

# momentum

Dear VCU School of Education alumni and friends,



Like many states, Virginia has struggled to recruit and retain highly effective teachers. Its traditional teacher preparation programs have been unable to meet staffing needs, both in graduating a sufficient number of teachers and in producing teachers who are well prepared for the challenges of high-needs schools and who will consider a career in these

schools. These factors contribute to high teacher turnover and shortages of highly effective teachers, conditions that negatively affect student achievement and have adverse economic impacts on Richmond and the surrounding area.

Striving to be the leader in urban education, the VCU School of Education is poised to make a positive impact and help address these challenges in the Richmond and surrounding communities. We are actively working with neighboring school divisions to develop innovative and collaborative educator pipeline initiatives. We have also formed an SOE Educator Pipeline Taskforce to develop solutions that will attract and better prepare teachers for success in high-needs schools, increase teacher preparation pipelines, significantly decrease the teacher shortage in our communities and help RVA become the national location for student-centered innovative teaching and learning.

None of this work would be possible without your support as alumni and friends. Whether it's time, talent or treasure, we thank you for your dedication to the mission of the VCU School of Education and look forward to continued collaboration.

**Andrew P. Daire**  
Dean, VCU School of Education

## Making an Impact Through Planned Giving

**S**chool of Education alumni and friends are making an impact on their own terms — and timeline. Gift planning, commonly referred to as planned giving, is now a preferred way for many to give a personally meaningful gift to the school.

“Estate planning is a great way to support the mission and vision of the school without feeling it in the monthly budget,” said Ed Kardos, SOE’s senior director of development. “Planned giving puts the donors in control so they may make a gift that can also provide financial or tax benefits.”

A bequest is a gift made through a donor’s will or trust by which they leave a lasting legacy. Donors who have chosen this way to give know that they retain control of their assets and can make changes to their plan as their personal

need dictates. The estate tax savings, although significant, is rarely the deciding factor in making this kind of gift.

“I found that loyal donors to the school like to leave a ‘legacy’ gift through gift planning. Although we don’t see the impact of their generosity today, we recognize these donors now because we appreciate their commitment to the future of the school,” concluded Kardos.

A bequest is one of the easiest gifts to make. With the help of an advisor, donors can include in their will or trust language specifying a gift be made, to family, friends or the VCU School of Education, as part of their estate plan.

There are other ways to make planned gifts and if interested in learning more, please contact Ed Kardos at [egkardos@vcu.edu](mailto:egkardos@vcu.edu).

### THE HERITAGE SOCIETY

recognizes donors who have made provisions for the VCU School of Education in their estate plans. Members are invited to participate in various on-campus functions and receive exclusive donor mailings.

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## Why Do You Give to the School of Education?



Stephanie Holt

VCU’s School of Education helped to change my life, and I realized that by endowing a scholarship I could help young people to attain their goals of teaching, especially in an urban environment. It is important to me to make sure that students can realize their dreams, and continue their education at VCU through the teacher preparation programs in the School of Education.

Virginia Arnold

Teaching, learning and developing materials for children and their teachers were factors in my life’s work. So it makes sense that the VCU School of Education and I make a perfect partnership! Such a relationship also keeps me in the circle of idea development and helps me connect to students to help them meet their financial needs.



Carolyn Eggleston, Ph.D., and Thom Gehring, Ph.D.

We are graduates of the Ph.D. in Urban Education at VCU and received a world-class education from the school, which we applied toward successful careers in higher education. We appreciated the quality of the curriculum, faculty and support staff; the quality made us better people and prepared us extremely well for future positions. We have stayed in touch with VCU and have observed that the quality has continued in the same way. These are the reasons we give to the VCU School of Education.

[soe.vcu.edu/giving](http://soe.vcu.edu/giving)

**Make it real.**  
CAMPAIGN FOR VCU

# With “STEM in Sports,” VCU Gives 400 Richmond Public Schools Students a Look at Cutting-edge Sports Technology

**Brian McNeill**  
VCU University Relations

At a station on the floor of Virginia Commonwealth University’s Stuart C. Siegel Center a group of Richmond Public Schools students hit baseballs into a net, using special bats fitted with sensors that measure the speed of their swing. At another station, kids kicked soccer balls with internal chips that track the velocity and spin of the ball. And at yet another station, students shot high-tech basketballs that calculate each shot’s arc, speed and rotation.

