

The Solidarity Report

Your weekly VUE Update

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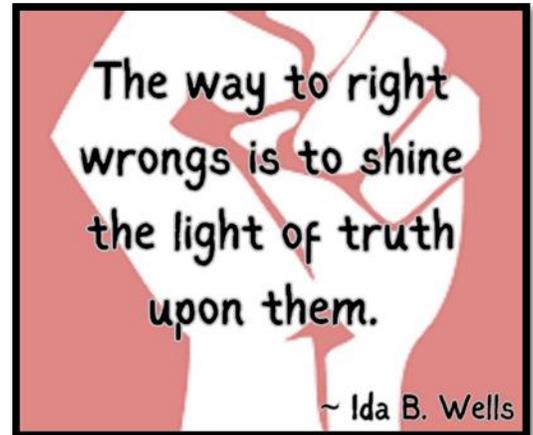
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A Message from Elizabeth

As we approach the final month of what has been undeniably the most challenging year for our union, I felt it important and necessary to stop and reflect upon what we have endured, overcome, and accomplished during the last twelve months.

At this time last year, we were still bargaining the 2022-23 contracts for instructional and support staff. Unfortunately this work would ultimately be stopped due to the declaration of impasse by VCS. At the same time, we were bracing for a hostile legislative session focused on attacking our union and our beloved public schools, and we were working to overcome the significant vacancies within our district which makes the process of educating and meeting the needs of our students harder on everyone.

Nevertheless, we did not give up, we did not crumble, and we did not succumb to the pressure. Instead, we organized, planned, and developed a strategy for success.

A mass action was called, and an impasse rally cry went out to our members. On January 24th, more than 60 activists, wearing red, attended the school board meeting for a “Grade In”, and within 10 days an agreement was reached for instructional personnel. The agreement for support staff was completed within the month. These agreements were reached as a direct result of the advocacy of our members.

As the legislative session began, more than a dozen VUE members traveled to Tallahassee to speak to members of the Volusia Delegation and to testify during Senate and House Committee meetings against the anti-union and anti-public school legislation that was being forced through the legislature. Although we were unable to stop the blatant union

busting bill from passing, we were able to speak truth to power and we **will** hold those who stood against us accountable during the upcoming election cycle. It is crystal clear that big money reigns supreme in Tallahassee, and that the billionaires from the Freedom Foundation (located in Olympia, Washington) have their hooks into certain elected officials in our great state.

With the passing and subsequent signing of SB 256 by Governor DeSantis, we responded in a powerful and strategic manner. We created our plan to convert to the eDues or cash pay options for VUE membership. Throughout the spring and during the summer, VUE staff and member activists spent their time ensuring that OUR UNION would not be decertified.

We have submitted our recertification application to the Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC) and are awaiting final approval. The instructional bargaining unit is expected to be approved as submitted, and the support unit has requested an election by submitting more than 600 interest cards declaring that the support staff within VCS desire to have VUE as the exclusive bargaining agent. PERC has 30 days from the submission of the request for an election to begin the process.

We continue to work to make improvements in our working conditions for our support and instructional personnel. We believe this is the way to retain and attract personnel to VCS. We have settled, ratified, and received board approval for the 2023-24 contracts for both instructional and support personnel. We advocated and received a correction to the issue with VAM scores. We will continue to monitor how these scores are calculated, and we are currently working to achieve significant changes related to ESE paperwork for general ed and ESE personnel.

We know that life is not guaranteed to be a bowl of cherries, and for us, union members working in Florida's public schools, sometimes we wonder exactly what *is* in the bowl! However, what we know is that good ultimately triumphs over evil and when we work together, stand united, and speak up; we win. We cannot afford to stay neutral, now is the time to commit to making OUR UNION, the most powerful voice in Volusia County. We must believe in the concept of "*Dunamis*," which is Greek for power, potential, and ability. Obstacles and challenges will continue to occur, but we must realize that they are not problems, but opportunities.

