

Celebrating All Abilities Virginia



WINTER 2022

And Just Like That...

Virginia has a new Republican governor. That may turn out to be fine... or not. In the past 60 years that I have been a Virginia resident, I have been: a student, a homeowner, a parent of a son in K-12 and then GMU, a writer, an editor, a business owner, a community volunteer, a substitute teacher and an advocate for people with disabilities, including for my brother who was born in 1958 with profound cerebral palsy.

My overall feelings are that, while there was always room for improvement, Virginia has been slowly – sometimes excruciatingly so – coming along in its ability to serve the Disability Committee, including of course, our kids and family members.

And in the past 20 years that I have been involved in this Disability Resource that I call *Celebrating All Abilities, Virginia* has had four Democratic governors and one Republican; and, because I'm an incrementalist, the recent progress seemed to me to be accelerating. Maybe this is a coincidence, maybe not.

But this latest governor has jumped right in with both feet to keep his campaign promises. Again, we'll know in the long run if it turns out okay. But I have my doubts.

Writing the newsletter this month has been like dancing on the head of a pin, trying to balance seemingly contradictory ideas. We need to support our teachers and we need to hold them accountable. The two are not mutually exclusive. Can a tipline possibly be a reasonable solution? We want to keep our children safe and in the classroom. We should maybe also want recognize

the rights of all parents because we've been working for so long for the community at-large to recognize our own parental rights. We're seeing that parents who previously pulled away from public schools now seem to be intent on remaking public schools with their specific narrow ideology. Could homeschooling collectives or collaboratives become a viable option for our kids?

My current primary concern is that, after the new governor takes his legislative sledgehammer to the "divisive" issues about which some parents are extremely vocal, he'll turn his attention to our kids. Someone may say that having our children around is "divisive" and will make their kid "uncomfortable." I'm shaking as I write these words, but I think it's necessary to confront these issues as best we can.

To that end, I say that we must continue to remain positive and supportive and document every interaction that may, at some point, affect our community. I plan to track legislation; as a start, please see page 5 for a Bill submitted by Rep. William Wren to amend the Code of Virginia by adding **22.1-208.03, relating to public elementary and secondary schools; student citizenship skills; certain instructional policies prohibited; parental rights; disclosures; penalties; other remedies.** Gotta say, Wren could use an editor for clarity and length. But dude also needs a history lesson; Abraham Lincoln did not debate Frederick Douglass; he debated Stephen Douglas.

Stay strong, stay safe, and see you in the spring.

Laura Nelson, Editor

IN THIS ISSUE

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|----|
| Letter from Editor | 1 | Spec Ed Ranking for VA | 4 | WH Press Release Re: Inclusion | 8 |
| Governor of Virginia | 2 | VA Proposed Legislation | 5 | Homeschooling | 10 |
| Tips and Tidbits | 3 | NDRN Report | 7 | Homeschooling Resources | 12 |

WINTER 2022

1



GOVERNOR OF VIRGINIA

Glenn Youngkin

For Immediate Release: January 21, 2022

Contacts: Office of the Governor: Macaulay Porter, Macaulay.Porter@governor.virginia.gov

Governor Youngkin Announces Updated Guidelines for Parents, Educators, and PreK-12 Schools

RICHMOND, VA—Governor Glenn Youngkin today announced updated guidelines for parents, educators, and schools per Executive Order 2, which creates a parental opt-out from mask mandates at both public and private schools in the Commonwealth. The guidelines were developed by the Virginia Department of Health and the Department of Education.

“I have said all along that we are going to stand up for parents. Executive Order 2 is not about pro-masks versus anti-mask, it’s about empowering parents. I am confident that the Virginia Supreme Court will rule in the favor of parents, reaffirming the parental rights clearly laid out in the Virginia code § 1-240.1. In the meantime, I urge all parents to listen to their principal, and trust the legal process. If you have any questions or concerns please contact us at helpeducation@governor.virginia.gov,” said Governor Glenn Youngkin.

