

The Solidarity Report

Your weekly VUE Update

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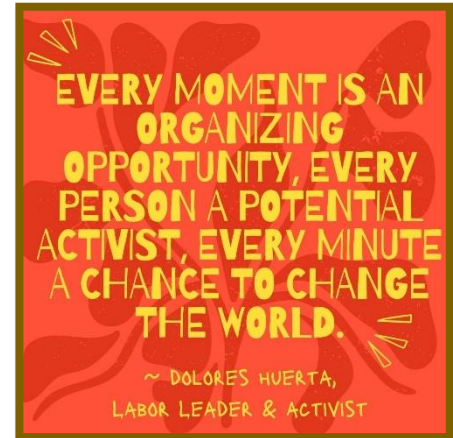
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Spotlight: Ms. Nereida Colon!

- * **30th year working as a professional educator; 9th year with VCS!**
- * **Currently teaching 3rd Grade at Blue Lake Elementary**
- * **Volusia County Schools Lead Mentor Teacher - BLE**
- * **Founder of Blue Lake Steppers**
- * **Favorite Quote: “I am not afraid, I was born to do this” ~ Joan of Arc**

Ms. Nereida Colon is an inspirational leader who has dedicated her career to supporting and motivating her students and colleagues to achieve great things. Nereida began her career nearly three decades ago as a Head Start teacher in the South Bronx. Throughout her career, Nereida has made it a priority to know every student on campus. She shared, *“I make sure that I know every student in our school and that students know me. I want them to know they are important to me, and that they matter. Whenever they need someone to talk to, lean on, or just be there, I always rise to the occasion.”* Nereida believes in the power of relationships, and she knows that they are the key to success. As a Volusia Mentor Teacher, she uses the relationships she is building with our new and early career teachers to provide support and encouragement. She shared, *“These teachers bring new strategies and resources to every school they grace. I love that we can share in the learning together.”* Nereida hosts “Catch-Up with Colon” to create the welcoming and collaborative atmosphere for her mentees. Thank you, Ms. Nereida Colon, for your compassion, dedication, and genuine care for others. Your encouraging presence and unlimited support for others is what makes you shine. We are blessed to have you in our VUE family. Solidarity!

District Update

Upcoming Dates to Remember: We are sharing important reminders below:

- **Week of September 18th** – Elementary Open House Week (Block Out week for Elem. Meetings).
- **Open House:** Attendance for instructional personnel at Open House is a contractual requirement. However, this year, we are receiving numerous calls about the length of time required for attendance at this event, primarily from teachers at the elementary level. The contract does not set forth a specific length of time, however, historically the event typically lasts between 1 -1.5 hours. Since this event is afterhours and generally begins at 5:30 or 6:00 pm, in the past, administrators have set parameters that have honored the time of the teachers and others who are working the event; understanding that this is a work night, and we have other obligations that must be met. At some schools, admin will pretend to call a meeting at a specific time to encourage visitors to leave campus so that employees are not caught in an impromptu parent conference. If your Open House is scheduled for more than 1.5 hours, please let us know. We will contact the district to determine why your site has scheduled extended the time for this event.
- **September 22, 2023** – Professional Learning Day for all instructional personnel and paraprofessionals. Here is a snapshot of the planned learning opportunities:
 - **Support Staff:** VCS Paraprofessionals will work to complete the independent study online course, *Paraprofessionals Supporting Students with Disabilities*, Units 4 & 5 (9/22) and Units 6 & 7 (10/16). This is a continuation of the course that began in August. The goal of this online course is to provide paraprofessionals with the fundamental skills to support their work in Exceptional Student Education (ESE). Paraprofessionals will complete the course in the BEESS Portal and verify their completion in an accompanying Canvas Course.
 - **Instructional Staff:**

