limited to, division supports, will likely have a positive effect on teacher retention. A stand-alone program created and delivered by the school system does not address the immediate and ongoing needs of actual teachers in buildings.

- Finally, Virginia elementary school principals may want to adjust their practices. Principals must look closely at current in-school practices for supporting new teachers. Developing an in-school induction program must be a priority. Programs should be responsive to the needs of the new teachers and provide opportunities to respond to needs as they arise. Principals should develop opportunities for new teachers to receive coaching, and a focus on improving what is actually happening in the classroom, rather than on what "should" be happening in the classroom. Principals should look at current requirements and expectations for new teacher mentors and develop protocols that ensure the teachers in those roles are the best fit for providing supports to new teachers.

Conclusion

Principals play a vital role in the support of new teachers, and in turn, retention. Teacher retention greatly influences student achievement. Creating an environment where relationships are valued and teachers feel supported is pivotal to keeping teachers in their positions and in advancing student growth. The principals in this study identified the strategies and supports they deemed most effective in supporting new teachers, as well as those that were not high yield. Changes in practice, as identified by Virginia elementary school principals, could provide the foundation for better new teacher support and, in turn, increased teacher retention, which would improve education in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Jump to Table of Contents

References

Alliance for Excellent Education (2014). *On the path to equity: Improving the effectiveness of beginning teachers*.

Brown, K., & Wynn, S. (2009). Finding, supporting, and keeping: The role of the principal in teacher retention issues. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *8*(1), 37–63.

Chisolm, S. D. (2008). The principal's role in teacher retention [Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi]. https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/1175

Harris, B. (2015). *Retaining new teachers: How do I support and develop novice teachers?* Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kaplan, L. S., & Owings, W. A. (2013). *Culture re-boot: Reinvigorating school culture to improve student outcomes*. Corwin Press.

McCann, T., Jones, A., & Aaronoff, G. (2012). *Teaching matters most: A school leader's guide to improving classroom instruction*. Corwin.

New Teacher Center. (2016). *State policy review: New educator induction Virginia*. https://newteachercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SPR-virginia-2016-v3.pdf

Sehgal, P., Nambudiri, R., & Mishra, S. K. (2017). Teacher effectiveness through self-efficacy, collaboration, and principal leadership. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, *31*(4), 505–517. http://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-05-2016-0090

Virginia Department of Education. (2018). 2018 annual report on the condition and needs of public schools in Virginia. https://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/reports/annual_reports/2018-annual-report-final.docx

Virginia Department of Education. (2020b, March). Virginia school quality profile. https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/virginia-state-quality-profile#desktopTabs-7

Winn, C. S. (2019). The relationship between teacher self-efficacy and principal leadership behaviors (Publication No. 27724606) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Houston-Clear Lake]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

CALL FOR 2023 JOURNAL ARTICLES!

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; and/or,
  - 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!

Manuscripts are due

August 1, 2023

and should be sent to our

Editor, Eric Carbaugh, at carbauem@jmu.edu.

Because the VASCD Journal is published in an online format, authors are encouraged to include videos, hyperlinks, podcasts, audio or animations to enhance their articles. Manuscripts should, as closely as possible, follow format and reference guidelines outlined in the Publication Manual of the American Psychology Association (APA).

VIRGINIA ASCD
Learn. Teach. Lead.

http://vascd.org

JOURNAL **2022**
Volume **19**