Imagine a school where students have what they need to focus on learning as opposed to taking on a second—or third—job. Imagine a school where faculty have the resources they need to uncover new knowledge that makes an impact. Imagine a school that finds solutions and puts its knowledge and expertise into practice exactly where it is needed most—in local communities around Richmond.

At the VCU School of Education, we believe education can solve every challenge faced by today’s world. With an integrated approach of teaching, research and service, we seek solutions that transform minds, families, schools and communities. Our goal is simple: to support our students and our faculty as they work toward finding transformative solutions to complex educational challenges.

We look to you to support our ambitious goals as we continue on this worthwhile journey.

Unfortunately, state funding is woefully inadequate to move our school to new levels of excellence. Every year, we receive a smaller percentage of state funds to operate and to generate new knowledge that will impact the future. Pursuing our ambitious goals cannot be accomplished without true innovative partnerships and support from our alumni and friends.

Imagine a school where students have what they need to focus on learning as opposed to taking on a second—or third—job.

Your philanthropic dollars will ensure our growth for the future. On Sept. 23, VCU and the School of Education launched the Campaign for VCU. Our ambitious goal is $7.5 million, which will provide the necessary funds for student scholarships, fellowships, professorships and chairs. This money will also enrich our students’ experience as they work with our community to build and rigorously test innovative programs and research agendas.

By doubling our endowment, we will assist more qualified students, provide funds for students to engage in research projects, attract top scholars and address key issues in the Richmond-area public schools. Doubling our expendable funds will also allow us to develop innovative teacher preparation and professional development opportunities and to advance impactful and multidisciplinary research.

For more information on the Campaign for VCU, visit support.vcu.edu. For more information about how you can help support the school, visit soe.vcu.edu/giving or contact Ed Kardos at egkardos@vcu.edu.

You can help support the school.

Dear VCU School of Education alumni and friends,

At VCU, an urban-serving research institution, we have a responsibility to serve our surrounding communities and provide solutions to the challenges they face. That’s where the impact of our teaching, research and service should be felt every day, as the community becomes the training ground, the place where innovation and impact occur.

During our opening meeting for School of Education students, faculty and staff this fall, we highlighted some of the issues impacting urban schools, communities, children and families: poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, single-family households, teacher attrition, low budgets and crumbling infrastructure, just to name a few.

These are not average problems, so they can’t be met by average ideas and efforts.

As a school of education, we have to be boldly aspirational and think big as we work toward meeting these challenges. We need to ensure that we’re preparing outstanding teachers, researchers, counselors, special educators and administrators able to serve as strong educators and leaders in their classrooms and communities. We want our students to truly understand the needs of urban schools and their communities, students and families.

We are committed to seeing that the work we’re doing benefits not just VCU, but the surrounding area as well. Our research must be community focused, and community engagement is key. We’re committed to developing mutually beneficial partnerships with local schools and local agencies to ensure we’re addressing the most pressing concerns locally, regionally and nationally.

But we can’t do it alone. As alumni, community leaders and friends, your continued support is needed. Whether it is by lending your time, talent or treasure, your joining our effort will help us function at the next level of excellence.

Andrew P. Daire
Dean, VCU School of Education

Hillary Parkhouse
Dr. Parkhouse’s research focuses on youth activism, critical citizenship education in urban classrooms and the teaching practices that promote political efficacy. Her other areas of research include immigration and education, global education and teaching for social justice.

Jason Chow
Dr. Chow is interested in taking what we know from psychological science and using it to improve math instruction for children with or at risk for learning and behavioral problems. Through his research, he is looking to better understand the relationship between low language skills and problem behavior in classrooms.

Philip Gninka
Much of Dr. Gninka’s research focuses on how individuals cope with stress and how stress may influence their mental health and academic success. He also conducts research on the personality trait of perfectionism.

Christine Lee Bae
Dr. Bae applies educational and cognitive psychology in K-20 contexts through interdisciplinary STEM education projects. She also examines strategies that promote meaningful learning and creative thinking among college students.

