

THE URBAN VOICE

TCNJ Urban Education Newsletter

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Issue 1 | May, 2021



A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

Students in the Urban Education programs at TCNJ demonstrated their commitment and resolve as the world shifted to remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this inaugural issue of the Urban Education newsletter, "The Urban Voice," students talk about their research, why they are committed to teaching in urban schools, and reflect on their virtual learning. Urban Education majors share a passion for learning and supporting diverse students and their communities.

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USE YOUR VOICE

Want to contribute to The Urban Voice? Email the team @urbaneducationnewsletter@gmail.com



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TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

By Yashira F.

Ms. Monifa Harrison

English Teacher

Trenton Central High School

Ms. Monifa Harrison has been an English teacher at Trenton Central High school for the last 9 years and has been within the educational field for over 20 years!

Within the classroom, Ms. Harrison has created strong bonds with her students and has cultivated a space that invites growth and kindness. Starting each day by greeting her students and making sure to take time to check in on how they are doing, Ms. Harrison feels that it is important to acknowledge her students have a life outside of the classroom. Encouraging her students to try their best while also creating lesson plans that reflect those intentions, she has been able to set a positive example of what an educator should look like. Taking a personal interest in each of her students and supporting their needs, it is clear to see that the students know they can count on their English teacher on having their backs.

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION'S URBAN EDUCATION PROGRAM

"We are committed to preparing educators who can be excellent teachers of all students in the state of New Jersey."

One of my priorities, when I became Dean of the School of Education at TCNJ, was to enhance the already exceptional work that was occurring in the Urban Education program. In four short years, we have celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Elementary and Early Childhood Urban Education program (under the phenomenal leadership of Dr. Tabitha Dell'Angelo), hired Dr. Salika Lawrence as the inaugural Campbell Endowed Chair of Urban Education, and accepted our first classes of students to the Secondary Urban Education program coordinated by Dr. Jonathan Davis. The students and faculty members who are involved in this work are at the heart of our work here in the School of Education...(cont.)



THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION'S URBAN EDUCATION PROGRAM

...The work of our Urban Education programs moves us closer to that target. As our country wrestles with the oppression and inequity that have been part of our fabric for too long, we've heard from many of our Urban Education alumnae that the education they received through their preparation programs has made them better able to be anti-racist, progressive, and socially just teachers for all of their students.

By Dean Suzanne McCotter

Spring 2021 **Editorial Team**

Dr. Salika Lawrence

Leah Castellano

Yashira Fernandez

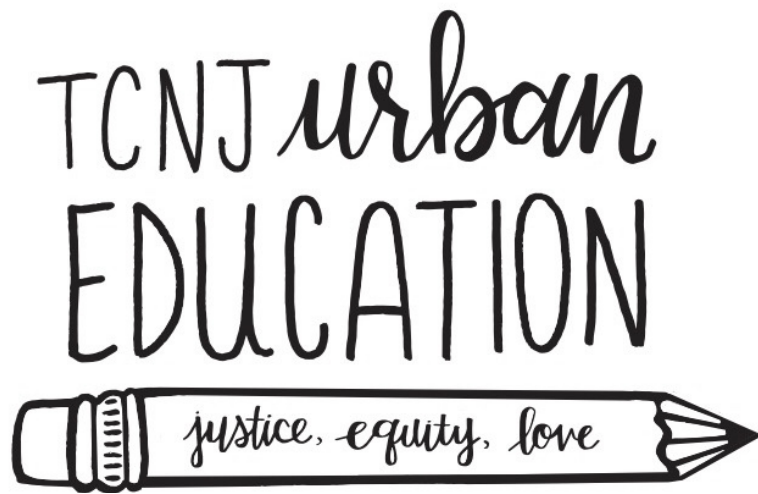
Janelyn Rodriguez

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

By Trevor R.

Hi, I'm Trevor! I'm an Urban Education major at the College of New Jersey and for me, being a male in urban education means being in an environment of empathy. Males in the United States, or in Western Society writ large, are expected to be rather competitive or punitive, and that usually transitions well into them joining majors such as economics, business, etc. where they can engage in those "market fundamentals" per say.

Being in education allows me to take a step back, be a critic and also an activist, and advocate for things such as education reform, or to speak out against For Profit education and charter schools, and standardized tests rather than perpetuating a status quo that I see as quite destructive. It also allows me to not only stay within the realm of education but, as a history and Social Studies major, I get to critique society writ large and act as a medium to facilitate this conversation among others. I honestly could not be happier to be an education major, a history major, and an Urban Ed major, at that.



URBAN ED ALUMNI WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

The EECE Urban Education program just celebrated its ten-year anniversary in 2020. Our first year we had three graduates and now we have about twenty each year. The graduates of our program are general education classroom teachers, ESL teachers, and school administrators. They are making an impact across the state of New Jersey, in North Carolina and Washington D.C. -- and as far as Mexico City and Costa Rica. We also have several alum who have pursued advanced graduate studies and who are working in law, policy, and curriculum development. We are incredibly proud of our urban education family. And, we have also been having fun watching each of their own families grow. Each year our urban ed family multiplies with life partners and children. We look forward to continued relationships with all of our alum.

By Dr. Tabitha Dell'Angelo

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

By Trevor R.

Mr. Muse, a Social Studies teacher at Luis Munoz Rivera Community Middle School, can be described in one word: "genuine."

His energy is upbeat and genuine.

The way he cares for the students is empathetic and genuine.

His trust in me, his student teacher, was unwavering and genuine.