To read a full copy of guidelines from Virginia Department of Health and Department of Education.
<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/get-the-latest-guidance/k-12-education/>

Visit the constituent services page at <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/constituent-services/>

The updated guidance is redesigned around Governor Youngkin’s key principles of parental rights, keeping kids in the classroom five days a week, and keeping kids safe and healthy. The update guidelines:

Emphasizes alternative mitigation measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 including vaccination, distancing, and outbreak awareness.

Provides a clear decision tree for parents to review when trying to determine how to keep and return children to the classroom.

Strongly encourages test-to-stay and other strategies to keep and return kids to the classroom as quickly as possible.

Gives schools practicable flexibility on contact tracing, distancing, and other strategies.

###

Tips & Tidbits to Chew On...

Governor Glenn Youngkin Signs 11 Day One Executive Actions

To view all 11 Executive Orders,
www.governor.virginia.gov/news-releases/2022/january/name-918519-en.html

Va. Code § 1-240.1 Rights of Parents

Added by Acts 2013 No. 668, § 1, eff. 7/1/2013.
A parent has a fundamental right to make decisions concerning the upbringing, education, and care of the parent's child.

<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title1/chapter2.1/section1-240.1/>

Editor note: As far as I can tell, this is the entire text of the law.

Governor Youngkin sets up tipline to report 'divisive practices' in Virginia schools. In multiple news outlets, Youngkin touts an e-mail helpline as a way for parents to report concerns they have about their child's school happenings that parents perceive as divisive.

helpeducation@governor.virginia.gov

#ThankATeacher:

Parents, educators flood Youngkin's email hotline with positive school experiences~

Virginia educators and parents are urging the community to send positive experiences with teachers to Gov. Glenn Youngkin's new email hotline aimed at collecting information about school happenings that parents perceive as divisive.

Using the hashtag #**ThankATeacher**, social media users were encouraged to send an email to the new address with information about favorite teachers, how children feel about their current teachers and fond school memories.



Look for the next issue of Celebrating All Abilities to be posted during the Spring/Summer of 2022. Send story ideas, interesting links, and events to *Laura Nelson, Editor* at CelebratingAllAbilities@gmail.com

*I do not solicit advertising or accept donations. I also do not accept stories/articles that have advertising links.
Thank you!*

THANK YOU FOR FOLLOWING US ON FACEBOOK.



**VIRGINIA
IS FOR
LEARNERS**

Editor's note: Dr. James Lane stepped down from his position in December 2021

James F. Lane, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Public Instruction

OFFICE OF MEDIA RELATIONS

Contact: Charles Pyle, 804-371-2420

Virginia Earns Top Federal Special Education Rating for 10th Consecutive Year

For Immediate Release: September 23, 2021
RICHMOND —

For a 10th consecutive year, Virginia has earned the U.S. Department of Education's highest rating for improving outcomes for students with disabilities and for compliance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, also known as IDEA.

The commonwealth received a "Meets Requirements" designation for 2021 under the federal education department's Results-Driven Accountability System for special education. The rating is based on student outcomes and compliance data from the 2018-2019 school year — the most recent data available under the federal reporting system — as well as a May 2019 monitoring visit conducted by the federal education department's Office of Special Education Programs.

Only five states and state-level education systems have earned the Meets Requirements designation for 10 consecutive years.

"The commonwealth's consistent national leadership reflects the effectiveness of the Virginia Department of Education's efforts to achieve positive outcomes for students with disabilities and our commitment to accountability and transparency in special education at both the state and local levels," Superintendent of Public Instruction James Lane said. "I would like to extend a special thanks to the parents, students and advocacy groups that have collaborated with VDOE over the last two years as we have worked to address the findings of the 2019 federal monitoring report and the December 2020 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission study of state special education programs. Working together, we are producing better outcomes and transitions for students with disabilities."

