

The Solidarity Report

Your weekly VUE Update

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“If you tell the truth
you don't have to
remember anything.”

~ Mark Twain

Member Spotlight: Ms. Emma Fisher!



- * 7th year teaching; 2nd year with Volusia County Schools!
- * Currently teaching ESE VE Separate Class grades 3-5 at McInnis Elementary
- * SAC Chair
- * PBIS Lead
- * Testing Co-Coordinator
- * Assistant Coach – Stetson University Rowing Team (WOW!)
- * Favorite Quote: “If there is ever a tomorrow where we’re not together, there is something you must always remember. You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think. But the most important thing is even if we are apart, I’ll always be with you.”
~ Christopher Robin – Winnie The Pooh

Ms. Emma Fisher is a rising star. She has only recently arrived in VCS, but oh what an impact she is making! Emma is an early career educator who is affecting positive change in her school, community, and within VUE. Emma has an in-depth understanding of the academic and social emotional needs of students with disabilities. Her resume is impressive as she has experience teaching EBD and as a support facilitator prior to taking on the role of a separate class teacher. As a first year steward, Emma has hit the ground running and hasn't looked back. She is eager to learn, quick to volunteer, and not afraid to advocate for our members at McInnis. Emma is the type of unionist who has the leadership qualities needed to change the future of the working men and women in VCS. Keep your eye on Emma. She is destined for greatness! Thank you, Ms. Emma Fisher, for your leadership, and your vision. We are so excited that you are a part of our VUE family. Solidarity!

District Update

Mark Your Calendar: Due to the ERPL this month, only one additional meeting is allowed to occur in February. This applies to meetings before school and after school. PLCs follow a different standard. At the middle school level, this applies to the PSP time that is provided before the student academic day. If you have questions, please reach out.

- **Wednesday, Feb. 21 – ERPL #7** – This district-based early release learning is scheduled to share additional information from the ESE Department.

Totem PD: It has been brought to our attention that the district has sent an email to principals asking them to have teachers download an app for Wednesday's PD. The original email was sent last week, but due to the confusion around this process, the district is asking that you create a new account for the ERPL. We received this information from a steward. Unfortunately, the district has not shared any information with us about this app or the learning scheduled to occur. We will contact the district and ask about this training, but in the meantime, **DO NOT DOWNLOAD THIS APP TO YOUR PERSONAL CELL PHONE.** This will create a huge vulnerability. Please use your VCS issued device and only this device. We continue to note an increase with investigations from Professional Standards. We never recommend using your personal phone for VCS work. We will keep you updated on this situation.

Meeting with Dr. Balgobin UPDATE: Unfortunately, we were unable to meet with Dr. Balgobin last week, but she did send her team (Dr. Hazel, Dr. Valle, Mr. West, and Ms. Workman) to meet with us to discuss our concerns. A summary of the discussion is below.

- **ESE issues & concerns** – The district has moved forward with the use of Ed Modified at the secondary level. So far, the feedback has been positive. We discussed the monthly ESE Audit and shared concerns that at some schools, what should be an administrative task has fallen to teachers and ESE service providers. Additionally, we have learned that some ESE Administrators have taken it upon themselves to go beyond one audit per month and add additional students to the audit list. This is causing additional stress and frustration for instructional personnel. The response from the district was that they would never stop an administrator from reviewing files. When we pointed out that this was causing a hardship for instructional personnel, the response was, why? We know that there is inconsistency from school to school within the district. We also know that the level of fluency with the process varies from site to site. We requested that a common practice be developed so that each site would have the same expectations. We will see if this is done. Also, we discussed paperwork. We were told that a "Principal's Council" has been created for the purpose of meeting to discuss issues and work towards solutions. Recently the Support Facilitator logs were discussed. It seems that the district will be working to create a more efficient and streamlined log. Again, we will wait to see what is provided.
- **Reading Endorsement incentives** – the district will continue to offer a reimbursement of \$150 to individuals who successfully pass the Reading K-12 subject area exam, and \$75 to individuals who add the reading endorsement to their certificates. Also, the district has partnered with the University of Florida to provide a free micro-credential that will lead to a reading endorsement.

