



Fall 2013 Newsletter, September 17, 2013

## *The Importance of Being There*

Daryl Chesley, VASCD President

On behalf of the Virginia ASCD Board of Directors, I bring greetings and the wish to each of you for a successful school year. I am honored to serve as President of this wonderful organization, and as I reflect on my first year of service to the VASCD Board in this role, I am continually impressed with the high caliber of educators that I have had the pleasure to meet - and to make connections with - all across the commonwealth. For it is truly the members of this organization that bring it such strength.

Not to overly date myself, but do you remember when the "Fish!" philosophy came out? This was the story of the Fish Market in Seattle, and how each of us can find motivation to enjoy the job we are doing. In this time of new starts – as we begin a new school year – there is no better time than now to show your motivation and love for coming (back) to work!

On any given day, I could be convinced that any of the four tenants of the "Fish!" Philosophy (Be There, Play, Make Their Day, and Choose Your Attitude) are the most important, but for the sake of this discussion, I'll focus on "Be There." In the world of education, and especially in individual schools and classrooms, there is no better way to emulate positive connections than to "be there" for each other. When people need you, they need *all* of you. Setting aside distractions and judgments to be mentally and emotionally present is a sign of respect. It improves communication and strengthens relationships.

More recently, however, when someone mentions "making connections," the discussion is about Social Media – either LinkedIn, Facebook, blogs, or any of the myriad of ways to 'connect' these days. What I am suggesting is returning to the *old school* connections – actually speaking with, and getting to know the people you work with as well as getting to know your students. Do not forget the power of personal relationships – with coworkers, students, parents, and community members!

As we all engage in the flurry of activities that mark the beginning another school year I encourage each of you to "Be There" for those important people in your lives. To give of yourself, and to make the connections that will last a lifetime for the students we serve. Again, best wishes to each of you for a successful school year. I look forward to 'connecting' with you at the VASCD Annual Conference in Williamsburg.

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## Assessment and Accountability: Time to Move On

Laurie McCullough, Executive Director

Last week at my local gym, I ran into a library media specialist who said her school library had been closed for a total of five weeks last year so the space could be used as a testing center. Just a few days before, I'd read a blog post by Rachel Levy (<http://bit.ly/19tr4vq>) in which she described the difficulties associated with opting her third grade son out of the SOL reading test (among these difficulties were that the opt-out resulted in a "refusal/disruption" code and a score of 0). A couple weeks earlier, I'd heard an elementary principal describe an 8-year old's 8-hour-long struggle with the third grade SOL math test. His teacher drove him home just in time for supper that day.

I find myself wondering what our assessment system is teaching our children about what we value.

The Virginia Standards of Learning were approved in 1995 for good reasons. Our schools needed a level of consistency, transparency, and quality control as well as a focus on all student groups. These 'standards' were all missing at that time. In 1998, when the first SOL tests "counted," only 2% of the Commonwealth's schools met the benchmark for full accreditation. Although the accreditation benchmark has increased over the years, 93% of Virginia schools were fully accredited in 2013.

We still need statewide assessment and accountability systems, but it is time to rethink them. While SOL scores are one indicator of a school's success, they do not define quality teaching and learning. We must be about real learning, and we must not confuse it with test preparation.

Our world and our communities have seen momentous change since the mid- 1990's. We access, process, and apply knowledge in new ways. The global economy is information and innovation-based, and young people need a different kind of preparation for success in the work force. At the same time, our student population has become more diverse, and in many communities poverty rates have increased dramatically. All this suggests that teaching and learning must be more personalized, more engaging, and more differentiated. Students need expert teachers to help them become self-directed in their learning- able to not only access the information they need for a specific purpose, but to curate, critique, and communicate what they are learning.

I find myself wondering how many opportunities students get in school to do real work.

VASCD's mission is to advance excellence in teaching, learning, and leadership in the Commonwealth. Our version of excellence is grounded in a whole child approach. It recognizes that while a common set of standards is important, students will reach them in different ways at different times. We believe we must build students' capacity for reasoning, inventive thinking and investigation; help them gain communication and collaboration skills; and leverage technology to support meaningful learning. We invite you to join the discussion on our *Facebook* page and on *Twitter*. Read, respond to, and write for *VASCD Speaks* on our website. Contact your VASCD Regional Representative to ask how you can help advance real excellence in your school and community. And of course, we hope you'll join us at the 2013 Annual Conference, themed @modernlearners, December 4-6 in Williamsburg.