The annual IDEA report card scores states on the participation and performance of students with disabilities on state and national reading and mathematics tests, and on the improvement of graduation rates for special education students. The report card also includes indicators related to discipline, the identification of minority students for special education services, the evaluation of

students for services and the development of individualized education programs, and the resolution of disputes between parents and local school divisions.

In December 2020, Lane announced implementation of a new model for supporting students with disabilities, investigating complaints, and monitoring school divisions for compliance with federal and state special education laws and regulations. The new approach stemmed from internal discussions about improving local program monitoring and recommendations from the OSEP and JLARC reports.

The approach includes more frequent and comprehensive monitoring of local special education programs, a comprehensive verification and review process for a sample of school divisions selected randomly every year, expanded criteria for the investigation of complaints, and a new procedure for confirming implementation of required corrective actions.

"Virginia's 10th consecutive Meets Requirements rating is an endorsement from our federal partners of the hard work of VDOE and local school divisions to improve outcomes for students with disabilities through innovative programming that meets the needs of students and their families," Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services Samantha Hollins said. "Compliance with IDEA is just the starting point. Our goal is to maximize the potential of all students, including students with disabilities."

IDEA, which was reauthorized by Congress in 2004, requires states and school divisions to ensure that children with disabilities receive educational services that meet their educational needs and prepare them for further education, employment and productive lives. IDEA also requires states to establish targets in their annual state performance plans for achieving the objectives of the law.

###

A BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 22.1-208.03, relating to public elementary and secondary schools; student citizenship skills; certain instructional policies prohibited; parental rights; disclosures; penalties; other remedies.

Offered January 12, 2022

Prefiled January 11, 2022

Patron– Williams

Referred to Committee on Education

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 22.1-208.03 as follows:

§ 22.1-208.03. Student citizenship skills; certain instructional policies prohibited; parental rights; disclosures; penalties; other remedies.

A. As used in this section, "divisive concept" means the concept that (i) one race, religion, ethnicity, or sex is inherently superior to another race, religion, ethnicity, or sex; (ii) an individual, by virtue of the individual's race, religion, ethnicity, or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously; (iii) an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of the individual's race, religion, ethnicity, or sex; (iv) members of one race, religion, ethnicity, or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to race, religion, ethnicity, or sex; (v) an individual's moral character is necessarily determined by the individual's race, religion, ethnicity, or sex; (vi) an individual, by virtue of the individual's race, religion, ethnicity, or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race, religion, ethnicity, or sex; (vii) an individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual's race, religion, ethnicity, or sex; (viii) meritocracy, punctuality, proper language usage, free markets, and traits such as strong work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race to oppress members of another race; (ix) the ideology of equity of outcomes is superior to the ideology of equality, a concept enshrined in the Constitution of the United States, of opportunities; (x) mathematics and scientific empiricism are products of western civilization and thus are rooted in racism; (xi) the Commonwealth or the United States is fundamentally or systemically racist or sexist; or (xii) capitalism, free markets, free industry, and other related economic systems are inherently racist.

B. The Board shall, in furtherance of the citizens skills portion of the 5 C's in the Profile of a Virginia Graduate, incorporate into each relevant Standard of Learning and associated curriculum framework a requirement that each student demonstrate the understanding of:

1. The fundamental moral, political, and intellectual foundations of the American experiment in self-government, as well as the history, qualities, traditions, and features of civic engagement in the United States;

2. The structure, function, and processes of government institutions at the federal, state, and local levels; and

3. The founding documents of the United States, including the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, the Federalist Papers, including Essays 10 and 51, excerpts from Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America, the first debate between Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass *, and the writings of the Founding Fathers of the United States.

C. No public school teacher or other instructional staff member shall be required to discuss any current event or widely debated and currently controversial issue of public policy or social affairs. Any such employee who chooses to discuss any such event or issue in the scope of his instructional duties shall, to the best of his ability, strive to explore such issues from diverse and contending perspectives, without giving deference to any one perspective.