Elementary	Middle	High
7:30 AM – 8:00 AM Welcome Teachers and any school-based announcements	8:50 AM – 9:20 AM Welcome Teachers and any school-based announcements	8:05 AM – 8:35 AM Welcome Teachers and any school-based announcements
8:00 AM – 9:00 AM Data Dashboard	9:20 AM – 10:20 AM Data Dashboard	8:35 AM – 9:35 AM Data Dashboard
9:00 AM – 11:00 AM Performance Matters	10:20 AM – 12:20 PM Performance Matters	9:35 AM – 11:35 AM Performance Matters
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM 1 hour Uninterrupted Lunch	12:20 PM – 1:20 PM 1 Hour Uninterrupted Lunch	11:35 AM – 12:35 PM 1 Hour Uninterrupted Lunch
12:00 PM – 1:00 PM De-escalation Strategies	1:20 PM – 2:20 PM De-escalation Strategies	12:35 PM – 1:35 PM De-escalation Strategies
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM Collaborative Planning	2:20 PM – 4:20 PM Collaborative Planning	1:35 PM – 3:35 PM Collaborative Planning

- **Week of September 25th** – High School Open House Week (Block Out week for HS meetings)

Teacher Lead Money: We have confirmed with the Chief Financial Officer that all eligible teachers will receive \$300 for the Teacher Classroom Supply Assistance Program. Please remember that this program is provided by the state.

Instructional Agreement Payouts: The salary increases will be realized in the paycheck provided on October 13th with retro to follow in the October 31st check. The payments for the lump sum Retention and Longevity supplements are still to be determined. We are anticipating the payment for retention to occur first, hopefully in November, with the longevity payment to follow before spring break. We will provide updated information once we have confirmed the dates with the payroll department.

ESE Workday: As a result of negotiations in 2022, an ESE Committee was formed for the purpose of streamlining processes and making the work of our ESE personnel more efficient. The committee included representatives appointed by VUE and administrators/district level leaders appointed by VCS. The committee worked hard to create solutions that were reasonable and practical. One issue that was discussed was the overwhelming amount of paperwork required for ESE personnel. After a lengthy discussion a decision was made to provide ESE teachers a substitute to allow for a half-day of planning at the end of each quarter to complete progress reports and work on upcoming IEPS. This planning day was implemented during 3 of the four quarters in the 22-23 school year. However, we have just learned that the district has decided to cancel this provision citing lack of funding. We are concerned about the relentless amount of work that is being piled upon all teachers and staff, let alone our ESE personnel. The decision to revoke the mutually agreed upon half-day is disturbing. We are quickly approaching the time when our conversation must shift to priorities. We must ask, what is the priority of work, since there is not enough time in the day to complete all that we are being asked to do. No more can we bear the burden of attempting to meet unreasonable timelines and complete more than is humanly possible during the course of the workday. We will continue to advocate for the return of this agreed upon day, and for reasonableness in expectations not only for our ESE personnel but for all instructional and support staff.

Walkthroughs, Lookfors, Resources: During this week's Labor Management meeting we had an extended conversation around the topic of walkthroughs. We learned that the district has set a rotating schedule for administrators to walkthrough classrooms once a week. We reminded the district that the work of the VSET Steering Committee was in part to reduce the requirement for administrators to complete formal observation for category 2 teachers with a record of effective or highly effective evaluations, yet the district is now overwhelming teachers and administrators with this new initiative. We were told that leadership is looking at how they strengthen systems. Systems including planning and the delivery of instruction. We were told that teacher autonomy must be earned and a reference to "The Opportunity Myth" was mentioned. I will admit that I have not read, nor am I familiar with this work, however, a quick google search will connect this work with TNTP (The New Teacher Project), which was founded by Michelle Rhee. If you've been around for any length of time, you will remember that Ms. Rhee was formerly the Chancellor of DC Public Schools. After a controversial stint in DC where she "fired" her way to success, it was revealed that all was not what it seemed to be in DC. Nevertheless, the crux of the Opportunity Myth is that teachers are the ones who are failing students because we are not providing them with the opportunities, they