- ***Latinos In Action***- This is a pilot program that is currently in six secondary schools on the west side of the district. This program is a college and career readiness program that engages Latino youth through personal assets, excellence in education service, and leadership. We are excited about this program and want to partner with VCS to help support and grow this opportunity for our students. The goal is to extend the program into two elementary schools next year.
- ***AVID programs*** – This program will only be offered in select schools for the 2024-25 school year. It will no longer be funded by the district but will be available if the Principal decides to include it in the course offerings. We are concerned with this decision, but it is a managerial right to determine which programs are offered each year.

State of OUR UNION

We believe in the power of our public schools and in the integrity and character of those who work in them to provide for the educational needs of our students. We believe that our communities thrive when our teachers, paras, office specialists, and students are treated with dignity and respect. However, not everyone believes the same things we do.

Last week was very enlightening and yet disheartening at the same time. Although we have had our differences over the years, we have always attempted to keep a collaborative and open mind when it comes to working with the district and school board. We know that chaos, deceit, and deception do not work to improve the lives of the adults and children who work and are educated in our public school system. Yet we have learned that there is a coordinated effort that was taken “*by the direction of the superintendent*” to call into question the integrity and character of VUE with the Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC). If you have not yet watched the last several minutes of Tuesday’s board meeting you can access it here, (the conversation about VUE begins at approximately 5:29) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65aFYYP3bVw&t=19744s>.

At the time of writing this report, I have spoken with four of the five members of the board, and none of them are fluent with the language of SB 256, yet they have allowed the district to take action that could lead to our decertification. Ignorance of the law is no excuse.

While I am confident that ultimately, we will prevail, we cannot sit by and wait for a resolution. We must respond by showing our strength, solidarity, and commitment to the work of OUR UNION.

We determine our future, no one else. We are the drivers of our destiny, and where we go is determined by how hard we work and what we deem important. The superintendent, district leaders, and members of the board are attempting to take away what is ours. We must rise up and face this moment for what it is. It is the moment of truth. There is no middle ground, no neutral corner. Now is the time that will determine if we achieve greatness or if we fall at the hands of those who want us gone. As for me, I plan to fight. Where will you stand when the history of this moment is written? Will you stand with

OUR UNION? Will you stand with your colleagues? Will you stand for public education and the students we serve? I believe in VUE and the hardworking men and women who I am proud to call brothers and sisters.

If you believe in VUE and are committed to making our future bigger and better than anyone could imagine, ask a colleague to join today. The best response to the attacks that have been waged against us is to organize. OUR UNION will not fail, we will prevail! You can use the QR code below to help a colleague join. Please remember that it is now a two-step process to join VUE and completing the online application (portal) is the first step. If you need assistance with this process, please call the office at (386) 238-1605. This is our moment, let's make it count! SOLIDARITY!



VPK Update

During Tuesday night's school board meeting, the members of the board voted to accept a new job description for a "Facilitator, Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program (VPK). This item was tucked nicely into the consent agenda, so that if you were not looking for it, you might not have found it. The proposed change would result in no longer using certified teachers in our VPK units and would replace them with paraprofessionals with a CDA credential. The justification from the district is that the Florida Statute only requires a CDA or equivalent to facilitate VPK, whereas VCS currently has certified teachers in these positions who could be moved to fill the vacancies in K-2. Additionally, we know that the potential savings in salary cost would be substantial for the district.

While we cannot say that we are surprised that the district is moving in this direction, we can unequivocally say that they are not moving forward in a manner that is appropriate, collaborative, and perhaps legal.