D. Neither the Board or Department nor any local school board shall (i) teach, instruct, or train any school board employee, contractor, or consultant, any public elementary or secondary school student, or any other individual or group to support, believe, endorse, embrace, confess, act upon, or otherwise assent to a divisive concept; (ii) penalize or discriminate against any such individual or group for refusing to support, believe, endorse, embrace, confess, act upon, or otherwise assent to a divisive concept; or (iii) accept any funding from any source for (a) the development, purchase, or choice of curricula or curricular materials that include divisive concepts, pertain to social-emotional learning, or otherwise violate any provision of this section or (b) the training or professional development of teachers that includes divisive concepts, pertains to social-emotional learning, or otherwise violates any provision of this section.

E. No school board or employee thereof shall:

1. Require, incorporate into any course or class, or award course or class grades or credit, including extra credit, for student work for, affiliation with, or service learning in association with any organization engaged in lobbying for legislation at the local, state, or federal level or engaged in social or public policy advocacy; (ii) political activism, lobbying, or efforts to persuade members of the legislative or executive branch at the local, state, or federal level to take specific actions by direct communications; or (iii) participation in any practicum or like activity involving social or public policy advocacy. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to prohibit or prevent any student from learning the process of government by firsthand observation;

2. Teach or incorporate into any course or class any divisive concept;

3. Be required to engage in training, orientation, or therapy that presents any form of race or sex stereotyping or blame on the basis of sex or race; or

4. Create a position or hire a consultant with the job title of equity director or diversity director or a substantially similar title and with a job description that includes any activity that would result in a violation of a provision of this section.

F. The parent of each student enrolled in a public elementary or secondary school has the right to be aware of all curricula, instructional materials, lessons, and other forms of instruction provided to his child and may request that the student's teacher provide any such item for review. Each teacher who receives such a request shall provide to the parent an electronic or paper copy of the requested item within 48 hours of the request.

G. Each public school shall annually, no later than the July 1 preceding the upcoming school year, prominently list on a publicly accessible portion of its website:

1. All instructional materials and activities to be used for student instruction at the school, organized by grade and subject area. For the purpose of this disclosure, "instructional materials" includes textbooks, reading materials, videos, digital materials, websites, and other online applications; "activities" includes assemblies, guest lectures, and other educational events facilitated by school board employees or outside individuals or organizations; and "activities" does not include student presentations; and

2. All training, documentation, and review and approval processes performed by the principal or any teacher or administrator in preparation for providing such instructional materials and activities to students.

H. Any individual, including any school board member, who knowingly and intentionally violates any provision of this section is guilty of a Class 4 misdemeanor and, in the case of a school board employee, may be terminated or, as applicable, have his license revoked or suspended in accordance with all relevant policies, regulations, and laws.

I. In the event that a local school board finds that a school board employee has persistently, knowingly, and intentionally violated any provision of this act, the parent of any student affected by such violations may request and the local school board shall provide a voucher in an amount equal to all sums from any source that the local school board received for the education of such student, and the parent shall use such voucher to provide for the education of his child in any setting set forth in subsection A of § 22.1-254.

###

Editors note: * Abraham Lincoln debated Stephen Douglas • https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln-Douglas_debates



New Report Details How Schools are Illegally Removing Students with Disabilities

***For Immediate Release
January 25, 2022***

Schools across the country remove students with disabilities from the classroom using illegal practices known as “informal removals. These off the books dismissals are described in detail in a new report released today by the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) called **Out from the Shadows: Informal Removal of Children with Disabilities from Public Schools.**

The report provides examples of children missing entire semesters of instruction after being removed from school because of behaviors related to their disabilities. The practice, coined by NDRN as “informal removal,” refers to an administrative removal of a child from school for a sufficient period of time to constitute a “change of placement” without the necessary legal protections. These are underground suspensions, hidden from data reporting and policy reform efforts.

