

## From the Dean



### Dear Friends,

While the COVID-19 pandemic has kept us apart for over a year, all of us here at the VCU School of Education remain committed to the quality of our programs and the engagement of our students.

That commitment is reflected in part by the accessibility of our programs by those near and far. In recognition of that, we were recently ranked **#10 Best Online Graduate Education Program** in the country by *U.S. News & World Report*, **#16 Best Public Graduate Education School**, and **#15 Best Special Education Online Graduate Program** in the country.

We also remain committed to meeting the needs of the communities that we serve in a way that is meaningful and engaging to our students. One of the most important ways that we do that is by creating opportunities for research that our students are looking for. For example, we followed our record-breaking year of external funding in FY20 by topping that record in just the first half of FY21! This means that our grant awards comprised nearly half of Monroe Park Campus' total grant awards during that time.

We continue to put all our efforts into meeting the needs of the children, families and communities that we serve, whether it's in Richmond, across Virginia, or across the globe. Of course, none of this would be possible without your continued support — so thank you on behalf of the entire VCU SOE community.

**Andrew P. Daire, Ph.D.**  
Dean and Ruth Harris Professor,  
VCU School of Education

## A Bold and Exciting 2021 is Off to a Good Start

The Office of Development, Alumni and Student Engagement has a mission to build and foster relationships with our School of Education community through lifelong learning opportunities, connecting with students, and networking with fellow alumni and encouraging their investment in our shared future. Although 2020 was a year like no other, and we have come into 2021 with a bold eagerness to engage our alumni, donors and students.

We take an interactive approach to engaging with our alumni. This means we not only want to share what we're all about, we also want to find out what you're all about. When we do this, we contribute to a spirit of community among current and future alumni, while also strengthening our School and the VCU community.

In December, the School of Education launched our Share Your Why campaign so that alumni could express why they chose to attend VCU to pursue a degree in education. Through this campaign, our recruitment team gained perspective and insight about why people from all over the world have chosen to be students at the School of Education. It is not too late to Share Your Why with us! Visit [go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni](http://go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni).



Edward Kardos

Our students give us energy and shine the light on our future. Like the Education Alumni Council, the Student Leadership Council is our way to enhance students' experiences by ensuring an opportunity for their voice to be shared and to develop activities that create a sense of unity, understanding and support of students. These are opportunities for students to interact with each other, faculty, staff and alumni to form meaningful, lasting relationships long after graduation.

**Teacher Appreciation Week will begin on May 3, 2021, and the School of Education will kick off Giving Week that same week. That's when students, faculty, staff and alumni will be able to share how teachers and educators have impacted and inspired them. Be on the lookout for more information about Giving Week!**

The only way that we can do the work that we do at the school is through our alumni, donors and volunteers. If you would like to engage with the School of Education, we encourage you to visit our website: [soe.vcu.edu/alumni/](http://soe.vcu.edu/alumni/)

Without our School of Education community, we would not be able to do the wonderful things that support our students, faculty, staff and the community. We are so grateful for supporters like you who go the extra mile for the school. The future generation of educators begins at the School of Education, and we strive to create meaningful change inside and outside of the classroom.

**Edward G. Kardos**, Executive Director of Development, Alumni and Student Engagement  
**Jasmine Carter**, Alumni and Student Engagement Coordinator, [carterja4@vcu.edu](mailto:carterja4@vcu.edu)

## Kathryn Dunbar: Teacher's encouragement inspires career

"She never stopped believing in me," says SOE alum and First-Year Teacher of the Year

Kathryn Dunbar earned her Master of Teaching in Early and Elementary Education from the VCU School of Education in May 2020. Dunbar is currently teaching first grade at An Achievable Dream Academy at Highland Springs Elementary School, where she was recently voted First-Year Teacher of the Year by fellow teachers and staff.



Kathryn Dunbar (M.T. '20)

### What drew you to the field of education?

I always loved school, learning and kids. As far back as I can remember, I was playing school with my friends or dolls and insisting that I was the teacher. When I was old enough, I started babysitting. At age 10, I became an assistant to my dance teacher to help with the dance levels below mine. My first job was as a teacher's assistant for a summer program at Luther Memorial School, and then I moved to working at Grace Covenant Child Development Center for 2 ½ years while I was working toward my degree.