“We’ve got a lot of nice facilities and a lot of cool technology that we use to collect data on our student athletes,” said Tim Lampe, Ph.D., senior associate athletic director for athletic facilities with VCU Athletics. “We thought, how interesting would it be if we could connect all that with Richmond Public Schools’ curriculum on math, science and technology?”

On April 4, the VCU School of Education and VCU Athletics hosted roughly 400 students and health and physical education teachers from elementary and middle schools across Richmond for a “STEM in Sports” event that focused on a holistic, integrated approach to athletics and science, technology, engineering and math.

“The purpose of this event is to provide students with an opportunity to experience sport-specific technology that is used to assess and enhance performance,” said Misti Wajciechowski, assistant professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning in the School of Education.

One station was an exploration of simple machines, such

as axles, and allowed the students to compete against each other in short races.

By tying together sports and STEM, Wajciechowski said, the event was geared toward both students who love sports and those who are not necessarily the best athletes but might be inspired by seeing how science, technology, math and engineering are used in sports.

“When they come here, they’re seeing the science vocabulary, they’re seeing the technology and they’re seeing how the concepts they’re learning in science and math class are being used to help athletes get better at the sports they love,” she said. “It’s real-life learning. It’s real-life application.”

In addition to the stations that analyzed baseball, basketball and soccer, a variety of other stations gave RPS students a chance to see sports technology in action while having fun.

At one, a team from the Science Museum of Virginia let students check out remote-controlled Sphero toys, demonstrating friction and how different surfaces can slow down or speed up the ball.

At a station demonstrating Blast Motion — sports analysis technology that uses motion analysis and video capture — VCU School of Education students used the technology to measure the RPS students’ vertical leaps, long jumps and sprints.

“We want the kids to see that sports is more than just physical strength and ability,” said Nick Dzienny, a master’s student in math education in the School of Education. “A lot of science and math goes into sports, as well. So these kind

of devices give a lot of metrics, statistics and numbers that we can use to show the kids that there’s a lot more that goes into sports.”

Farwa Hussain, a sophomore majoring in math education in the School of Education, helped Richmond Public Schools students as they tried out “Swing Tracker” technology that measures how fast they swing the bat.

Meanwhile, in the Basketball Development Center, the RPS students checked out the basketball team’s weight room, heard from VCU Athletics’ dietitian Liz Wanamaker, learned about how sports teams use video analysis and saw a demonstration by VCU soccer player Zeron Sewell, who was wearing a biometric sensor on his chest.

“With [the biometric] information, I know how fit I am,” Sewell told a group of students. “That helps me improve my performance.”

Fifty students from the School of Education helped staff the event, and many were responsible for designing a lesson on the technology for the RPS students.

The idea, Wajciechowski said, is to show future teachers an alternative way to help their students learn information. “The elementary [education] majors, they’re going to have to teach math and science. So all of a sudden, they’re going to think, ‘Well, I did this cool thing in college. I’m going to go talk to the P.E. teacher. Or I’m going to go talk to the technology person. And now we can do something that ties together math, technology and physical education,’” she said. “It’s an interdisciplinary, cross-curricular, out-of-the-silo way of thinking and teaching.”



Elizabeth Oduro, a senior in the School of Education who studies physical education and health, helped organize the event as part of a VCU internship. “It’s amazing to see kids engage with science, technology, math and engineering through sports — which is something they can relate to,” she said.

For the RPS students, the event was meant to hook their interest in STEM — and possible future careers — through the fun and competition of sports, said Stefanie Ramsey, Ed.D., instructional specialist, Athletics, Health & P.E., Driver Education, with Richmond Public Schools. “It’s never too early to get a child engaged in questions like, ‘Where am I going to go in life, and what am I going to do?’ They love sports. There’s always got to be a hook. When I was in school, sports was the hook for me. I lived to play every kind of sport, every season,”

she said. “A lot of our kids are in the same platform as that. But you also have the kids who aren’t necessarily about playing a sport — but they love the science and STEM side.”

