

Preparing Educational Professionals to Ensure Safe and Secure Schools: An ATE-VA/VACTE Proposal for Action

Preamble:

The tragedy perpetrated on the grounds of one of Virginia's proudest and most esteemed education institutions lies in the terrible loss of life and the incomprehensible actions of a disturbed individual who left a trail of warnings prior to the rampage. As the two professional organizations representing the institutions that prepare Virginia's education professionals, we remember those who lost their lives on the campus of Virginia Tech; we mourn the goodness, creativity, joy, intelligence, and potential that was lost.

We live in a multicultural and diverse society where reliance on tolerance, empathy, and compassion is one of the first and necessary steps to eradicating the violence and insult that individuals perpetrate on others. As a society, however, we have a considerable distance to go before we can say with much assurance that everything possible is being done to help find support and healing for victims of tragedy or for those trapped in states of alienation, despair, and disaffection. If we don't instill in our children and youth the simple virtue of kindness and the value of human life, we can't expect the world to become a better place any time soon.

It is more important than ever that educators help students learn to harness their knowledge and skills to address the real problems families and communities face. The combined professional organizations VACTE/ATE-VA believe that our education programs should resonate in a distinctly civil and humane way. We believe that we should help our students who are preparing to become administrators, counselors, and teachers learn to think critically and creatively about events and circumstances that imperil our relationships with others, and that we should prepare graduates who imagine a safe and humane society, and take whatever action they can to help make our relationships with others more civil.

The Safe Schools Initiative, launched by the US Office of Education, provides guidance in helping schools create plans for school safety and develop response mechanisms and skills to address school violence. A number of other reports and great deal of research has provided educators with the information and best practices that should be infused into the preparation of educational professionals. This past year, the Virginia Board of Education added a new objective to its plan, one focuses on ensuring that all Virginia schools are safe and secure.

The proposal that follows evolves out of our strong desire to help clarify and seek insights into a number of questions regarding the role that education and educators might play to prevent violence or to aid a community that experiences a major catastrophe:

- What profound challenges to a school community's social fabric and emotional sensibilities does a disaster – human-induced or natural, in our community or elsewhere – present?
- What is meant by a "responsive community", and how can educators contribute to its establishment and maintenance?

- How can educators best contribute to the development of systemic and personal *agency* in the aftermath of a catastrophe?
- What compelling classroom, school, and community learning opportunities does a major disaster present?
- How can educators most effectively “frame” a crisis event in a way that emphasizes hope and greater human understanding?
- To what community resources can educators turn for greater intellectual understanding and emotional resolve?
- How can educators help give children “voice” whereby they are able to contribute in purposeful ways to the healing process?
- How can educators respond to a crisis in a way that reaches out and connects meaningfully with the larger community?

Exploration of these and other such questions lies at the core of a school curriculum that focuses on the most fundamental aspects of the human condition – issues of conscience and interpersonal regard. ATE-VA/VACTE and our critical friends and colleagues are dedicated to helping instill in educators and students the ability and the will to think through what they care about most; to deepen their understanding of themselves as human beings; and to develop their capacity for maintaining resiliency, engaging in reflection, remaining hopeful, and prevailing over crisis events.

Our Vision:

Virginia’s teacher educators and the education professionals they prepare (teachers, counselors, administrators, and other school leaders) will have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to a.) deal with crises and b.) promote a safe and secure learning environment for Virginia’s students in K-12 and college/university settings.

Our Mission:

To work proactively to ensure that teacher educators and the education professionals they prepare have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to a.) deal with crises and b.) promote a safe and secure learning environment for Virginia’s students in K-12 and college/university settings.

Our Goals:

1. To identify the set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that teacher educators and the education professionals they prepare must have to be equipped to deal with crises and promote safe and secure learning environments in our schools.
2. To create curricula that will help teacher educators and the education professionals they prepare deal with crises and promote safe and secure learning environments.

3. To create and/or identify a variety of other resources that will help teacher educators and the education professionals they prepare deal with crises and promote safe and secure learning environments.
4. To work collaboratively with our K-12 partners to create the infrastructure for safe and secure learning environments in our schools.
5. To work collaboratively with our K-12 partners to provide professional development to help inservice educators deal with crises and promote safe and secure learning environments.

Deliverables:

1. A curriculum for the preparation of educational professionals that addresses the full range of issues that embody the spectrum of prevention through recovery including: Threat Assessment Awareness/Importance of Emergency Events in Students' and Teachers' Lives; Emergency Response Protocols; Importance of a School/Classroom Emergency Response Plan; Aspects of an Emergency Response Plan; Discussion of Case Studies; How to Relate Effectively to the Media; Communicating with Parents; Resources for Helping to Deal with Emergencies and Their Aftermath; How to "Read" Students' Reactions to Emergencies and Their Aftermath; FERPA Regulations/Privacy Issues; Returning to "Normal".
2. Development of an instructional guide for use by teacher education programs. Guides would address many of the issues identified in '2' above, with an emphasis on the role of the classroom teacher. This could be a fairly concise (4-8-hour) instructional unit, something for which one credit could be assigned. The guide would contain everything from resources for information and support, to sample case studies for discussion, to instructions on how to respond to an emergency, to rubrics for evaluating a school's Emergency Response Plan.
3. Development of a self-paced mediated training module containing video clips of possible emergency response scenarios, case studies, etc. (somewhat along the lines of the "Child Abuse" module in current widespread use) that could be taken on-line.
4. Sponsorship of a series of professional development symposia or workshops for teachers, counselors, and administrators. These workshops could be presented over the course of a year or so – perhaps on the scale of the different Superintendents Regional study groups. Experts and guest speakers would be engaged as presenters, discussion leaders, group facilitators, etc. A short version of the conference plan could be presented as a pre- or post-session at ATE-VA and/or VACTE national conferences. We envision these events occurring during the development stages of the curriculum and instructional materials, through field testing, then full dissemination. This phased approach will help build ownership of the various educational constituencies, as well as ensure a rich instructional program that is sustainable and continually improved.