I've always wanted to make a change in the world around me, and I believe those changes come from educating children who can grow up to become amazing, caring and compassionate adults.

### Did anyone inspire you to pursue study in this field?

Several of the teachers I had growing up inspired me, but I hold one very dear to my heart. In high school, I was part of the AVID program (Advancement Via Individual Determination: an academic support program that prepares students for college eligibility and success), and I had the same teacher, Mrs. Judith Shepherd, from freshman to senior year. I started each day with her, and that truly made a difference. It didn't matter if I was having a bad day or not; she always greeted me with the biggest smile and checked in with me when I barely offered one in return.

I never dreamed I would go to college. I didn't have much desire to go, and I surely didn't have the money. However, one day, Mrs. Shepherd asked what career I would consider pursuing if I happened to change my mind. I told her that I would probably go into teaching, and she told

me that she couldn't think of a better career for me. She told me that I could do it, and she never stopped believing in me. She helped me apply to several schools, VCU being the No. 1 choice, and we waited and waited to hear back. Finally, the day came when I could walk into her classroom and hand her my acceptance letter from VCU.

All it took was one person believing in me and never letting me forget how capable I was. She was there for me then, and we are still close today. Relationships between students and teachers are an amazing thing.

### Why VCU SOE for your M.T. degree?

It is a fabulous program. It incorporates diversity, equity and inclusion into the curriculum of its programs, which is an imperative for educators.

My time in the undergraduate program (Liberal Studies for Early and Elementary Education) only helped solidify why continuing into the M.T. program was the right thing for me.

I had many opportunities to "jump right in" and get involved with schools around the area. SOE has everything designed to ease the transition from the undergraduate level to the graduate level. The extended teacher preparation program helped me get through my classes in 5½ years instead of 6, it saved me money, and I was able to graduate a semester early by taking more credits than I originally thought I could. It was a lot of work, but I pushed through it and was able to obtain my master's degree at 23 years of age.

### How well did SOE prepare you for teaching at An Achievable Dream Academy?

It prepared me incredibly well. The professors incorporated guest speakers into their classes, and as part of my Home-School Collaboration class, Dr. Misti Mueller brought in Dr. Shawnya Tolliver, the principal of An Achievable Dream Academy at Highland Springs Elementary School, as a guest speaker. Dr. Tolliver explained how the program is designed to help children K-12 believe that they can learn and succeed regardless of their socioeconomic background.

## Gerron Scott: SOE program aligns with growth goals

Originally from Providence, Rhode Island, Gerron Scott is an undergraduate academic advisor in the VCU Department of Biology. He earned both his undergraduate degree (science) and master's degree (college counseling and student affairs) from the University of West Georgia. Scott was recently named the 2019-20 recipient of the College of Humanities and Sciences Leadership in Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Award. He is currently pursuing his doctoral degree in the VCU School of Education's Ph.D. in Education, Concentration in Educational Leadership, Policy and Justice program.



Gerron Scott

### Is there anyone who inspired you to pursue study in this field?

My family. I have a very strong support system who have always encouraged me to pursue my dreams. Even when I am scared, they are in my corner motivating me and letting me know that I am worthy and capable of amazing things. Outside of my family, interacting with African American students also inspired me. There is somehow still so much to learn about the way African Americans are viewed and treated on campuses.

### What has impressed you most about your program so far?

The friendliness of the faculty, staff and students. People want to see others succeed, and learning in a place like that is empowering.

### Any tips for students who are considering study in your program at VCU SOE?

Do not let the imposter syndrome stand in the way of your dreams. You are capable and deserving of a spot in the program.

### Anything else that you would like to add?

Trust the process and enjoy the journey.

