

The Solidarity Report

Your weekly VUE Update

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In This Issue:

- Member Spotlight
- District Update
- Legislative Update: 2024-25 Budget
- ESE Townhall #1 Summary
- VPK & ESE Blended Pre-K Survey
- Upcoming VUE Professional Learning

Since the educational professional is more important to the success of a student than the programs, curriculum or technology, that means the educational professional's MORALE is more important than the programs, curriculum or technology.

~ Dr. Brad Johnson



Member Spotlight: Mr. Benjamin Weinrich!



- * 3rd year teaching in Volusia County!
- * Currently teaching Physical Education at Spruce Creek Elementary
- * Run4Fun Club Founder
- * Futures Grant Recipient – Ultimate Frisbee Unit
- * Heart of Florida Grant Recipient – Heart Healthy February
- * Board Game Enthusiast
- * Avid Formula 1 Race Fan
- * Favorite Quote: “Sometimes you gotta lick the stamp and send it.”
~ Daniel Ricciardo, Australian Formula 1 Race Car Driver

Mr. Benjamin “Ben” Weinrich is an early career educator who is on the rise. Ben, as he is known to his friends and family, is a product of Volusia Schools, and two Volusia County Teachers. Ben is a friend to all and an all-around nice guy. He did not intend to become a teacher, but after graduating with a degree in Criminology, he started subbing as a P.E. Coach. He quickly realized that working with children provided an opportunity to positively impact others. He obtained a certificate in secondary social sciences and the rest is history. Ben enjoys working with all of the students at SCE. It makes no difference if they are in Pre-K or 5th, his attitude is the same, they need to learn that exercise and healthy choices make life better. Ben also prioritizes spending time with his family. He runs 5k races for charity with his parents and participates in robust board game tournaments with his family. He also enjoys reading and spending every possible minute with wife and his beautiful young daughter, Claire. Thank you, Mr. Ben Weinrich for your positive attitude and your dedication to the children at SCE. We are lucky to have you as a member and are looking forward to watching you soar! Solidarity!

District Update

Mark Your Calendar:

- This is a **No Meeting Week**. No meetings are allowed to occur before, during, or after school. The only exceptions are IEP, PST and 504 meetings, and these should be limited.
- **Early Release will be FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15TH** due to winter break.
- Tuesday, 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. Additionally, administration is contractually allowed to use ½ of the day for meetings, trainings, curriculum meetings, etc., but the meeting shall be completed prior to lunch. Teachers are to receive an uninterrupted one-hour lunch.

VAM Roster Verification Update: The REA department sent an email to all teachers on Monday, December 4th, detailing the process for roster verification. It is **VERY IMPORTANT** that you take the time to complete this process as it is your statutory right (Florida Statute 1012.34(1)(a)). Additionally, this has a direct impact on the outcome of your summative score, which impacts your evaluation. If you need support with this process, PLEASE reach out. Included in the email is a FAQ, Roster Verification Tool (RVT) guidance, and a voiceover power point presentation. If you teach in one of the following grades/subjects, roster verification is mandatory:

- English Grades 3-10
- Math Grades 3-8
- Science Grades 5 or 8
- Civics
- Algebra 1
- Geometry
- US History Grades 9-12
- Biology

You have the right to make changes to your roster. If you have students assigned to you that you do not teach, please make sure to remove them from your roster. There are questions about the roster placement of student's receiving Tier 3 reading support when the classroom teacher does not have the reading endorsement. We have requested a meeting with the REA department to discuss this concern along with concerns about the number of assessments required in our schools. We will share the outcome of the meeting once we speak with Dr. Teron and his team.