need to be successful. I am very concerned about a reference to this body of work and am hopeful that this is not the mindset of our district leadership. Of course, our greatest obligation is to our students and their academic success, however, there is more than one way to ensure this success and the way to encourage teachers and staff to deliver the highest quality instruction is not through surveillance and compliance driven mandates. We believe that collaboration, support, and transformational leadership are critical pieces to the puzzle of what makes a successful student. Teachers and staff must be viewed as collaborative partners, not as drones who carry out a prescribed mission. To be fair, the conversation did include a feedback component and the “lookfors” are supposed to be for the purpose of providing feedback. We all agree that specific feedback is very meaningful for the educator who wants to improve their practice. If this is occurring as a result of the walkthrough, we support this practice. If feedback is not being received, we need to know. We were also told that the lookfor feedback will not be entered into VSET. Finally, the discussion concluded with a reference to instructional resources and the reminder that within Domain 1, Planning and Preparation, there is a component that refers to knowledge of resources outside of the district provided curriculum. Due to legislative issues and need to be protected from accusations of inappropriate behavior, we have asked the district to explain how a distinguished rating can be achieved if outside resources are not allowed. To say that this issue is resolved would be inaccurate. We understand that the district wants to ensure that our students are provided quality instruction, and so do we. However, since we have the same goal, it seems that we should be able to agree on how to get there. Relentless walkthroughs, top-down management mandates, and lack of collaboration are not a recipe for success.

Support Impasse

On Friday morning, after three bargaining sessions, (a cumulative total of approximately 8 hours), the district declared Impasse against VUE Support. Unfortunately, I cannot say that I am surprised, but I can definitely say that I am disappointed.

The differences between the VUE proposal the VCS proposal are not that vast, which is why we believe that the declaration of impasse was premature and shows a lack of collaboration on the part of the district.

VUE has proposed a 3% salary increase that would be realized through a step and changes to the longevity schedule that would provide retention incentives for employees beginning with 5 completed years of VCS service. The district has held firm on a 2% salary increase that would also be realized through a step and has modified the current longevity schedule as shown below.

VCS Experience	Rate
5-10	\$200
11-14	\$175 400
15-19	\$275 500
20-24	\$450 700
25+ 24-29	\$700 1,000
30+	\$1,100

We believe that there is a solution and that with continued conversation we will get there. However, now that Impasse has been declared, here is what will happen next.

Incorrectly, the members of the school board will be told that they are not allowed to talk with individuals, specifically VUE members, about

bargaining. This is an incorrect statement as the only time that members of the board are prohibited from talking with members of the support bargaining unit is during the insulated period of the process. We are far from that time. The district will file paperwork with PERC to advise them that they have declared Impasse. We will ask the district if they are interested in utilizing a no cost mediator to find a resolution to the impasse, and they will most likely decline. The district will hire (at taxpayer expense) Gray Robinson to represent them through the process and we will work with the appointed attorney to select a Special Magistrate to rule at the Impasse Hearing.

Throughout this process, we will continue to work with the district to find a resolution. We know that we can get there, and we hope that the district is committed to the same. We will continue to keep you updated and we encourage you to reach out to the members of the school board to share your feelings about their decision to end bargaining after what is a cumulative total of one workday (8 hours). Additionally, with the release of the district's Annual Financial Report, specifically the K-14 report, we will work with FEA to point out where the district can find the money to fund salary increases and financial incentives that value and respect the work of those who run our schools and provide educational supports to our students with disabilities. The district provided this critical documentation to VUE on Wednesday, September 13th and therefore to end bargaining just when the financial data has been provided is inappropriate.

You can contact the members of the board using the email addresses below. Please remember to be professional in your communication and to share your story. There is power in making your personal walk visible to the members of the board. They have not walked a mile in your shoes, and they deserve to know the truth about your daily experience within VCS.

Jamie Haynes
Anita Burnett
Jessie Thompson
Ruben Colon
Carl Persis

jmhaynes@volusia.k12.fl.us
adburnet@volusia.k12.fl.us
jjthomps@volusia.k12.fl.us
rcolon@volusia.k12.fl.us
cpersis@volusia.k12.fl.us

Sick Leave Bank

The Sick Leave Bank (SLB) is available to all instructional and support personnel, regardless of union membership. The SLB provides protection in cases of long-term catastrophic illness. In order to draw from the bank, individuals must be a member of the SLB prior to the diagnosis. In order to join the bank, individuals must have at least 1 year of service with VCS and have accumulated 5 sick days. A donation of 1 sick day is required to join.



We strongly encourage you to consider joining the SLB. Eligibility requirements and applications for support and instructional personnel can be found at <https://www.ourvue.net/sick-leave-bank/index> , or you can reach out to the VUE office at 386-238-1605.