The idea of making changes to the VPK classes (these are the neuro-typical students from the community and not the blended classes) was brought to us last year, and we were successful in shutting it down. The idea was resurrected this year during instructional bargaining where we advised the district that it was inappropriate and out of order for instructional bargaining, and it would need to be bargained separately. At the time, it seemed that the district understood.

On Monday, February 5th, I had a meeting scheduled with the HR Director to discuss this item. While I incorrectly assumed we would be talking about it casually and setting dates to bargain, the HR Director handed me a formal job description and had been advised by someone in the district that our solitary meeting would suffice for bargaining. I explained that bargaining is done in the sunshine and ultimately left without having the meeting. After contacting FEA Legal, I sent a "Demand to Bargain" letter to the superintendent but have not received a response.

During the consent agenda, I spoke against this item and provided several reasons why it should not move forward. First, this will ultimately result in an erosion of the instructional bargaining unit, our VPK program is remarkably successful and focused on providing the foundations for reading (phonics) and numeracy (number sense). Our

programs are evaluated by the state each year and produce students who are kindergarten ready and prepared to excel. Additionally, this shift will ask our beloved paras to take on the full responsibility of the VPK classroom and all of the accountability for only a fraction of the pay currently earned by instructional personnel. While we know that our paraprofessionals are top notch educators, they will be vulnerable and disadvantaged by this move. Also, we know that the district cannot currently provide the support and resources needed for our current instructional employees, so why would we believe that they will be able to support our paras if they step into this role of “Facilitator”. Furthermore, they have proposed this job description without stating the salary. The job description states that the position is within the support unit but shows “facilitator” under the salary column. The contract for support professionals does not include a “facilitator” pay schedule. Therefore, we are unsure what is being proposed for pay. Finally, how has this proposed change been communicated to parents? We know that the advertisement that was sent to “ALL STAFF” on Friday included “certified teachers” in the lower right corner of the flyer, so it seems that yet again, the communication within VCS is flawed.

Since we have received no response from the Superintendent on our Demand to Bargain, our attorneys have filed an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) with PERC. On Friday, we received word that PERC has determined that there is sufficiency to move forward with the ULP. This is good news for us and another example of how the district’s myopic, my way or the highway attitude has proven to be wrong again.

We will continue to keep you posted on this issue and provide updates as they are available.

Upcoming VUE Professional Learning **REGISTER TODAY!**

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

ESE: IDEA/IEP

Course # 72058
Section #108190
Time:

Dates:

Monday, February 26, 2024
VUE Office
5:00 pm –8:00 pm

ESE: Building Relationships w/ Adults

Course # 72061
Section #108191
Time:

Dates:

Monday, March 4, 2024
VUE Office
5:00 pm –8:00 pm

Managing Behaviors in the School Community

Course # 71630
Section #108379
Time:

Dates:

Monday, Mar. 4, 11, 18, 2024
VUE Office
5:00 pm –8:00 pm

ESE: Building Relationships w/ Students

Course # 72229
Section #108374
Time:

Dates:

Monday, March 11, 2024
VUE Office
5:00 pm –8:00 pm

ESE: Classroom Strategies

Course # 72059
Section #108375
Time:

Dates:

Monday, March 18, 2024
VUE Office
5:00 pm –8:00 pm

ESE: Student Behavior

Course # 72060
Section #108376
Time:

Dates:

Monday, April 1, 2024
VUE Office
5:00 pm –8:00 pm

Free Income Tax Assistance

The United Way will once again offer free income tax preparation assistance to members of our community. The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program offers FREE tax preparation services. Volunteers are IRS certified and trained to identify taxpayer's eligibility for federal tax credits to help families get the most accurate returns.

Many taxpayers who are eligible for free tax preparation also are eligible for the EIC (Earned Income Credit) and the CTC (Child Tax Credit). EIC/CTC are two of the best anti-poverty programs offered by the federal government.