District Assessments: As previously reported, we continue to struggle under the weight of the required district assessments. As a reminder, the FAST Assessments were created by the legislature to REDUCE the amount of testing that our students must endure, and to provide relief to local school districts by eliminating the need to continue to create additional tests in ELA, math, and writing. However, this has not been the case within VCS. At the elementary level, testing has significantly increased. For example, this week, ***the week before winter break***, elementary students in 4th grade will spend 3 out of 5 days, taking assessments. This is ridiculous and we wonder about the accuracy of any data taken from these assessments due to the distractions and mindset of students at this time of the year. We know that the ELA VBA is 18 pages and includes 29 questions. We also know that the PM 2 FAST Assessment will be given on January 9th. If the VBA is given with the purpose of identifying students who need remediation, this testing schedule gives the teachers 4 possible days to use the VBA 2 data for remediation, not nearly

enough time to be effective. It seems like the folks making the testing schedules are forgetting all of the variables involved in being a classroom teacher. The myopic view of test, test, test, must be corrected. Our youngest students no longer enjoy coming to school and over testing is one of the reasons. Our teachers want time to teach and remediate, not just test. During a recent labor management meeting, we discussed the schedule and expectations for district assessments and agreed that a meeting with the district REA department was needed. We are working to schedule this meeting and will provide an update from the conversation. For now, we ask that you keep us informed of the impact to your teaching and learning environment from testing. Also, please consider emailing the members of the school board, (from your personal email account), to share how district assessments effect your students and your ability to teach. You can find the email addresses for the members of the board here, <https://www.vcsedu.org/school-board/school-board-members>. It is very powerful when YOU share your story with the board members. Please consider this option. If we want to change the way assessments are done in VCS, we have to get involved in the process.

VSET Reminders: Please be reminded of the important VSET dates below.

- January 5, 2024 – a minimum of one out of two DPP learning cycles must be successfully completed in MyPGS to be considered for a Distinguished DPP rating
- January 5, 2024 – Optional Mid-Year Self-Evaluation due for category 2 teachers. Teachers may submit Domains 1 and 4 evidence to be considered for the year-end evaluation
- January 26, 2024 – Evaluator DPP feedback due
- March 8, 2024 – DPP learning cycle(s) must be completed in MyPGS
- March 15, 2024 – Last day for observation cycles
- March 22, 2024 – Evaluator DPP feedback due
- March 22, 2024 – Teacher evidence and required ratings for all 22 components must be submitted in the final self-assessment
- April 1-19, 2024 – End of the Year Evaluation Conferences

Legislative Update: 2024-25 Budget

There was not much activity in Tallahassee last week, but Governor DeSantis traveled to a charter school several hundred miles away from our capital to announce his budget recommendations for 2024-25. Here is a summary of the information.

DeSantis' budget recommendation will keep Florida's teachers and staff professionals among the lowest paid in the nation by suggesting a raise of less than \$1,000 for all instructional personnel while also suggesting a \$16 billion surplus. Let's be clear, Florida's budget surplus is built on the backs of underpaid teachers and education staff professionals. The Governor is marketing his proposed per student funding of \$8,841 as the "highest ever" increase to student funding. However, when adjusted for inflation, the budget proposal spends \$500 less per student than the budget he first proposed back in 2019. If it feels like you are being asked to do more with less, it's because you are! This concept seems to be spreading to points beyond Tallahassee.

When Manny Diaz, Commissioner of Education, presented the proposed budget to the Senate Education Appropriations Committee, he touted the teacher salary increase

allocation and wanted the committee to believe that the Governor has made increasing teacher pay a priority. However, the reality is that Florida's teachers are in the bottom five in the nation in average teacher salary. This fact does not support the narrative that is coming from Tallahassee. When pressed about the average teacher salary by Senator Tracie Davis, Commissioner Diaz gave an incoherent response ([you can watch it here](#)) in which he blamed school districts and collective bargaining for salaries being so low. Let's not miss the big picture: in 2006-07 Florida's teachers were 28 in the nation in average teacher salary. When adjusted for inflation, per-student spending that year was nearly \$1,500 more per student than in the 2024-25 proposed budget. For each educator in Florida to be paid what they deserve, Florida's politicians must prioritize funding public schools. That is why FEA is calling for \$2.5 billion in new education funding each year for the next seven years. When that happens, Florida's teachers will move from the bottom five in the nation in average teacher salary to the top ten.

The good news is that this is just a proposal, and it is up to the members of the Florida Legislature to craft a budget. Once again, we will call on our friends in Tallahassee to support our public schools and our students. We will need to engage in this work, but that is nothing new. If you are interested receiving information in "real time", please sign up for text alerts from FEA by texting "edactivist" to 22394.