More than anything, Lampe said, organizers hope the RPS students walk away from the event having made connections between sports and what they’re learning in class. “It’s not about the sports. We’re using sports as the bait. They’re interested in basketball, baseball and soccer and the other sports we have here today. But we want them to make the connection and look at the force, speed, spin and trajectory of the ball, and the other components they learn about in math and science class, and actually see it, touch it and understand it,” he said. “If they think they’re not good at math and science, they’re wrong. They’re good at it; they maybe just don’t know how to identify it. That’s what we’re trying to achieve today.” ■

# VCU SOE Faculty Make an Impact in the Richmond Teachers for Social Justice

After a year of teaching social studies and English in the Dominican Republic and five years in New York City’s Dominican neighborhood, Hillary Parkhouse wanted to make an impact on the urban city schools of Richmond, Virginia. To do that, Parkhouse, assistant professor in the VCU School of Education Teaching and Learning department, joined the Richmond Teachers for Social Justice group (RVA TSJ) soon after moving to Richmond in 2016.

“RVA TSJ supports teachers’ efforts to ensure that schools are welcoming and safe places for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation or immigration history,” said Parkhouse.

The RVA TSJ was founded in 2010 by Jesse Senechal and Kurt Stemhagen, both faculty members in the VCU SOE. Senechal, who also has a background in urban education, from Chicago Public Schools, noticed no one was addressing these issues in Richmond.

“We [Senechal and Stemhagen] wanted to pull together a community of teachers and other professionals at VCU who were interested in issues of social justice in schools,” said Senechal.

The RVA TSJ mission is to support teachers in any way they can with issues of social justice facing their schools and students, including developing curricula that address issues of social justice.

“The hope is that teachers across the country will take a portion of their instructional time to teach a lesson on the importance of public education,” said Parkhouse.

The organization has initiated monthly national teach-ins and their website includes lesson plans and other helpful classroom resources. In addition, the organization fundraises for public schools with events like LOVE Public Schools Concert to promote public education.

One of the RVA TSJ projects is raising awareness of the importance of public education for a healthy democratic society. The group also advocates for better funding of local schools and more just disciplinary processes.

“We want to get teachers’ voices heard in debates regarding school policies,” said Senechal as he described the resources RVA TSJ provides for local teachers. “Teachers have an important perspective that is often overlooked.”

“Our work is more critically important than ever due to the current political climate in which support for traditional public schools is being displaced by private and charter school interests,” added Parkhouse.

RVA TSJ events have entailed discussions on the value or misuse of standardized testing in Virginia public schools and interviews collecting an oral history of how high-stakes testing affects real people.

A recent concern was voiced during a monthly panel meeting last December, when local Richmond teachers expressed their worry for their undocumented immigrant students in light of the current political climate.

In response, on March 18, RVA TSJ and PLUMAS at VCU held a UndocuALLY Training for teachers. The training provided information for K-12 educators about supporting undocumented immigrant students and their families. PLUMAS is a student organization of Latinx students and allies who work toward enacting social action for the rights of Latinx in the United States.

The first training was so successful they hosted another one on April 22.

# The VCU School of Education Celebrates Its Students at Scholarship and Awards Ceremony

On March 13, the VCU Student Commons Ballroom was filled with the sounds of the VCU Jazz Orchestra led by Kevin Eichenberger. As families flooded into their seats to congratulate their loved ones, eager students awaited their awards.

In his welcoming remarks, Dean Andrew Daire expressed his gratitude toward this year’s award and scholarship recipients, as well as to the generous donors who made it all possible.

and graduates make on communities, families and children.

Among the scholarships awarded were the SOE 50th Anniversary Urban Education Scholarship to Dabreona Brown and Stephen Tyler and the School of Education Faculty Organization Scholarship, awarded to Samantha Parker and Rebecca Pullen. ■

The VCU School of Education awarded 48 scholarships to 66 of the school’s top students. The awards given out totaled \$68,515.



# Asein Ta’s Journey to American Education

Asein Ta’s first elementary school experience will be when he starts his Richmond Teacher Residency program in May 2017.



“It’s interesting because I am going to teach elementary education but I never went to elementary school,” said VCU senior Asein Ta, who will be studying early elementary education at the VCU School of Education.