“The reality is that we have no idea exactly how many children are removed from school each year because school districts do not include informal removals in reports to the public,” said NDRN Executive Director Curt Decker. “But we do know that our network represents hundreds of such children per year and that these removals hurt them.”

Federal law requires that children with disabilities who need behavioral services receive them, that they receive at least the same education as other students, and that they are educated with their peers to the maximum extent appropriate. None of this can happen when a child is

home during the day without schoolwork, or with a tutor who sees them a handful of hours per week.

In one school district, three students with diagnoses of autism, were repeatedly sent home because the school didn’t have sufficient teacher’s aide coverage and they were considered “too hard to handle.” One child was not in school for almost a year. The law requires that these children, like all public school students, receive an education, and that an appropriate program or placement be provided to them.

In another incident included in the report, a six-year-old boy with complex medical needs who exhibited disruptive behaviors at school, such as flopping on the floor while refusing to do work, was only permitted to attend school for one day per week. He was at risk of being removed from his foster home because his foster parents became increasingly frustrated by the shortened school days.

“Informal removal and lost instructional time have long-term negative economic, health, and community impacts for individual children and their families,” said NDRN Managing Attorney and the report’s primary author Diane Smith Howard. “Federal, state, and local officials must take action to stop the practice of informal removal.”

*Contact: David Card
202.408.9514 x122
press@ndrn.org*

###

The report includes specific recommendations to end the practice of informal removal.

www.ndrn.org/resource/out-from-the-shadows-informal-removal-of-children-with-disabilities-from-public-schools/

Editor’s Note: No specific mention of Virginia schools in the report.

The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) is the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems and the Client Assistance Programs (CAP) for individuals with disabilities. Collectively, the Network is the largest provider of legally based advocacy services to people with disabilities in the United States

www.ndrn.org

Fact Sheet: Advancing Disability Inclusive Democracy in the United States and Globally



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 3, 2021

When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed 31 years ago, it provided historic civil rights protections for disabled Americans. Grounded in the four core outcomes of full participation, equal opportunity, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency, the ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in many contexts of American life: public accommodations, employment, transportation, and community living. However, Americans with disabilities still face barriers in fully participating in many aspects of their lives.

Today, on International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the United States is partnering with other governments, civil society, and experts across the globe to discuss disability inclusive democracy around the world. This event, which is being co-hosted by Norway and the United Kingdom, is a part of the U.S. Summit for Democracy. The discussion will include how to improve the accessibility of voting, increase support for disabled political leaders, and expand civic engagement.

The Biden-Harris Administration has already taken a number of steps to develop a more disability inclusive democracy, including:

• **Appointing U.S. Special Advisor on International Disability Rights**

President Biden appointed Sara Minkara to be the U.S. Special Advisor on International Disability Rights. As the senior-level disability human rights position at the State Department, the Special Advisor leads the U.S. comprehensive strategy to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities internationally and across the Department. Special Advisor Minkara was sworn in on November 8, 2021.

• **Increasing Access to Democracy for Voters with Disabilities**

In March, President Biden signed Executive Order 14019 on Voting Access that takes significant steps to ensure disabled Americans can access key voting resources, requires an assessment of barriers to the right to vote independently and privately, and will help ensure that all Americans, including voters with disabilities, can exercise their right to vote.

• **Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Across the Federal Government**

In June, President Biden signed Executive Order 14035 advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and acces-

sibility (DEIA) across the federal government. The Executive Order charges agencies with assessing their state of DEIA to eliminate barriers employees encounter. For federal workers with disabilities, the Executive Order sets a path for the federal government to become a model employer to improve accessibility, ensure accommodations can be requested, increase opportunities for advancement and hiring, and reduce physical accessibility barriers. On November 23, the Biden-Harris Administration released its Strategic Plan to Advance DEIA in the Federal Workforce to provide federal agencies a roadmap for implementation of the Executive Order.

