

# History of the Visiting Teachers/ School Social Workers

## In Virginia

Visiting Teachers were first employed in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the 1930's as a result of the New York's Commonwealth Fund which gave the National Committee of Visiting Teachers financial support for nationwide demonstration and experimentation in the field of school social work. When the project ended, Richmond was one of the cities that continued the program.

The Virginia visiting teacher/school social worker program was inaugurated in 1945 as a result of recommendations of the Virginia Education Commission. This body, known as the Denny Commission, was appointed by the General Assembly in 1944 to study the public school system of the Commonwealth. Concerned that efforts be made to improve school attendance, the Commission recommended the employment of visiting teachers to improve attendance from the point of view that truancy and absenteeism are symptomatic of deeper problems. This position thus broadened the scope of work which had been traditionally ascribed to an "attendance officer".

Charged by the General Assembly to initiate and administer a visiting teacher program, the Board of Education in January 1945 established qualifications, determined the basis for State aid on salaries, and adopted a resolution encouraging the employment of visiting teachers by local school divisions. That same year, a training program for visiting teachers was initiated through Richmond Professional Institute's School of Social Work. By 1946, visiting teachers had formed their own department of the Virginia Education Association. In the early 1970s the Virginia Department of Education officially recognized the school social worker and established accompanying endorsement requirements for practice in the public schools. In 1985, the state organization became independent of the Virginia Education Association and established the Virginia Association of Visiting Teachers/School Social Workers. At the present time, the Virginia Association of Visiting Teachers/School Social Workers has developed a job description, standards of practice, a code of ethics, and a newsletter for practitioners. It also has established several committees to enhance professional development.

Seventy-seven (77) visiting teachers were employed by sixty-three (63) divisions by 1945-46. By 1955-56, seventy-six (76) divisions participated in the program by employing one hundred six (106) visiting teachers. The program flourished and by 1965-66, one hundred thirty-seven (137) visiting teachers were practicing Statewide. The total number of practitioners had almost doubled by 1975-76 when the annual reports indicated that two hundred sixty-eight (268) visiting teachers were employed throughout Virginia. Annual reports

submitted in 1985-86 revealed that three hundred eighty-six (386) visiting teachers/school social workers were employed. In the fall of 1989, the number had grown to four hundred nine (409) with approximately half of this number endorsed or seeking endorsement as school social workers and the other half endorsed or seeking endorsement as visiting teachers.

The visiting teacher/school social work program and the role of the practitioners have evolved over the past several decades to help meet the needs of Virginia's school children. In 2016, at the fall state conference in Staunton, Virginia, the association officially changed its name to the Virginia Association of School Social Workers (VASSW). As the needs for intervention and prevention on behalf of students remain evident, the VASSW will continue to be an integral and vital part of the public school system. On a broader scale, the VASSW maintains a collaborative relationship with the National Association of Social Work (NASW), the Southern School Social Work Council, other regional councils for VASSW, and the School Social Worker Association of America.

Adapted from the Guidelines for Best Practice For Visiting Teacher School Social Work Programs: Virginia Department of Education, 1990.

# Virginia Visiting Teacher/School Social Worker Association Presidents

<b>Year</b>	<b>President</b>	<b>School Division</b>
'46-'47	Edith Smith	Louisa County
'47-'49	Grace Smith	Norfolk County
'49-'51	R. L. Rosenbawm	Dickenson County
'51-'53	Winnie Sutherland	Fairfax County
'53-'55	Louisa Rigdon	Fairfax County
'55-'56	Elizabeth Obenschien	Danville City
'56-'57	Carol Sheffey	Smyth County
'57-'59	Emma Story	Norfolk City
'59-'61	Helen Hill	Richmond City
'61-'63	Emily Kincaid	Fairfax County
'63-'65	Malcolm McConnell, Jr.	Henrico County
'65-'67	Fay Forsbey	Norfolk City
'67-'69	Nan Manning	Arlington County
'69-'71	Betsy Robertson	Danville City
'71-'73	Kirby Wright	Pittsylvania County
'73-'75	John Honeycutt	Rockingham County
'75-'77	Vernon Reed	Hampton City
'77-'79	Donna Caller	Fairfax County
'79-'81	Ralph Witt	Wythe County

Virginia Visiting Teacher/School Social Worker  
Association President's List

<b>Year</b>	<b>President</b>	<b>School Division</b>
'81-'83	Shirley Williams	Richmond City
'83-'85	G.H. Jones	Amherst County
'85-'87	Joe Swack	Frederick County
'87-'89	Charlotte Bailey	Richmond City
'89-'92	Marie Givens	Lancaster County
'92-'96	Karen Hatfield	Virginia Beach City
'96-'98	Susan Friski	Rockbridge County
'98-'00	Donna Thornton	Newport News City
'00-'02'	Vicie Dotson	Bristol City
'02-'05	Renata Hedrington-Jones	Richmond City
'05-'08	Dr. Sherin A. Shearin	Norfolk City
'08-'09	Elizabeth Arthur	Salem City
'09-'10	Monica L. Williams	Suffolk City
'10- '14	Bonita Kimbrew	Newport News City
'14 – '18	Susan Daly	Fluvanna County
'18 – present	Monica L. Williams	Norfolk City