Living in a small town in Myanmar, a country run by a military dictator, Ta’s family struggled financially and could not afford to send him and his siblings to school. After his father’s death, his mother soon fell ill. Wanting a better life for her son, she made sure he could leave.

“She asked me to go with my uncle on a trip; I had no idea she was setting me up for a different path,” said Ta.

He was 10 years old when he left Myanmar with his uncle, who frequently made these

trips for people who needed to get out.

“We had to go through the city but there wasn’t a way to get through the soldiers that were blocking the gates,” said Ta. They traveled through the woods with only one bag of belongings until they reached the border.

“I didn’t know where we were going but we ended up at a refugee camp called Mae La with other children in Thailand.” After his uncle settled him in at a monastery, Ta was on his own and was raised by Buddhist monks.

“The last time I saw my uncle at the camp was when he came to tell me that my mother had passed away,” he

shared. “I stayed in the camp for about five years and I got to know a lot of people. We had a little bit of schooling. I learned a little bit of English and math,” said Ta, reflecting on his first educational experience.

Then an opportunity arose to leave Thailand and travel to the United States. Ta filled out the application paperwork and got a positive response.

“I was very lucky; a lot of people never hear back but I got my papers in two years,” said Ta. “Soon after, I got on a plane for the first time and flew to Japan and then the west coast of the United States.”

Ta arrived in Virginia on March 6, 2008. He was placed in a foster home with loving

parents Sam and Susie, who enrolled him in public school soon after his arrival.

“They are so educated and very supportive of my education; they pushed me to study all the time. I really appreciate everything they have done for me. They taught me a lot,” said Ta.

This past March, Ta was the winner of the Virginia A. Arnold Scholarship from the School of Education. It will help him continue his education through graduate school here at VCU. “Someday I hope I can make all this possible for other children,” Ta concluded. ■





School of Education

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# momentum

## Celebrating Dr. Diane Simon Ahead of Retirement

During her 29 years of service at the VCU School of Education (VCU SOE), Dr. Diane Simon has touched the lives of many students, whom she refers to as “her children.” As her time at the school is coming to an end as she approaches retirement this June, Dr. Simon thinks back fondly at her VCU experience that shaped her professional life — and much more.

“Over the years, getting the card, call or visit to say ‘thank you’ has been incredibly humbling and gratifying. Building these relationships has so enriched my life and my experience at VCU,” said Dr. Simon.

Before her time at VCU, Dr. Simon served as chair of the Division of Education and Psychology at Virginia Union University, where she developed and taught courses for the Speech and Hearing minor in the Special Education program.

Having joined the VCU SOE in 1988 as assistant dean and special education professor, Dr. Simon is now the senior associate dean for student affairs. Together with the Student Services Center staff, which she directs, she has supported and assisted thousands of students who came into the five-year teacher preparation program as freshmen, as well as students in other graduate programs, until they walk across the stage at graduation.

“The opportunity to meet and work with so many wonderful students has been most rewarding. I watch them grow, mature, graduate and move on to become successful educators,” she said.



A large part of Dr. Simon’s role at the SOE has been guiding the school through the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), now CAEP, process. She has prepared for six visits since coming to VCU. The last review was the most successful yet, with full approval from NCATE and multiple commendations.

“Preparation for accreditation is a collaborative venture and the faculty is always critically important in the preparation and success of a visit — they have always been an integral part of the process,” said Dr. Simon.

Another part of her time at VCU that made a lasting impression has been meeting so many students who were struggling financially to get through school. They were taking out loans, working two jobs just to stay afloat.

That is when Dr. Simon decided to also become a generous donor for the School of Education.

Together with her husband, Dr. Simon established the Elaine West Johnson Scholarship in honor of the first teacher she knew, her mother. Her mother spent 30 years teaching deaf children at the elementary school level, which inspired Dr. Simon to continue the family tradition.

When asked how the SOE has changed over the years, Dr. Simon echoed Dean Andrew Daire’s belief that we can only be as good as the school systems around us. During her time with VCU SOE, she has seen the number of local schools interested in partnering and working with the university increase.

--- MOMENTUM SUMMER 2017 ---

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