## OSE's Summer Learning Academy registration is now OPEN!



Our **Summer Learning Academy** explores critical topics in education, preparing educators to create a culture of educational excellence and equity in schools through innovative techniques. **This summer, we are offering more than 50 different sessions.**

For more info or to register, visit [bit.ly/OSE-SummerLearningAcademy](http://bit.ly/OSE-SummerLearningAcademy)

## Momentum | Spring 2021

Owen Wachter, Editor Michael Lay, Designer

### Education Alumni Council Representatives

Andrew P. Daire, Dean

**Edward G. Kardos**, Executive Director, Office of Development, Alumni & Student Engagement

**Jasmine Carter**, Alumni & Student Engagement Coordinator, [carterja4@vcu.edu](mailto:carterja4@vcu.edu)

**Jared Crist**, B.A. '14, M.Ed. '18 (President, Education Alumni Council)

The SOE Education Alumni Council welcomes its newest members: **Kevin Bruny**, **Robin Liesfeld**, **Julia Baily**. To view the complete Education Alumni Council roster visit:

[go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni](http://go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni)

*Momentum* is a biannual publication of the VCU School of Education Office of Development, Alumni & Student Engagement.

## Reimagine Your Future!



Achieve your professional potential with these SOE programs:

- **Ed.D. Leadership** A three-year cohort-based program available in-person or online
- **Ph.D. Education** An in-person program with individualized research tracks
- **M.Ed. in Reading** TESOL concentrations fully online for multilingual learners
- **M.Ed. in Educational Leadership** 50% of the program can be fully customized
- **Post-Masters Certificates in Reading and Educational Leadership** Add-on endorsements online on your time
- **M.Ed. in Adult Learning** In-person concentrations in instructional design and technology and human resource development

Visit [soe.vcu.edu/academics](http://soe.vcu.edu/academics)

Interested in SOE alumni engagement? Visit [go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni](http://go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni)



· SAVE THE DATE ·  
**One Day, One Place, Unlimited Learning**  
Education Alumni College | February 26, 2022  
More information coming soon.


# momentum

Spring 2021

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- Dr. Apugo co-edits *Strong Black Girls: Reclaiming Schools in Their Own Image*

Visit us at [soe.vcu.edu](http://soe.vcu.edu)



## Dean Daire named co-chair of group on inclusive education

The new Culturally Relevant and Inclusive Education Practices Advisory Committee was established by the General Assembly in 2020

Andrew P. Daire, Ph.D., dean of the VCU School of Education, has been appointed as a co-chair of Virginia's new advisory committee charged with making recommendations on culturally relevant and inclusive education practices in Virginia's public schools.

The Culturally Relevant and Inclusive Education Practices Advisory Committee, which was established by the General Assembly during the 2020 session, held its inaugural virtual meeting earlier this year and Gov. Ralph Northam announced its leadership and members.

"Inclusive and culturally relevant learning environments are vital to creating equitable pathways to success for all Virginians," Northam said in a news release. "The work of this committee will advance our ongoing efforts to tell the complete and accurate story of Virginia's complex past, improve our history standards, and give educators



Dean Daire: "Educator preparation programs need to step up to the plate and revise how to prepare educators to ensure that we are best preparing educators to work with all schoolchildren."

educators to ensure that we are best preparing educators to work with all schoolchildren. I do hope that this committee will develop meaningful recommendations for regulations and policy in this area."

opportunities to engage in important conversations and lessons with their students."

Daire is co-chair of the advisory committee alongside Sen. Jennifer Boysko and Francisco Durán, Ph.D., superintendent of Arlington public schools and a member of the Virginia Board of Education.

"The governor, [Virginia Department of Education] and Board of Education have been quite ambitious and successful in addressing educational equity in our K-12 schools in the commonwealth," Daire said.

"However, educator preparation programs also need to step up to the plate and revise how to prepare

## SOE ranked #10 Best Online Grad Program by *U.S. News & World Report*

School also recognized for #16 Best Public Grad School and #15 Best Online Special Education Grad Program

The VCU School of Education was recently ranked #10 in Best Online Graduate Education Program by *U.S. News & World Report*. The school ranked #16 Best Public Graduate School and #15 Best Online Special Education Graduate Program.

We are excited and proud that the School of Education is the highest *U.S. News & World Report* ranked college or school at VCU.

With 309 schools of education participating nationwide, only two

Virginia schools of education ranked among this year's top 50 in either category, with VCU being one of them.

