



# Solidarity Report

**“The test of our progress is not whether we add to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”**  
 ~ Franklin D. Roosevelt

## Welcome to 2025!

On behalf of the VUE staff and Executive Board, I want to wish each of you a Happy New Year and share our excitement about the opportunities that are waiting for us in 2025! Admittedly, 2024 was one of the most challenging years I have experienced as a public school teacher and unionist working within VCS. However, due to our tenacity, perseverance, and grit, we have overcome threats and challenges that we could never have predicted would come our way. We made it through these challenges because we have each other. My confidence continues to soar because I know that our union is committed to doing the work of our members. Listening to and taking our direction from each of you. Your issues and concerns are VUE's issues and concerns as our union is not a separate entity; it is all of us, and together we will make decisions about our future!

The new year brings with it opportunities to grow our power and ability to influence positive change within our district. We are happy to share that we have scheduled January meetings with 4 of the 5 school board members. We are committed to ongoing conversations and collaboration to work together to make improvements for students, staff, and instructional personnel. Also, we are working to reestablish our monthly meeting with the Superintendent. We have not been able to meet since the end of October, but we are hoping to get back into the practice of meeting each month to share ideas and continue building a positive relationship with VCS leaders.

If I had to select one word for 2025, it would be “*Intentional*.” My goal is to be intentional with my words and actions. When we are intentional, deliberate, and purposeful in what we do, the chances are greater that we will reach our goals.

To conclude, I know that your hard work is paying off. Our membership numbers continue to remain constant amid the uncertainty surrounding our public schools. Our focus in 2025 will continue to be recruitment to exceed the required 60% membership density for both units, organizing the former AFSCME eligible employees, and advocating for improvements that lead to a better life for all of us. Our collective commitment to showing up to do the work of our union will result in a positive change in 2025! Solidarity.

## FRS: Your Retirement Options

As public employees, one of the most important benefits we receive is our retirement. The district has recently advertised the opportunity to participate in a webinar to learn more about the FRS Investment Plan. While we think options are great and planning for retirement is extremely important, we want to make sure that you are fully informed about the differences between the Pension and Investment plans.

### **Some Key Points:**

The Pension system is the traditional system that is designed for employees who are not fluent/comfortable with managing their own investment portfolio. While the Investment Plan is designed for individuals who are comfortable with a 401(k) investment plan.

The Investment Plan requires individuals to choose how to invest their retirement from a diversified set of funds and the responsibility for management of said funds. The Pension Plan is managed by the State Pension Plan Trust Fund, which is one of the top 10 performing state pensions in the nation.

Employees qualify for the Pension Plan benefit after the completion of 8 years of service, which is payable upon reaching retirement age. After the completion of 1 year of service, employees own all contributions and earnings in an individual's Investment Plan account. If an employee leaves FRS employment prior to retirement, both plans acknowledge that the employee owns their own contributions (The 3% deducted from each of your paychecks).

Eligibility to participate in The DROP plan is only available to Pension Plan participants.

Employees are allowed one opportunity to switch from the Pension to Investment or vice versa, however, if you move from Investment to Pension, you will have to “buy into” the pension using your investment plan account.

For additional information on your FRS Options, click [here](#).

Additionally, we recommend considering a 403 b or 457 retirement account. You can never be over-planned when it comes to your retirement!



# FAST Assessment Reminder

As you know, the state required FAST Assessments are administered for progress monitoring purposes three times per year. The window for PM2 of the FAST Assessments begins on January 9th and remains open through January 24, 2025 (to allow for makeup assessments).

If you are a test administrator, please make sure that you fully understand the expectations of administering these assessments. Because the assessments are computer-based (CBT), there are restrictions on providing assistance to students who experience issues with the testing platform or the logistics of navigating through the test. Additionally, since the CBT includes our youngest learners (Kindergarten; students as young as 5), you must be aware of what you can and cannot do. The assessment manuals are no longer provided as hard copies, but the FLDOE has provided resources [here](#) and you should have received a digital copy of the Test Administration Manual from your school testing coordinator.

If you have questions about the PM2 assessment, ASK! **Allegations of testing irregularities are very serious and can lead to district and state level investigations and possible impacts to your teaching certificate.**

Unfortunately, we have experienced allegations of testing irregularities within VCS and cannot stress the importance of being informed. While PM1 and PM2 are for informational purposes only, test security protocols must be followed. This includes but is not limited to:

- viewing the passages or test items before, during or after testing.
- explaining or reading the passages or test items for students.

If you have students who experience difficulty with navigating the test items or assessment platform, we recommend that you contact your school testing coordinator or you refer to the section of the script that explains the testing rules and what to do if students come across an item they have not yet learned.

We have included the upcoming assessment schedules from the VCS REA Department. PLEASE contact the office if you have any questions!