VUE Committees

Are you interested in becoming more active with YOUR union? Do you believe that WE have the power to create the change that we are seeking in our schools and worksites? Have you ever asked yourself, how can I share MY voice?

If you answered yes to any of the questions above, there is a place for you in one or more of the committees within our union. VUE is an organization that is run by the members and for the members. Our members are the experts on what is best for our students, our schools, worksites, and our communities. It is through committee work, that our collective voice is heard, change occurs, and leadership is developed. Please take a moment to review the list of VUE committees below and begin the process of engaging in the work of OUR union.

Government Relations Committee (GRC): The GRC is for members who are interested in speaking with elected officials on issues related to public schools. The GRC is the political arm of VUE, and members of this committee often travel to Tallahassee during the legislative session to advocate at committee meetings and one-to-one with legislators. If you are interested in learning more about the GRC, please contact the Chair, Sarah Marzilli at sarah.marzilli@gmail.com

Human & Civil Rights Committee (HCRC): The HCRC is for members who are dedicated to ensuring that **ALL** students have access to learning environments that are inclusive and committed to educational openness, honesty, and fairness. The HCRC focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion and works to ensure that VCS seeks to provide fair treatment and offers full participation to all people, particularly groups who have been historically underrepresented or subject to discrimination on the basis of identity or disability. If you are interested in learning more about the HCRC, please contact Elizabeth at elizabeth.albert@floridaea.org.

Florida's Youngest Remarkable Educators (FYRE): FYRE's purpose is to engage early career educators through identifying and connecting their core values to FEA and VUE's union values of integrity, advocacy, respect and empowerment. FYRE continuously engages and empowers diverse teams of early career educators through training, collaboration, networking and opportunities to experience their union in action — giving a voice to new members with which to advocate for their students, their union and their profession. If you are interested in learning more about VUE's FYRE committee, please contact Amanda Talton at amandatal123@gmail.com .

Sick Leave Bank Committee (SLB): The SLB committee meets to review and respond to requests for support from the Sick Leave Bank. This committee has the responsibility of determining if a member of the SLB qualifies for support based upon certain medical criteria. If you are interested in learning more about the SLB, please contact Dr. Lekita Howard at lekita.howard@floridaea.org.

Bargaining Committee: The Bargaining Committees are created during contract negotiations and each bargaining unit has its own committee. During “whole book” years,

(years in which the entire contract can be amended or modified), the committees work to develop contractual language improvements and new language items based upon the responses from the bargaining survey sent to members. If you are interested in working on this committee, please continue to watch the Solidarity Reports for the advertisement. The 2024-25 school year will be a “whole book” year and the committees will be convened for instructional and support.

Membership Committee: The Membership Committee works to make connections and establish communication with new employees. The role of the committee is to inform new teachers and staff about the benefits of membership in our union. The committee members also assist our stewards by informing them of the new employees on their campuses. If you are interested in joining the VUE Membership Committee, please contact Sheila Butchart at sbutcha1@gmail.com.

Social Committee: This committee has not been active since prior to the COVID pandemic, but it is time to get it up and running. The intent of this committee is to plan fun events that offer networking and relationship building opportunities within our union. The sky is the limit here, and we are currently looking for a Chairperson. If you are interested in learning more about the Social Committee, please contact Elizabeth at elizabeth.albert@floridaea.org.

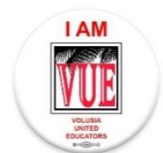
Volusia/Flagler Central Labor Council (V/F CLC): The CLC is a regional branch of the Florida AFL-CIO. The FL AFL-CIO works to protect the rights of all workers, educate the public about workers’ rights and connect workers together so that every worker has a shot at the American Dream. The CLC is a gathering of local labor unions who desire to improve the lives of working men and women within Volusia and Flagler County. Affiliated partners include electricians, plumbers/pipefitters, communication workers, educators, laborers, retirees, deputies, and others. Additionally, the CLC supports the work of the Florida Future Labor Leaders, who are a group of young, energetic unionists who are developing their leadership skills. If you are interested in learning more about how you can become involved with the V/F CLC, please contact Elizabeth at elizabeth.albert@floridaea.org.

In Solidarity,

Elizabeth Albert
President



VUE is proud to celebrate Hispanic Heritage month. *Sí Se Puede!*



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!