Take a moment to reflect on how YOU can become more engaged in the work of VUE, and how you can contribute to ensuring continued improvements in our working conditions. VUE is powerful because of our members. We must continue to recruit and continue to be the voice of hope for our members, students, and our communities. We are the experts in our public schools, and we are the ones who will transform VCS into what it needs to be for ourselves, our colleagues, our students, and our community.

Solidarity!

Elizabeth

District Update

Mark Your Calendar: NO MEETINGS ALLOWED BEFORE OR AFTER SCHOOL IN DECEMBER.

- Wednesday, December 6th is scheduled as a site based ERPL. Due to the number of days in the month, there cannot be any other meetings scheduled. This includes Team meetings before the school day in our middle schools, faculty meetings, and parent conferences NOT scheduled by the individual teacher.
- IEP, 504, and PST meetings may occur, but must be limited. If you are a classroom teacher and are scheduled for more than one of the identified meetings above during the week, please reach out immediately.
- PLC meetings may take place this week and the week of 12-4 but are NOT allowed during the week of 12-11.
- **Early Release will be FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15TH** due to winter break.
- Monday, January 2nd is a TDD and report card grades are due by the end of the day. **Paras will report on this day as well.** This will be the final duty day for paras for the 23-24 academic year.

Copies & Paper: with the change in reporting requirements and the call for ESE documentation to be printed and turned in to administration more frequently, it seems that an unforeseen and unplanned for consequence is that teachers are being told that they must use their own paper and limited number of copies for the month to generate these documents. To the individual not working in the classroom this may seem trivial; to our teachers this has negatively impacted their already limited resources. We are asking that VCS provide additional paper and copies to our teachers, when requested, for the purpose of generating these documents. Teachers should not have to dip into to their lead money or personal bank account to purchase paper that is used for satisfying the requirements of their job.

Look For Document & PLCs: after several attempts to obtain clarity on the expectations for the Look For documents and its use in our schools, we have received confirmation from district leadership that there has been NO MANDATE given by the district that teachers are required to complete the Look For document during weekly PLCs. We were specifically told, “*There is no expectation for secondary teachers in regard to the look for document. Rather, it is a document that may be used as a resource for teachers, PLCs, and school administration.*” Therefore, if you are being asked to spend your weekly PLC completing this document, please let us know. If this is the case, it is a site-based decision, and we have the right to ask why. Elementary teachers should also be using their PLC time to work on issues and concerns that result in improvements to instructional practice and student learning. Completing paperwork that does not produce better outcomes for teachers and students is a misuse of our already limited time.

Performance Matters Writing Assessment: on Friday before the break, we sent an email advising that we reached out to VCS regarding multiple concerns about grading the Performance Matters writing tests. The difficulties grading student work on the Performance Matters platform and the suggestion to teachers to download each writing assignment or copy and paste student work onto Microsoft word is unreasonable and demonstrates the lack of planning on the part of the district. Additionally we have learned that some students were able to exit Performance Matters and access AI resources for this assessment. When the district was contacted the suggested solution was to use the Impero

program or proximity to address the issue. Again, another example of how the use of programs that are not fully vetted create problems for our teachers and staff. The failure of VCS to plan for all contingencies has created a situation where learning time has been lost, and the data gained from the Performance Matters writing assessment may not be valid. We must do better.

Legislative Update

The members of the Florida Legislature did not meet last week due to the Thanksgiving holiday, however, in the final days before the break, there were significant measures taken to remove and relax many of the regulations impacting our public schools. Below is a brief summary of what occurred.