Julie Gorlewski
A former K-12 public school teacher, Dr. Gorlewski researches how students, teachers and educational leaders are affected by the challenges of economic and social inequality. She is particularly interested in the ways that public policies influence instruction and assessment, and how schools contribute to, or interrupt, injustices. Dr. Gorlewski has published nine books, numerous articles and book chapters, and is co-editor of English Journal.
Experiences across the globe carry SFE alumna to Fulbright award

For Faij Amin, her career in education has always seemed like a path of destiny. A Palestinian-American who received her M.T. in elementary education from VCU in 2012, Amin recalls a life-changing moment when her first-grade teacher, Ms. Sanaa Izzuddin, wasn’t sure if she was brazen or crazy. “I needed them and I’m not finished with these kids yet,” Iizzuddin said. “But I just said to myself, ‘I’m not finished with these kids yet, I need them and they need me.’ That consistency proved to be a revelation for both students and teacher. Amin credits the summer to prepare the supplies she knew her students needed. And when the start of the school year rolled around, the class hit the ground running.

“Instead of the first week of school being frantic, where you’re both trying to figure each other out, we were ready,” Amin said. “I knew what I was doing, I knew my students — the keys to them and what made them click — and they knew me.”

That experience in Dalma formed the basis of Amin’s Fulbright proposal, which she was awarded in spring 2016. The 10-month grant, scheduled to start in the fall, will see her spend a year in the UAE. “To get this award, I asked and I received,” Amin said. “I’ve been handed the tools to make an impact on a macro level. The sky’s the limit, the horizon of Dalma got a whole lot wider. Just like Oliver Hall before it, that island in the middle of nowhere was where I was supposed to be. This is my chance to make a difference, and I’m not going to waste it.”

“My professional mentor is one of the people you surround yourself with, and Dr. Rhodes is a wonderful person,” Amin said. “She and I just clicked on a personal level. Asking her to be my professional mentor is one of the smartest things I’ve ever done for myself.”

“Receiving the Fulbright is an honor, but it wasn’t just me alone,” she said. “A lot of people deserve credit — VCU Alumni’s Gordon McCloud, The Honors College’s Jeff Wing — so many people were helpful along the way.”

The UAE, which Amin refers to as a microcosm of her entire VCU experience, is a wonderful place,” she said. “A lot of people deserve credit — VCU Alumni’s Gordon McCloud, The Honors College’s Jeff Wing — so many people were helpful along the way.”

“From day one at VCU, I realized that doors will open to you if you’re willing to do the work and take chances,” Amin said. “To get the award, I asked and I received.”

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Experience across the globe carries SFE alumna to Fulbright award

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Changing the equation: future math teacher looking to make a difference in lives of inner-city students

A second-year student in the VCU School of Education’s M.T. program, Leah Powell has an unusually specific line item in her 10-year plan.

“One of my lifelong goals is to teach middle school math in inner-city Baltimore,” Powell said. “My friends think I’m crazy, but I just love the city. And I think it’s somewhere where I can really make a difference.”

There’s a great deal of Powell’s character wrapped up in that one goal: for starters, her interest in both math and education. Cliché as it may sound, Powell always knew she wanted to be a teacher, even while she was growing up in Midlothian.

“When I was 5 years old, I used to make punch papers of theirs that I graded.” she said, with a hint of embarrassment. “I still have pretend it was a classroom,” she said, “When I was 5 years old, I used to make punch papers of theirs that I graded.”

A lifelong lover of math as well — it was the subject she majored in at Tennessee’s Tusculum College during her first two years. She describes working with another second-year student in the VCU School of Education’s M.T. program, Leah Powell has an unusually specific line item in her 10-year plan.

“How [with these scholarships,] it feels like a big weight has been lifted from me, knowing half of the semester’s cost is off my shoulders,” Powell said. “The donors providing them are math people too: they understand the problems and issues math teachers face, so I’m working hard to make them proud.”

Ultimately, whether it’s in Baltimore or some other high-need area, Powell’s goal is to leave a positive impression on the students who come through her class.

“I want every kid to walk out of my class better than when they came in,” she said. “Whether they learned something about algebra or learned how to help others in their community, I want to have some lifelong contribution and impact on their lives.”

Now, as Powell winds down her VCU career, she’s making the most of her final semesters in the School of Education. This spring, Powell received a pair of scholarships: the Ena Gross Scholarship in Secondary Mathematics Education and the Debbie and Todd House Urban Education Scholarship in Math and Science. She also received the Noyce Scholarship, which supports STEM educators interested in teaching in high-need areas, in October.

Not only have these scholarships helped ease some of the financial burden on Powell, but they’ve also freed her up to pursue additional experiences outside her coursework that will help her along the path to Baltimore.

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