

VASS is proud to introduce the First Cohort of the Virginia Superintendents Leadership Academy (VSLA). Congratulations to these twelve superintendents who were recently accepted into the program. They are pioneers in a new and exciting Professional Learning Community, uniquely designed to meet the challenges and opportunities of Virginia superintendents.

VSLA is a 12-month competency-based training program designed for sitting Virginia superintendents who desire to serve as leading change agents through innovation and deeper learning in their school division. The Academy bases its curriculum on the acquisition of leadership competencies identified in the Profile of a Virginia Leader, which was presented to the Virginia Board of Education in July 2020. There are a number of superintendent academies throughout the country; however, the VSLA is the only academy uniquely designed to meet the challenges and opportunities of Virginia superintendents. Participants who successfully complete VSLA requirements will receive a Certificate of Recognition from the Governor.

Participation in the VSLA is a significant investment in personal and professional growth. It institutionalizes lessons learned and provides tangible follow-up leading to student success. The academy is structured around four module conferences, four digital meetings, executive coaching, and a Capstone Project, which is focused on a contemporary problem of practice. Participants examine, analyze, and investigate approaches to innovation, deeper learning, and engagement for superintendents as lead change agents who demonstrate outstanding instructional leadership and address the needs of increasingly diverse student populations through the lens of equity for all students. Participants are assigned an Executive Coach—a current or recently retired superintendent, whose primary responsibility is to help support the superintendent and facilitate their Capstone Project.



SARAH CALVERIC
Caroline County Public Schools

Dr. Sarah Calveric has served as superintendent of Carolina County Public Schools (CCPS) since 2018. Previously she served as assistant superintendent of instruction for CCPS. She earned a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership for Virginia Commonwealth University. She has actively engaged in collaborative work, reflective practices, and cohort collegiality through the UVA SCOPE program, and as a VASCD board member, participant in VaLIN's innovation network, teaching ELPS students at University of Richmond, and contributing to the Region III superintendent team. As a member of the VSLA, Sarah says, "I am eager to experience the power of divergent thinking and to challenge and extend my current pedagogical beliefs and practices."



WENDY GONZALEZ
Page County Public Schools

Dr. Wendy Gonzalez has served as superintendent of Page County Public Schools (PCPS) since 2018. She started her career as a teacher next door, in Rockingham County, then had the pleasure to teach and serve in various administrative roles in Chesterfield County Public Schools. She also served in Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools, as well as Charles City County Public Schools at the division level. She earned a doctorate degree in Educational Administration and Policy Studies from George Washington University and SCOPE. Wendy says, "I feel extremely blessed and want to be the most effective Superintendent I can be. I believe this academy will help me sharpen my leadership skills, so that I can best serve those around me."



MATTHEW HAAS
Albemarle County Public Schools

Dr. Matthew Haas has served since 2004 as a high school principal, director, executive director, assistant superintendent, deputy superintendent, and superintendent in Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS). Previously he served as Smyth County Schools as a high school principal and in Virginia Beach City Schools as an English teacher, athletic coach, and bus driver. He earned a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Virginia Tech. With 30 years of experience in Virginia's schools, Matthew believes that "framing the program (VSLA) within the context of Virginia's profiles for graduates, teachers, and leaders gives the participants a chance to be on the cutting edge in strategic thinking and planning."



LORENA HARPER
Amelia County Public Schools

Dr. Lorena Harper has served as superintendent of Amelia County Public Schools (ACPS) since 2019. Previously she served as assistant superintendent for instruction and federal programs for Essex County Public Schools. She has also served students in Lancaster County and in the Muroc Joint Unified School District in California. During her doctoral work at the University of Phoenix in Arlington, one of her research conclusions was that academic learning time - the time during which students are actively, constructively, and successfully engaged in learning - is more important than how much time students spend in school. She says, "The VSLA provides an excellent resource for promoting continued lifelong learning and enhancement of leadership competencies."



GEORGE PARKER, III
Newport News Public Schools

Dr. George Parker has served as superintendent of Newport News Public Schools (NNPS) since 2018. Previously he served as superintendent of Caroline County Public Schools. Following his service as a U.S. Naval Officer, he worked as a teacher and building level administrator in Virginia Beach Public Schools. He earned a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership from Virginia Tech University. He attributes his personal educational attainment with breaking the cycle of potential social and economic outcomes in his immediate family. He says, "I have a passion for equitable and rigorous academic experiences for all students. I hope that my experiences as an African American male and career-switcher will bring a different perspective to our discussions."