## Elementary

January 9 (Makeups through January 24)	FAST PM2 ELA Reading Grades 3-5 *CBT
January 14 (Makeups through January 24)	FAST PM2 Math Grades 3-5 *CBT
January 15 - 24	FAST PM2 Reading and Math Grades K-2 *CBT
January 27-March 7	ACCESS for ELLs & Alternate ACCESS for ELLs--ESOL
January 30	Science 03 VST 03 *CBT
February 20	Science 05 VST 02 *CBT
February 24-April 4	Florida Alternate Assessment (FAA) Grades 3-5--ESE

## Middle School

January 9 (Makeups through January 24)	FAST PM2 ELA Reading Grades 6-8 *CBT
January 14 (Makeups through January 24)	FAST PM2 Math Grades 6-8 *CBT
January 23	Science 08 DIA 04 *CBT
January 27-March 7	ACCESS for ELLs & Alternate ACCESS for ELLs--ESOL
February 4	Science 06 DIA 05 *CBT
February 18-21	PERT (Dual Enrollment Candidates) *CBT
February 20	Science 07 DIA 05 *CBT
February 24-April 4	Florida Alternate Assessment (FAA) Grades 6-8--ESE

## High School

January 9 (Makeups through January 24)	FAST PM2 ELA Reading Grade 9 *CBT
January 14 (Makeups through January 24)	FAST PM2 ELA Reading Grade 10 *CBT
January 27-March 7	ACCESS for ELLs & Alternate ACCESS for ELLs--ESOL
January 30	Science Biology DIA 06 *CBT
February 18-21	PERT (Dual Enrollment Candidates) *CBT
February 27	Science Biology DIA 07 *CBT

## Important Reminders



- **The Mid-Year Self Assessment** available to certain instructional personnel is due Friday, January 10, 2025. While this self-assessment is not required, we are strongly encouraging instructional personnel identified as Category 2 in VSET to consider providing evidence in Categories 1 & 4. If there are differences from the lens of the evaluator, completing the mid-year assessment will allow for collaboration and support to potentially increase/align the rating before the final evaluation in March. If you need support or have any questions about VSET, please contact Dr. Howard at [lekita.howard@floridaea.org](mailto:lekita.howard@floridaea.org).
- **January 20, 2025** is Dr. Martin Luther King Day - Schools are closed.
- **Evaluator approval/feedback** provided on DPP #1 must be received by January 24, 2025.

## Know Your Contract



It is important to know your contract in order to ensure that the rights and privileges that have been negotiated are provided to you. Listed below are a few contractual provisions that you should know.

- **Teacher Duty Days-** on duty days, at least on (1/2) of the day shall be reserved for teachers to work items, tasks, and job responsibilities as they deem necessary. Administrators have the discretion to require attendance at a faculty meeting, training, or grade/department meeting during the balance of the work time, but the meeting shall be scheduled to be completed prior to lunch. On duty days, teachers shall be given an uninterrupted one-hour lunch.
- **Para Duty Days- Monday, January 6, 2025 is the final para non-student duty day for the academic year.**



## VUE Professional Learning

Your union continues to provide you with top notch professional learning that is designed to meet your needs. VUE PL is facilitated by members for members. The following face-to-face courses are currently being offered. The schedule for the five ESE modules needed for recertification will be shared in an upcoming Solidarity Report.

Make sure that you register today using MyPGS. There are only a limited number of seats and they are filling up quickly!

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Lekita Howard at [lekita.howard@floridaea.org](mailto:lekita.howard@floridaea.org).

### ESOL: Language & Literacy

Course #24241

Section#112390

Beginning on Monday, January 13, 2025

(This is a 10 week course)

Concluding on Monday, March 24, 2025

5:00-8:00 pm at the VUE Office

### Reading Endorsement Competency #1

Course #74887

Section #112391

Beginning on Monday, January 13, 2025

(This is a 10 week course)

Concluding on Monday, March 24, 2025

5:00 - 8:00 pm at the VUE Office



## Sick Leave Bank

It's the season when unexpected illnesses arise. Don't wait until it's too late, join the Sick Leave Bank now.

It's simple!

All you need is a minimum of one year of employment, 5 sick days accrued, and one-day sick leave donation. Let the sick bank be the silver lining in the cloud of a catastrophic illness.



Please contact Dr. Lekita Howard at 386-238-1605 or [lekita.howard@floridaea.org](mailto:lekita.howard@floridaea.org) if you have questions.

**JOIN NOW!**

## Member Benefits!

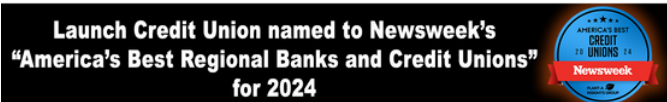
Did you know that as a member of your union, you have access to many benefits that could result in significant financial savings?

VUE members have access to benefits provided through NEA, AFT, FEA, and the AFL-CIO. These include discounts on car rentals, life insurance, credit cards, identity theft protection, vehicle purchase (new and preowned), hotels, car rental, shopping, dining out, and much more.

**VUE is proud to have a longstanding partnership with LAUNCH Credit Union.**

Launch Credit Union offers a variety of services including but not limited to checking/savings accounts, CDs & IRAs, personal loans, auto loans, and mortgages. They have several branch offices located throughout Volusia County and also have branches located at UHS and AHS!

Reach out today to our friend Leslie (386-761-9752 ext 2844) or explore their website at <https://www.launchcu.com/>.



You can view the complete list of partners by visiting, <https://www.ourvue.net/for-members/member-benefits/>

If you need assistance with your website credentials, please contact the office at (386) 238-1605.

Please make sure that you take a moment to explore all that is available to you as a member of VUE. You just might find exactly what you are looking for!

**SOLIDARIY!**