* **Expanding Access and Inclusion for Disabled Americans**

The Biden-Harris Administration has taken significant steps to achieve a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable country for people with disabilities, including people with disabilities that experience multiple forms of discrimination and bias on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation and other factors. These steps include a focus on funding supporting economic self-sufficiency; advancing independent living through home- and community-based services and accessible, affordable housing; and

improving access to services needed during the pandemic. Through quick policy action, the Administration has ensured disabled Americans are receiving resources and are included in key administrative proposals.

• **Developing Inclusive International Health Systems**

In early 2021, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched Learning, Acting, and Building for Rehabilitation in Health Systems (ReLAB-HS). This global project will support the development of health systems to respond to populations' growing needs for rehabilitation. Through this project, USAID will co-design and implement innovative, comprehensive, cost-effective interventions that strengthen health systems to provide rehabilitation services, including assistive technology.

• **Helping Individuals Cope with Challenges Posed by COVID-19**

In July, the Departments of Health and Human Services (Office for Civil Rights and Administration for Community Living), Justice, Education, and Labor provided guidance and information about where individuals with disabilities can access resources and accommodations and clarified their rights with regard to health and educational services and supports. USAID launched a Distance Learning Toolkit, which provides guidance for designing a comprehensive distance learning strategy. These strategies can be implemented during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when learning institutions are

closed. They can also be implemented beyond crises, to increase and promote access to quality, equitable, and inclusive teaching and learning. In the coming year, the Administration will take the following steps to create a more disability inclusive democracy:

• **Launching the Disability Inclusive Democracy Year of Action**

The year of action will explore innovative approaches and common challenges to promote disability-inclusive democracy globally. As part of the Summit for Democracy, on December 3, the United States is co-hosting an event with Norway and the United Kingdom that will bring together more than 100 leaders and experts across sectors to identify and discuss the most important issues in access to voting, elections, and political and civil participation. Building on the event, the year of action will lead to a "Disability Inclusive Democracy Action Plan" that lays out best practices and recommendations for the United States and our international partners. This framework will engage civil society, foreign governments, multilateral partners, and the private sector to promote equitable, inclusive, and accessible democratic principles and practices for more than one billion people with disabilities globally.

• **Focusing on Inclusive Climate Planning**

USAID announced the Disability Program Fund that is committed to supporting people with disabilities and their representative organizations in responding to climate change next year. Announced at the 26th United

Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties, this initiative will bolster persons with disabilities' resilience to the effects of climate change.

• **Announcing Partnerships to Improve Access**

USAID launched a partnership with ATscale, the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology, and is committing \$25 million towards the goal of providing 500 million people with life changing assistive products by 2030, including wheelchairs, eyeglasses, prosthetic devices, or hearing aids. This partnership will assist the more than one billion people in the world who utilize assistive technology or devices.

• **Committing to Inclusive Disability Policy**

President Biden's Build Back Better Act invests in the caregiving economy, advances competitive integrated employment, and expands inclusive and accessible preschool and child care. Once enacted, the Build Back Better Act will provide significant investments to children and adults with disabilities to achieve independent living, economic self-sufficiency, equitable educational opportunities, and full participation in the workforce and in communities.

White House Press Office
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500-0003 · USA
202-456-1111

###

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/03/fact-sheet-advancing-disability-inclusive-democracy-in-the-united-states-and-globally/>

Across Cultural Lines, Home Schooling Has Boomed Since Covid-19 Hit

By Jeff South



Originally posted January 3, 2022 • www.virginiamercury.com

- **Editor's note:** This extremely comprehensive article is excerpted with thanks!
- **To view entire article, including all relevant graphs and charts, please visit www.virginiamercury.com/2022/01/03/across-cultural-lines-home-schooling-has-boomed-since-covid-19-hit/**

For Isabel Bishop, 12, and her 8-year-old brother, Bodhi, school might mean a trip from their home in Fairfax County to the Harriet Tubman Museum in Maryland to learn about slavery and the underground railroad.