SERBRENIA SIMS
Surry County Public Schools

Dr. Serbrenia Sims was appointed superintendent of Surry County Public Schools (SCPS) in 2020. Previously she served as an assistant superintendent and principal in SCPS, and in teaching and administrative positions in Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools. She earned a doctorate degree in Educational Policy Planning and Leadership from the College of William and Mary. She has more than 20 publications to her credit. Serbrenia says, "I am hoping to experience an environment where discussion, debates, and the free exchange of ideas with others is the norm. The VSLA will offer me insights and feedback that would be impossible to achieve when trying to develop these skills on my own."



KRISTY SOMERVILLE-MIDGETTE
Brunswick County Public Schools

Dr. Somerville-Midgette has served as superintendent in Brunswick (BCPS) since 2018. Previously she served as assistant superintendent, director of secondary education, principal and assistant principal in Mecklenburg County Public Schools. She earned a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership from Liberty University. Kristy says, "The VSLA would be an ideal program to pursue acceptance as a result of the experiences I have gained as a beginning superintendent. To become a successful change agent requires much more than just knowing the competencies, but an understanding of how to apply them in situations you may not have the experience or privilege to study."



TAMARA STERLING
Franklin City Public Schools

Dr. Tamara Sterling has served as superintendent of Franklin City Public Schools (FCPS) since 2017. Previously she served as directory of secondary education in Accomack County Public School Public Schools, and in a variety of leadership positions in Rhode Island, Houston, and Chicago. She received her doctorate degree in Educational Leadership from the University of New England. Tamara says, "I think the leadership academy will provide me additional insight regarding how other superintendents approach situations that I've encountered and those that I will possibly face in my career. This program will assist with expanding my opportunities to meet and work with other superintendents that can contribute to my growth as a leader."



HARRY THOMAS
Essex County Public Schools

Dr. Harry Thomas has served as superintendent of Essex County Public Schools (ECPS) since 2019. Previously he served as chief academic officer, director of instruction, principal and assistant principal in Fredericksburg City Public Schools. He earned a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Virginia Tech. He endeavors daily to be an effective superintendent for the students and community of ECPS. Harry says, "I am interested in participating in the VSLA, to improve my ability and capacity to lead the Essex School Division. I would like to become well-versed in contemporary leadership and organization research as it pertains to the superintendent position."



DASHAN TURNER
Colonial Beach Public Schools

Dr. Dashan Turner has served as superintendent of Colonial Beach Public Schools (CBPS) since 2018. Previously he served in leadership roles in Westmorland, Petersburg, Essex, and Philadelphia schools. He earned a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership from Northcentral University and is also a graduate of the Statewide Communities of Practice for Excellence (SCOPE). He says, "I want to make sure that I continue my growth as a leader, ensuring that I have the skills needed to articulate a desired vision, goal, or direction for any school division that employs me as a leader. I am hopeful that VSLA will provide me with this level of learning and extend my network of superintendents to support my continued growth."



REBECCA WALTERS
Lexington City Public Schools

Rebecca Walters has served as superintendent of Lexington City Public Schools (LCPS) since 2019. Previously she served as assistant superintendent of instruction and director of instructional services in LCPS. She has also worked in Waynesboro and Rockbridge schools. She earned an Ed.S. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Virginia Tech. She works diligently to ensure success for all of Lexington City's students, and she will continue to do whatever it takes to create a safe, productive, and high-quality learning environment. Rebecca says, "I am very excited to have this chance to engage in deeper learning about Virginia's 'Profiles' so that I can better serve my school community and our profession."



DAVID WHITE
King William County Public Schools

Dr. David White has served as superintendent of King William County Public Schools (KWCPs) since 2016. Previously he served as chief secondary school officer in Stafford County Public Schools (SCPS). He earned a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Virginia Tech, and he has also completed the AASA National Superintendents Certification Program. David says, "Having participated in the AASA National Superintendent Certification Program, I learned from educational leaders throughout the Country; however, I feel that the VSLA would provide me an opportunity to enhance my understanding and expertise in my position with my peers within the Commonwealth."