VITA
VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE

FEBRUARY 1ST - APRIL 15TH 2024
FREE TAX ASSISTANCE FROM TRAINED VOLUNTEERS.
APPOINTMENT ONLY

FLAGLER COUNTY LIBRARY 2500 Palm Coast Pkwy NW, Palm Coast, FL 32137	G.W. COMMUNITY CENTER 201 E. Drain St. Bunnell, FL 32110	GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH 4110 S. Ridgewood Ave. Port Orange, FL 32127
DR. JOYCE M. CUSACK RESOURCE CENTER 489 W. Mathis St. DeLand, FL 32720	STETSON UNIVERSITY - LYNN BUSINESS CENTER 345 N. Woodland Blvd. DeLand, FL Room 318	FOUR TOWNS YMCA 280 Wolf Pack Run, DeFonia, FL 32725
FIFTH THIRD BANK COMMUNITY ROOM 1030 W. International Speedway Blvd. Daytona Beach, FL 32114 2nd Floor	BETHUNE COOKMAN UNIVERSITY 151 N. Lincoln Ave. Daytona Beach, FL 32114 College of Business Second Floor	JOHN H. DICKERSON CENTER 308 S. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Daytona Beach, FL 32114
MID-FLORIDA COMMUNITY SERVICES 592 S. Volusia Ave. Pleasant, FL 32180	DAYTONA STATE COLLEGE - NEW SMYRNA BEACH 941 10th St. New Smyrna Beach, FL 32168 Building 1 Room 135	

UNITEDWAYVFC.ORG/VITA

2-1-1 Get Connected. Get Help.
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION Volusia-Flagler Counties
SCAN TO BOOK APPOINTMENTS OR CALL 211

The Campaign for Working Families provides this free service in Volusia and Flagler Counties yearly with the intention of providing assistance to help families with income up to \$54,000 file accurate tax returns.

VUE Black History Month Contest.

In honor of Black History Month, the Volusia United Educators are sponsoring a contest open to all Volusia County Schools students. Two (2) winners will be selected at each level of instruction (elementary, middle, and high school).

Students are eligible to win a \$50 gift card.

The topic of this year's contest is "African Americans Contributing Positively through Performing Arts." The categories include visual arts and essay. For more information, please contact Dr. Lekita Howard at Lekita.howard@floridaea.org.



African American History Contest 2024
Sponsored by Volusia United Educators

THEME
"African Americans
Contributing Positively
through
Performing Arts"

Win a \$50.00 Gift Card

In honor of Black History Month Volusia United Educators is sponsoring a contest. The theme is "African Americans Contributing Positively through Performing Arts" (music, singing, dance, acting, recitation, etc.). There are two categories: Essay and Virtual Art. One winner will be chosen in each category(2) for elementary, middle, and high.

- Original work only
- Essays must be typed
- Submission deadline February 23rd
- Must address the theme
- 500 word minimum
- Winners announced February 29th

Submit entries to: Dr. Lekita Howard
1381 Educators Road
Daytona Beach, Florida 32124
lekita.howard@floridaea.org

VUE Visits

Last week, our Friday lunch visit took us to Silver Sands Middle. We had a fantastic time visiting with our old friends and we are excited about the new members that joined during our time on campus.

Thank you to everyone who was able to stop by and say hello. We truly enjoyed our time with you. Next week we are headed to the Hinson Hurricanes. Let's make it a rockin' good time!



Next week, we will be in the schools listed below. If we are scheduled to visit your school, please make sure to stop by to say hello! 😊

Monday: President's Day Holiday

Tuesday: Osteen Elementary, Ormond Beach Elementary

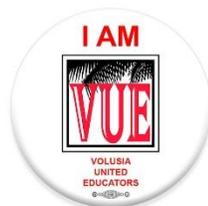
Wednesday: Olson Center, Spirit Elementary

Thursday: Blue Lake Elementary

Friday: Hinson Middle

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!