For Mali Holmes, 7, of Richmond, school might mean playing chess with friends and developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

For Tera Thomas' sons – Noah, 10; Jude, 8; and Elias, 7 – school might mean baking Christmas cookies. “Lots of math and instruction following,” the boys' mother said.

Those children are among the approximately 62,000 home-schoolers in Virginia – a number that has doubled over the past decade and is up 40 percent since fall 2019.

Experts say home schooling has grown in popularity across the socio-political spectrum, from the religious right to the humanist left, driven in recent years not only by the COVID-19 pandemic but also by the culture wars being waged in many school districts.

“I think it will permanently change the landscape of education,” said Yvonne Bunn, director of government affairs for the Home Educators Association of Virginia, or HEAV. “I don't think it will ever go back to the way it was before.”

Bunn said home schooling lets parents “individualize the curriculum to fit the needs of their children.”

Nikiya Ellis, Mali's mother, agreed. “Our children learn from us in different ways,” she said. “And it doesn't have to be this academic way of learning all day, every day. They learn from watching us cook, watching how we treat each other. It doesn't have to be sitting down at a table with pen and paper.”

Over the past two years, home schooling has increased in 120 of Virginia's 132 school divisions, including in all but one of the 15 largest districts. If home-schoolers were a division unto themselves, it would be the sixth-largest in the commonwealth – with about as many students as the public schools of Virginia Beach or Chesterfield County.

COVID-19 was the main trigger. When the coronavirus prompted schools to move instruction online in spring 2020, many families created “pandemic pods” to home-school their children: A handful of students, often from the same neighborhood, would study together, led by parents or a hired teacher.

As a result, the number of home-schoolers in Virginia spiked from about 44,000 before the pandemic to more than 65,500 for the 2020-21 academic year, when instruction remained virtual in most communities.

Tera Thomas' children were part of that initial exodus from the public schools.

“We knew there was no way our kids were going to enjoy being on a computer all day,” said Thomas, a former high school English teacher who lives in Louisa County. “I don't even want to be on a computer all day.”

When public schools resumed in-person classes this fall, some home-schoolers returned to campus, but most continued their studies at home. They were joined by children like Isabel and Bodhi Bishop.

Their mother, Carlea Bauman, said home schooling not only makes learning fun and interactive but also helps her forge “deeper relationships with my kids.”

With the sharp spike when COVID-19 emerged and then a slight dip this fall, home schooling in Virginia has seen a net gain of about 18,000 students over the past two years.



Isabel and Bodhi Bishop, home-schooled students from Fairfax County, take a trip to Assateague Island National Seashore. Photo courtesy of Carlea Bauman



Mali Holmes holds a drawing at an art class at the Cultural Roots Home School cooperative. Photo courtesy of Nikiya Ellis

“That’s amazing to us,” Bunn said.

The number may continue to grow. Since September, Bunn said, HEAV has handled more than 21,000 phone calls for advice about home schooling. “It’s been unbelievable the surge in parents just wanting to know what they need to do and how they could do it.”

Andrea Cubelo-McKay, president of the Organization of Virginia Homeschoolers, said many families that turned to home schooling early in the pandemic thought it would be a temporary move. But they “decided to continue home schooling because it was a really positive experience for them.”

There are more than 120 home-schooling support groups in cities and counties across Virginia. HEAV and VaHomeschoolers each maintain directories of these groups. Most are co-ops that provide classes, field trips and other activities for home schooling children. Many co-ops have a religious orientation (usually Christian but also Muslim). Other co-ops are secular but may appeal especially to African Americans, military families, gifted children or families that follow a specific home schooling curriculum or philosophy. In addition, there are support groups for children with special needs and groups that focus on community service, sports, visual and performing arts, or learning Spanish. Many groups, such as Homeschooling in Virginia, operate online.