SB 7000- Deregulation of Personnel: This bill is the direct result of member activism. One of the positives of this legislation is the potential return of the multiyear contract for instructional staff. You will remember that when tenure was stripped from instructional personnel, support staff were not included. Our support staff still have the ability to earn tenure. SB 7000 also *removes some but not all* of the laws surrounding how instructional personnel are paid. At this point, the percentages required for performance pay are removed and payments for advanced degrees do not have to be in the teacher's area of certification. HOWEVER, as with most things, the details are what matter. Although there is a bit of good in this bill, there are also several items of concern. Such as language that restricts collective bargaining, which is your constitutional right. Additionally, there are concerns with how the multiyear contract is earned and the instructional calendar for local districts. Local control is once again a target of the elected officials in Tally.

SB 7002- Deregulation of Finance, Facilities, and Administrative Oversight: This bill is largely focused on providing relief from regulations on school district facilities and reducing school district and superintendent paperwork. Some of the paperwork in question makes it easier for districts to defy the class size amendment. Several senators pointed this out during a committee meeting. We will be monitoring this closely as parents and teachers alike understand the benefit of having smaller class sizes. With the focus on differentiation, small group instruction, and remediation, we must have manageable class sizes. When the classes are too large, impacts to learning are inevitable.

SB 7004- Deregulation of Assessment and Accountability: This bill is as notable for what it does not include as for what it does include. Nothing in SB 7004 reduces any testing nor the amount of time that students spend testing. SB 7004 continues the practice of favoring publicly funded private schools over public schools. Private schools still do not have to report their test scores publicly; they still don't receive an A-F grade from the Department of Education, and they still face zero consequences for low test scores year after year. However, this bill would end mandatory third grade retention for students who receive a Level 1 in ELA. Additionally, high school students would no longer be required to pass the tenth grade ELA assessment and the Algebra 1 end of course exam to receive a diploma. While superintendents from around the state testified in favor of these provisions during the committee meeting, relief from the punitive accountability system in Florida is

sure to be met with resistance from DOE and other power brokers who have the ability to influence certain elected officials in the Florida Legislature.

There are two committee weeks left prior to the official start of the 2024 legislative session. We will continue to keep you updated on the latest developments from the halls of the Capital.

VUE Republican Cadre- LAST CALL

We are including this information one more time. We had several VUE members reach out about joining the VUE Republican Cadre, and we wanted to ask again before we submit the final list to FEA. Please know that this advocacy opportunity has the potential to change the future for our public schools. Lawmakers need to know that the decisions they make are affecting ALL of us. There are no democrats, republicans, independents in our eyes, we are all educators. People who want to make life better for children. Therefore, this work is critical if we are to share the impacts of the legislators' decisions within our classrooms.

Please remember that opportunities will be provided to cadre members to travel to Tallahassee during the upcoming legislative session to advocate during committee meetings and directly with the members of the Volusia delegation. Training for this advocacy work will be facilitated by FEA.

If you are interested in joining the VUE Republican Cadre, please contact Elizabeth at elizabeth.albert@floridaea.org no later than Friday, December 1, 2023.

eDues Reminder

As a reminder, if you have enrolled in eDues, the dues deductions are scheduled to align with each VCS payday. As we approach the holiday season, please be reminded that your VUE dues will be deducted on the scheduled pay dates.

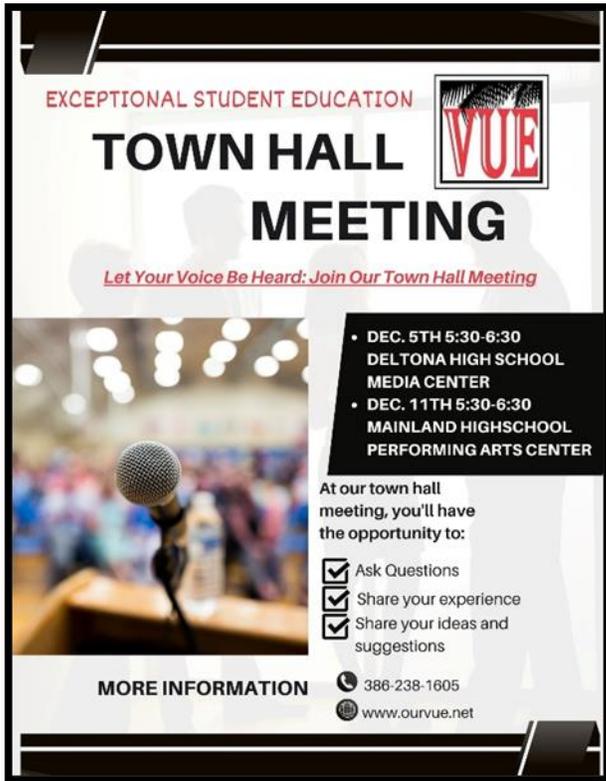
The remaining pay dates for this calendar year are:

- Thursday, November 30, 2023
- Friday, December 8, 2023
- Friday, December 15, 2023

If you are planning to separate from VCS, take a leave of absence, or change bank accounts, it is your responsibility to inform our office. If you are interested in shifting to a cash pay membership instead of using the ACH eDues, we can assist you with this process.

Thank YOU for sticking with our union and for your support through this very challenging time. Solidarity!

ESE Townhall Confirmed!



EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION

TOWN HALL MEETING

Let Your Voice Be Heard: Join Our Town Hall Meeting

• DEC. 5TH 5:30-6:30
DELTONA HIGH SCHOOL
MEDIA CENTER

• DEC. 11TH 5:30-6:30
MAINLAND HIGH SCHOOL
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

At our town hall meeting, you'll have the opportunity to:

- Ask Questions
- Share your experience
- Share your ideas and suggestions

MORE INFORMATION 386-238-1605
www.ourvue.net

VUE and VCS will cohost an ESE Townhall meeting to provide an opportunity for teachers and staff to ask questions, provide input, give feedback, and make suggested improvements to the documentation and reporting requirements for students with disabilities.

The first townhall will be held on Tuesday, December 5th at Deltona High from 5:30 pm – 6:30 pm in the Learning Commons (media center). The eastside meeting will be held on Monday, December 11th at Mainland High from 5:30 pm – 6:30 pm in the Performing Arts Center.

We encourage you to attend one of these meetings if you have questions or concerns about documenting ESE accommodations, tracking progress toward goals, service models, or any other item related to ESE. We are encouraged about the opportunity to offer this face-to-face collaboration session. Since time will be limited, we encourage you to arrive early, if possible, as we will begin promptly at 5:30 pm.

Upcoming VUE Professional Learning

Your union continues to provide top notch professional development led by our members. These courses are free to VUE members.

ESE: Module #4 Classroom Strategies

Course # 72059
Section #107159
Time:

Dates:

November 27, 2023
VUE Office
5:00 pm –8:00 pm

ESE: Module #5 Student Behaviors

Course # 72060
Section #107160
Time:

Dates:

December 4, 2023
VUE Office
5:00 pm –8:00 pm

In Solidarity,

Elizabeth Albert
President



SOLIDARITY, UNITY, AND STRENGTH!

As a member of the **Volusia United Educators** you will join with your colleagues to share your voice and expertise to shape the future of our profession.

Through **Solidarity, Unity, and Strength** of our membership, **VUE**:

- Is a leader in our schools and community on Public Education issues
- Fights to improve working conditions and pay for teachers and educational support professionals in Volusia County
- Provides top notch professional development and training for members
- Communicates weekly with our membership
- Stands for high quality Public Schools

Additionally, when you join **VUE**, you will receive many benefits from our **VUE** office and our state and national affiliates such as:

- Discount auto insurance
- Discounts on credit cards, cell phone service, car rentals, etc.
- Discount legal services
- And much, much more

In Florida you have a choice to make; you can unite with your colleagues as we make our Public Schools the best they can be, or you can stand alone.

The Volusia United Educators; Teaching Today's Children for Tomorrow's Future!

To join VUE, click the QR code below and complete the VUE Fastrack form to become a member today!