ESE Townhall #1 Summary

Due to the overwhelming concerns with changes in ESE paperwork, reporting intervals, and variety of other issues, VUE and VCS agreed to host two townhalls. The first took place last week at Deltona High. We would like to thank Mr. Micallef and his staff for hosting the event and for providing a welcoming environment for this conversation. The event was scheduled for one hour, but we could have continued the conversation well into the evening. A brief summary of the conversation is below. Please remember that the eastside townhall is scheduled for Monday, December 11th from 5:30 -6:30 at Mainland High's Performing Arts Center. If you have concerns, issues, and most importantly suggestions for improvement, we need you to attend!

The Q & A session included the following:

1. How did we get here? What has caused us to have to do the things (paperwork/reporting/monitoring) that we are being asked to do? A summary was provided going back approximately 10 years when the original complaint was made against VCS that the district was not providing the services and supports that were written in IEPs for students with disabilities; specifically students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The district was found to be at fault and entered into a settlement agreement with the DOJ. After a period of time, the DOJ returned to VCS to determine if the terms of the settlement were being followed and found a lack of proof that the corrective measures agreed upon had been executed. The term of the settlement has been extended. Attorneys are currently working to reach an agreement on the term of the extension.

During this same period of time, a systemic complaint was made to DOE, this type of complaint alleges that a "practice or pattern of wrongdoing" has a broad impact

- throughout an organization, and that is why it effects all schools and all teachers. So in a nutshell, the allegation is that as a district, VCS is not providing students with disabilities the services, supports, and accommodations they are afforded by their IEPs.
2. How are we going to retain teachers and staff with this going on? A suggestion was offered by a teacher that included the following 3-point plan:
 - I. Stop the hemorrhaging of employees by offering incentives, pay teachers and paras more.
 - II. Provide meaningful training that is relevant to the job role. Differentiate for the individuals within the target audience. Provide opportunities for hands-on training and collaboration with role-alike individuals. Teams could be used to facilitate these groups and offer a conduit for communicate between ESE professionals
 - III. Pause all new initiatives within VCS. Give teachers and staff time to learn the process for monitoring & reporting and hold back on rolling out new “things to do.”
 3. Will the ESE paperwork days be reinstated? YES. Approval has been provided for ESE paperwork days for the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th quarters. Principals were told to speak with ESE teachers to schedule the days. Principals are NOT to manage the tasks on this day. The time is being provided for teachers to work as they deem appropriate (an email was sent last week detailing this information).
 4. ESE teachers need more time. How are teachers supposed to do all that is required during the course of the day? District staff are available to meet with teachers to provide support on how to manage the workload. Please reach out to your district resource personnel to request this support. Additionally, Ms. Wiles shared that she is working on creating an ESE coach position within our schools. This position will be for a highly skilled ESE professional to provide site-based support to colleagues within the campus. This idea is still in the planning phase, but it is something that she is very excited to offer. This will be a supplemented position. A suggestion from a teacher was to offer an additional planning period for ESE teachers similar to the planning provided to AVID and ESOL teachers. An additional suggestion was for ESE personnel to be offered a Plus-One type of contract.
 5. There is a lack of clear information about the changes and expectations with reporting, monitoring, and tracking. A conversation occurred about the difference between tracking and reporting. Tracking of IEP goal progress is done based upon how the goal is written. It could be daily, weekly, or some other interval. Goal progress is reported quarterly. The conversation continued, and focused upon the mixed messages that teachers are receiving from administrators. Consistent and reliable communication is lacking as it relates to ESE. After a bit of back and forth, Ms. Wiles agreed to send communications directly to ESE personnel. This should eliminate the issue.
 6. The current NCI process does not work with some secondary or larger students. What else can we do? Ms. Wiles shared that she is aware of the concerns and is

looking into an alternative program called Ukeru. Here is the link we found when we googled the program, <https://www.ukerusystems.com/>.