At the national level, several organizations provide advocacy and support for home schooling. They include the National Home School Association, National Black Home Educators and the Home School Legal Defense Association, which has posted explanations of the home-schooling laws in Virginia and other states. Facebook has numerous groups with resources and advice about home schooling. They include:

- Fun and Learning at Home
- Free Homeschool Ideas
- Rock Your Homeschool!
- Homeschooling Resources Support Group
- African American Homeschool Network

Home-schooling organizations, support groups and online forums can point interested parents to curriculum programs for home-schoolers.

At HEAV, which espouses a “biblical worldview,” Bunn said parents may have turned to home schooling because “they feel like they’re not being heard” – a theme that Republican Glenn Youngkin struck in his winning campaign for governor in November.

“The children don’t belong to the state. I think parents really want to impart their own values to their children – their values and beliefs and their own worldview. And that is a major reason parents are home schooling,” Bunn said.

At VaHomeschoolers, which calls itself an inclusive alternative to “Christian conservative home-school organizations,” Cubelo-McKay said the rancor over social issues in the public schools had a different effect: It drove more Black and LGBT students to try home schooling.

“They didn’t feel safe with the level of hostility” toward racial equity initiatives and transgender rights, she said.

Virginia is among top states for home schooling. Home-schoolers represent about 5 percent of Virginia’s total public school enrollment. That is among the highest proportions in the United States, according to the National Home Education Research Institute.

Fifteen states publicly report their home-schooling numbers, the institute said. Only two – North Carolina and Montana – had a greater percentage of home-schoolers than Virginia.

The proportion of home-schoolers varies widely among the commonwealth’s school divisions. It ranges from less than 1 percent in Arlington County and the city of Norton to more than 15 percent in eight mostly rural counties. In Franklin and Highland counties, nearly one of every five students is home-schooled.

• To view entire article, including all relevant graphs and charts, please visit www.virginiamercury.com/2022/01/03/across-cultural-lines-home-schooling-has-boomed-since-covid-19-hit

Jeff South

Recently retired after 23 years as a journalism professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. Before that, he was a newspaper editor and reporter for 20 years in Virginia, Texas and Arizona. He can be reached at JeffSouthRVA@gmail.com.



Adah Thomas, 3, creates pictures by arranging tiles of different shapes and colors. Photo courtesy of Tera Thomas

HOMESCHOOLING RESOURCES IN VIRGINIA

These sites and others relating to education, including ideas that can be used for homeschooling, can be found under the *Community Resources* tab at www.celebratingabilities.com

Some sites have a religious world view, others do not.



• Help in School

Resources for the parents and teachers of students with special needs.

www.helpinschool.net

• Home Educators Association of Virginia

More than 2,000 web pages of Virginia homeschool information, resources, field-trip ideas, etc.

Includes information about homeschooling laws and regulation in Virginia.

www.heav.org

• Learning Abled Kids

Resource and support website with information, curriculum resources, and tools to homeschool bright children who have learning issues, including reading disabilities, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, central auditory processing disorder (CAPD), ADD, ADHD and more.

www.learningabledkids.com

• Virginia Home Schoolers Association

Volunteer organization providing information and advocating for the homeschoolers. This is an inclusive organization and is neutral in matters of politics and religion.

www.vahomeschoolers.org

• Home School Legal Defense Association

Advocates for the freedom to homeschool and offers support for every stage of the homeschool journey.

www.hslda.org

• Homeschool Central

Information and curriculum for homeschoolers.

www.homeschoolcentral.com

• Moore Expressions

A used and new book store specializing in home-school materials.

www.mooreexpressions.com

• Virginia Dept of Education Rules and Regulations for homeschoolers

https://www.doe.virginia.gov/families/private_home/index.shtml