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## Virginia ASCD's Strategic Plan

In July, 2013, Virginia ASCD's Board of Directors revised our Strategic Plan to focus on three goals:

- Promoting public policy to benefit Virginia's students;
- Facilitating the exchange of ideas among educators and groups in the commonwealth; and
- Ensuring access to high-quality relevant professional development.

We invite you to read the entire one-page plan at [VaASCD.org](http://VaASCD.org).



## *Parents Hold the Key to Success*

*Melany Stowe is the Director for Communications and Community Outreach for Danville Public Schools. She is also an ASCD Emerging Leader.*

***The key to success for all students is the 80% of the week they are NOT in school.***

Students spend approximately thirty-five hours per week in school. Teachers and administrators are working harder than ever to make every minute count in eliminating achievement and opportunity gaps, ensuring students are reading at grade level and preparing students for on-time graduation. Educators' hard work pays off for many students, but not all. The key to all students demonstrating academic success is ensuring parents are engaged in their children's education. Research shows students from families with above-median parental involvement showed success rates thirty percent higher than those from families with below-median parental involvement, as measured by GPAs and test scores in math, science, reading, and social studies (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

**Are you involving parents or engaging them? There is a difference.**

It is time to move beyond parental involvement and become transformational by engaging parents. Involvement activities are typically transactional, for example, school performances, conferences, and weekly folders. While beneficial and important to a school community and communicating to parents, transactional activities do not provide parents with the content and techniques they need to assume the role of "teacher" during non-school hours. As part of the commitment to educating all students, parents should be provided with practical resources to understand the curriculum. Teachers need to be specific about students' areas of challenge and assist parents with strategies to overcome them.

Parents are the first and most influential teachers for their children. You must empower your students' parents. In addition to helping parents create a proper learning environment at home, parental engagement includes governance and advocacy. Parents should be included on school improvement teams and school committees. **If a decision is being made regarding students, are you including parents in the process?**

Students have one family unit and as educators we must be relentless in reaching out to students' families. The most accurate predictor of students' achievement in school is parental engagement during non-school hours. Preparing students for college, career, and citizenship needs to evolve from involving to engaging parents. Involvement is good, but engagement can produce even greater results for students, parents, and schools because engagement taps into the 80% of the week students are not in schools. (Ferland & Hammond, 2009) **How are you engaging parents during non-school hours?**

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# *An Education that Promotes Success in the Real World: Miss Virginia's Outstanding Teen Advocates for Arts Education*

*Phyllis Milne, VASCD Newsletter Editor*



*Cassie Donegan, Miss Virginia's 2013 Outstanding Teen*, is an advocate for the arts as well as arts in education. Cassie, who was a talent winner and the fourth place runner up in the 2013 Miss America's Outstanding Teen competition, is an 11th grade student and performer at York County's School of the Arts. Cassie is presenting her platform, "Promoting Arts Education in Our Schools," to local, state, and national lawmakers. Her goal is to encourage support and funding of arts education in our schools.

Cassie plays the tuba, the piano, and the violin. She has been dancing since she was two, and currently she performs tap, ballet, jazz, modern, character, lyrical musical theatre, vaudeville and pointe. She has been acting since she was five, and her roles included Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, Annie, Peter Pan, Elizabeth Benning in Young Frankenstein, and Penny in Hairspray. She also appears in national and local commercials.

Cassie believes that participation in the arts has taught her important life lessons that prepare her and other students for success in the real world. Whether in drama, dance, or musical ensembles, she has learned the responsibility of working with a team as well as organizing her time to maintain her straight A average. Cassie's participation in theatre or musical performances has boosted her self-esteem as she overcomes the fear of speaking or presenting to a group. Not only do students like Cassie learn the satisfaction of a job well done, but also they gain skills and knowledge that lead to unexpected opportunities in many career fields. The arts stimulate creativity and growth physically, mentally, and emotionally. Students practice purposeful movement as well as explore the backgrounds of diverse theatrical roles and varied artists. To view Cassie's platform "Arts Education in Our Schools," go to [www.facebook.com/mvaot](http://www.facebook.com/mvaot).



## *VASCD Annual Conference: @modernlearners*

*Registration for Annual Conference is underway!*  
[More information and online registration are available here.](#)

*See you in Williamsburg in December!*