"During the global pandemic, we remain committed to the accessibility of our programs by those near and far, working full time or part time," said Dr. Andrew Daire, dean of the School of Education. "Our ranking in *U.S. News & World Report* demonstrates not only the high quality of our faculty, staff, students and programs, it also confirms the impact of our teaching, research and continued service to the surrounding communities."

## Dr. Apugo: new book highlights Black girls in schools

Coming-of-age narratives reflect resistance and resilience of "Strong Black Girls"

Even though Black women and girls are expected to overcome many barriers in order to achieve an education in America, their voices and experiences often go unheard.

A new book, *Strong Black Girls: Reclaiming Schools in Their Own Image*, co-edited by Danielle Apugo, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning in the VCU School of Education, aims to change that narrative by amplifying the voices of Black women and girls through their storytelling, essays, letters and poetry.

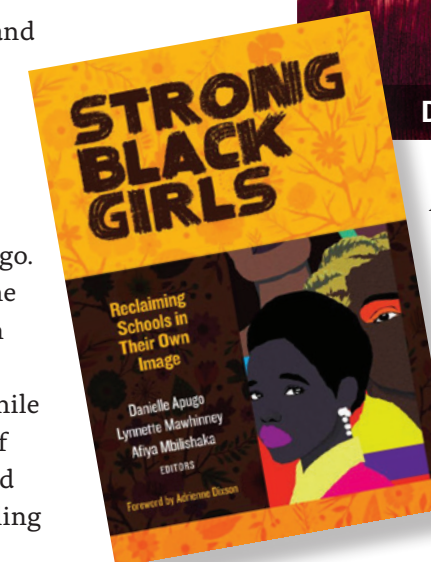
"As educators, scholars and stakeholders, we must concern ourselves with how Black girls are experiencing the K-12 schooling process in the United States," said Apugo. "This book highlights the realities of Black women and girls on their educational journeys, while examining the impact of memories, resistance and resilience on K-12 schooling for Black females."

The book is divided into three primary themes:

- the insidious nature of silencing Black girls in schools and its consequences;
- the recognition that Black female bodies are sites of historical trauma and terrorism; and
- the complexities of the phrase "Black girl magic" and its identity.



Danielle Apugo (Ph.D.)



Authors in the book include graduate students, professors and an elementary school student. Each chapter concludes with discussion questions to extend the conversation around the everyday realities of navigating K-12 schools, such as sexuality, intergenerational influence, self-love, anger, leadership, aesthetic trauma, erasure, rejection and unfiltered Black girlhood.

Co-editors with Apugo on the book are Lynnette Mawhinney, Ph.D., chair and associate professor in the Department of Urban Education at Rutgers University-Newark, and Afiya Mbilishaka, Ph.D., chair and assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of the District of Columbia.

## A message from the Education Alumni Council

Dear Fellow Alumni,

As the end of the academic year approaches, I stand amazed at the courage, strength and persistence demonstrated by our community over the past year. The students, staff, faculty, alumni and administration of the VCU School of Education have shown resilience in the face of gargantuan difficulties. The work of our campus community to stay healthy, support our local communities, deliver services in new ways, address hatred and bigotry in all of its pervasive forms, and preserve connection is truly humbling. Despite the hurt and loss of the past year and the work still to come, I see hope on the horizon. My gratitude and commendation go to each and every one of you who has persisted as a member of the VCU School of Education family.

The School of Education Alumni Council has continued its mission to connect current and future alumni, strengthening the School and the greater University community. Thank you to the many alumni who led and participated in virtual socials, the Share Your Why campaign, ongoing engagement with students through the Student Leadership Council, and more. We will carry this momentum toward even greater heights in the coming year.

I encourage alumni to take advantage of the opportunities offered through the Alumni Council and the School of Education. Similarly, I encourage all future alumni to strengthen peer connections and take advantage of the many opportunities available through the School. Visit the recently updated Development, Alumni and Student Engagement section of the School of Education website for more information. Fostering connections and leveraging available resources are the best ways to enhance your experience with the SOE community.

In the months to come, I hope you all stay well, stay connected, and stay committed to the good work you have done all year.

Yours in service,  
**Jared Crist, M.Ed. '18**  
President, School of Education Alumni Council

To learn more about SOE alumni engagement opportunities, visit [go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni](http://go.vcu.edu/soe-alumni)