5. Creation of a monograph of short essays, personal stories, recollections and reflections, poems, artwork... thought pieces of all manner of scope... even students' work could be included. This could be some sort of compendium of various narratives designed to capture individual perspectives on the theme and to accord the subject "life" as only heartfelt accounts and viewpoints can accomplish.

We are seeking start-up funding from the Virginia Department of Education, SCHEV, and the Governor's Office to implement our three-year project. A general timeline of activities with budget to enact these activities/deliverables follows:

Year One: Planning and Development

1. Draft this initial proposal to articulate focus, conceptual approach, and action plan. Share plan with the Virginia Secretary of Education, Virginia Board of Education (VBOE), the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), and the State Council on Higher Education in Virginia.
2. Hold Fall VACTE/ATE-VA Meeting. Design program to present the issues with speakers who were impacted directly by the Virginia Tech tragedy, along with experts on threat assessment, resilience, surviving and thriving.
3. Hold conversations with Drs. Tom Morris, Billy Cannaday, members of the VBOE, VDOE, and SCHEV, hopefully secure initial start-up funding to secure a project coordinator (e.g., graduate/doctoral student)
4. Gather data and conduct literature reviews to develop a solid knowledge base of the literature and numerous reports within the past ten years on school safety and violence.
5. Hold conversations with school superintendents at their regional meetings to determine needs, how we might contribute, best mechanisms for development and dissemination, and partnerships
6. Synthesize information to develop a clear set of principles to form the basis of the curriculum
7. Seek potential external grant funding (e.g., foundations, US Department of Education, etc.)
8. Hold Spring ATE-VA/VACTE Meeting. Design program to engage VA's teacher educators in analysis of the data and principles to begin to flesh out a curriculum and instructional practices, and constitute work teams
9. Draft a pilot curriculum to be field tested with teacher educators at regional workshops in Year Two.

Year Two: Materials Development and Field Testing

1. Develop instructional materials including instructor's guide, case studies, web-based modules, and podcasts (specifics developed from results of Year One activities).
2. Hold the Fall VACTE/ATE-VA Meeting: Share curriculum and demonstrate draft materials with participants.
3. Conduct regional workshops with teacher educators for formative evaluation of the curriculum and instructional materials; combine these meetings with consultants who will engage the participants in the materials, but also give participants a deep understanding of the curriculum so that the information can be integrated in

educational programming and shared with other teacher educators at the home institutions (i.e., trainer of trainers model).

4. Conduct meetings with key instructional leaders in the school divisions for formative evaluation of curriculum and instructional materials so that information may also inform practicing educators about safe and secure schools.
5. Spring ATE-VA/VACTE Meeting: Report the findings from the field testing, gather additional feedback from individual institutions' experiences with the curriculum and materials since the regional workshops.

Year Three: Refinement of Deliverables and Dissemination

1. Refine curriculum and instructional materials based on the feedback from teacher educators and key instructional leaders.
2. Hold Fall VACTE/ATE-VA Meeting: Share curriculum and instructional materials with teacher educators to bring back to home institutions.
3. Conduct regional workshops with practicing teachers identifying potential partner school divisions who will give feedback on impact of training and materials.
4. Hold Spring ATE-VA/VACTE Meeting: Report the findings from the field-based implementation, and plan future resources.

Budget¹

Year One:

Project personnel:

- Project Coordinator: tuition and stipend \$40,000
- Consultants 5,000

Materials (books, reports, paper, etc.) 1,000

Sub-total: \$46,000

Year Two:

Project personnel:

- Project Coordinator: tuition and stipend 40,000
- Computer programmers for website and podcasts 20,000

Materials (software, paper, CDs, etc.) 5,000

Regional Workshops²:

- 5 drive-in workshops, 50 participants each workshop
 - Approximately \$75/participant (includes food and materials) 18,700
 - Speakers/consultants 20,000
 - Speakers' travel 3,500

Sub-total: \$107,200

¹ This budget does not include general overhead costs, e.g., space, computers, telephones, Ethernet hook-ups, etc.

² We will hold 5 regional workshops in the same locations used successfully by the TEAL II project team.

Year Three:

Project personnel:

- Project Coordinator: tuition and stipend 40,000
- Computer programmers: part-time 15,000

Regional Workshops³:

- 5 drive-in workshops, 50 participants each workshop
 - Approximately \$75/participant (includes food and materials) 18,700
 - Speakers/consultants 20,000
 - Speakers' travel 3,500

Sub-total: \$97,200

Total: \$250,400

³ We will hold 5 regional workshops in the same locations used successfully by the TEAL II project team.