7. Can support be provided to gen ed teachers for completing accommodations checklists and goal tracking? Yes, please contact your administrator and request support.
8. How is the district planning to keep students in the VE Multi program safe? There are concerns about the intense needs of the students and the lack of resources for teachers. Ms. Wiles requested to be contacted about these issues on a site-by-site basis. She is working with teachers at a westside high school right now to provide additional resources and better safeguards for the students.
9. How are Support Facilitators supposed to manage their caseloads when they are being asked to take on the caseloads that are left when a vacancy occurs? Some SF are writing IEPs for students they never see. Ms. Wiles responded that the ESE Department Chair should be working to cover the vacancies and provide support. A caseload should be 25 to 30 students. ESE teachers who write IEPs for students they do not see due to a vacancy are not liable should questions arise. There should be a disclaimer in the IEP that the teacher does not provide services/supports for the student but wrote the IEP due to the lack of personnel.

Although this summary is not a word-for-word transcript of the discussion that occurred at the townhall, it covers the bulk of the conversation. The main themes that were reoccurring were the need for improved communication and training and more time to complete the work. We realize that these issues are not specific to ESE, but in this time of scrutiny by the DOJ and DOE, it makes a lot of sense.

Please consider attending the eastside townhall at Mainland on Monday night. If you have questions that were not covered above, you need to attend. If you have suggestions and solutions to improve the situation, you need to attend. If you are unhappy with the changes to ESE, you need to attend. The solutions we seek will not be created on their own. YOU are the experts, and it needs to be YOUR voice leading the conversation.

If you have questions, please contact the VUE office at 386-238-1605. See you Monday night!

VPK & ESE Blended Pre-K Survey

Volusia County Schools has proposed making a change to the staffing model used for VPK units. The proposal includes no longer requiring the instructor hold a Florida teaching certificate. The district has pointed out that the Florida Statutes require only one of the following credentials for VPK instructors in a school-year program:

- a child development associate credential (CDA) issued by the National Credentialing Program of the Council for Professional Recognition and completion of an emergent literacy training course

- a credential approved by the Department of Children and Family Services as being equivalent to or greater than the CDA (i.e., a CDAE) and completion of an emergent literacy training course
- a bachelor's or higher degree in early childhood education, prekindergarten or primary education, preschool education, or family and consumer science
- a bachelor's or higher degree in elementary education, if the instructor has been certified to teach children any age from birth through sixth grade, regardless of whether the certificate is current, and if the instructor is not ineligible to teach in a public school because his or her educator certificate is suspended or revoked
- an associate's or higher degree in child development or Early Childhood Education
- an associate's or higher degree in an unrelated field, at least six credit hours in early childhood education or child development, and at least 480 hours of experience in teaching or providing childcare services for children any age from birth through eight years of age, or
- an educational credential approved by DOE as being equivalent to or greater than an educational credential described above.

We believe that just because the state has identified the minimum requirements, we have a VPK program that has a proven track record of preparing our youngest learners to be successful and fully prepared to enter kindergarten. Why would we consider changing something that is not only working, but working well? We believe that this is another example of trying to do more for less. An example of education on the cheap, but at what cost? The district would like to engage VUE in a conversation about replacing our VPK teachers with paraprofessionals who hold any of the credentials above. While we deeply value our paras, we have concerns about the responsibilities and expectations that will be placed upon them, while continuing to pay them less but expecting so much more.

To that end, we need to plan. We ask that our VPK, ESE Blended Pre K, and paraprofessionals in these roles complete the survey below. We are only looking for basic information at this time but will need to escalate this issue after we return from winter break. Please take a moment to respond to this very brief survey if this applies to you. Thank you. <https://leadernet.aft.org/webform/vpk-ese-blended-pre-k-survey>

Upcoming VUE Professional Learning

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

ESOL: Language & Literacy

Course # 24241
Section #107713
Time:

Dates:

Tuesday's- Jan.9th- Mar. 12th
VUE Office
5:00 pm –8:00 pm

ESOL: Curriculum & Materials

Course # 23226
Section #107746
Time:

Dates:

Wed's- Jan.10th - Mar. 13th
VUE Office
5:00 pm –8:00 pm

The VUE office will close for winter break on Friday,
December 15th at 4:30 pm. We will reopen on Tuesday,
January 2nd at 8:00 am. Happy Holidays!!!

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!