Early on in my student teaching experience, the students let me know that something is different about Mr. Muse. One student said, "Mr. Muse, I love how you actually want to be with us, our other teachers are just dead on the inside." Mr. Muse engages students through an inclusive curriculum. Whether it is planned or not, Mr. Muse connects almost every lesson in a way that resonates with students of color and LGBTQ students. Mr. Muse is keenly aware that seeing oneself in the curriculum can be a motivating factor to be engaged and it is evident through his teaching at he feels it would be downright neglectful to teach anything other than an inclusive curriculum.



URBAN ED ALUMNI: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Back in March 2021, Sarah Jung, our TCNJ Urban Elementary Education alum (Class of 2019) made a virtual visit to Dr. Lawrence's ECE Multicultural Children's Literature class. Only about three months earlier in December of 2020, Sarah had co-published with her sister her first children's picture book, *Daddy's Love For Me*.

During her visit, Sarah shared in depth about her publishing journey with the current TCNJ students. She discussed the many inspirations that led to writing her own multicultural children's book, including the need for greater diversity in the characters of picture books and the importance of addressing how socioeconomic factors impact a child's psychological and relational development.

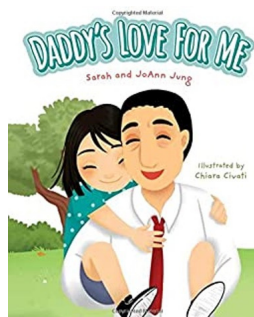
As such, the story features Sumi, a young Asian girl, who grows up believing that her father does not love her due to his lack of presence and involvement in her life. She compares her dad to the dads of her friends and forms grudges that sully how she feels about her dad. However, as the story unfolds, Sumi comes to understand that the long hours that her dad spends outside of the home are his efforts to provide for the family.

This touching story touches upon two major areas of intersectionality, namely race and class, featuring characters of multiple ethnicities and as explained in the plot above, a family trudging through financial hardships.

Sarah mentioned that taking courses at TCNJ such as ECE Multicultural Children's Literature and many others, raised her awareness for the need for more books that touch upon social systems that impact not only for adults but also children. She expressed the shock she had experienced when she first learned that there are "less than 7% of children's picture books feature Asian characters" and "not many books that address socioeconomic issues, which may be difficult to talk about, but are very real for some children."

As an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in Fairview, NJ, where almost all of her students receive free lunches, Sarah is keenly aware of the impact of socioeconomics on children's education. Over the holidays, each of her students received a copy of her book. The book was an invitation for her students and their families to converse about their own stories. She hopes that *Daddy's Love For Me* will be a valuable tool that parents and educators can use to explore with children what may be a tough or sensitive topic.

Daddy's Love For Me can be found on the publishing company's website at Mascot Books, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other online retailers.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

By Aurent E.

Being an Urban Education major I've gained a different perspective on so many topics. I thought I was knowledgeable about how the system has failed black and brown students, but having conversations about this topic with professors, especially Dr. Dell'Angelo, gave me a new outlook on the issue. As future educators, Dr. Dell'Angelo encouraged us to seek solutions rather than just talk about the problems in the education system.

One thing that has definitely impacted my thinking was reading the book *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Bettina Love. The book talks about how we need to do more than reform the way we teach, we must dismantle the educational complex we've created. This will forever stay with me.

Urban Education Book Club

On March 24th, Urban Education students and faculty came together via Zoom to discuss a variety of Young Adults novels centering around intersectionality.

This book club was a space for all of us to read novels that are not typically part of our traditional coursework and that will inform our understanding as educators of students with all different backgrounds. I'm a huge proponent of the importance of YA novels and felt this book club was a great starting point for how we can bring novels like these into our own future classrooms. For this book club, I read *Juliet Takes A Breath* by Gabby Rivera which follows a young Puerto Rican lesbian girl. This book explores different forms of feminism, identity, and acceptance of oneself.

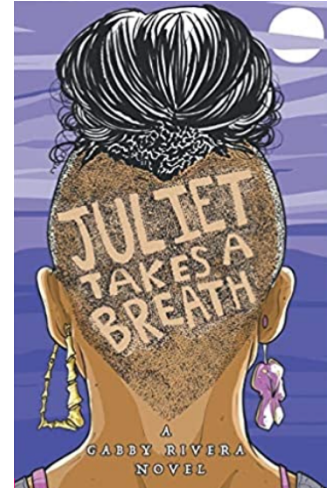
I chose this book because I did not previously have a recommendation for a YA book that discusses intersectional feminism in my repertoire. I felt this book and the discussions we had gave me multiple ideas for how to utilize the book within a classroom and how to navigate conversations around topics like sexuality, race, and identity that many teachers might consider to be hard topics to begin discussing with their students. This event was a great first step for all of us on how to incorporate YA and intersectional novels into the classroom. I hope others found this discussion to be just as insightful as I did!

By Alyssa Joyce

Why Urban Ed?

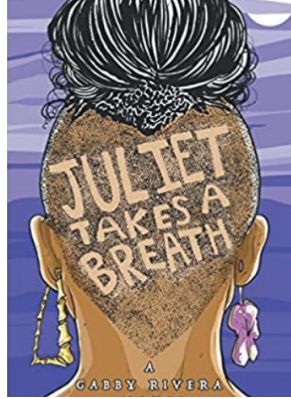
Urban Education has allowed me to meet a diverse group of people that want to invest in the students within urban communities"

-Yashira Fernandez,
Senior, English
Urban Secondary Ed



Urban Education Book Club

A REFLECTION BY VICTORIA WINTERS



In the Inaugural Book Club we got to choose between multiple YA texts. I chose the novel *Juliet Takes a Breath* by Gabby Rivera. I was drawn to this novel because, as a female in the LGBT community, I was able to relate to a lot of the situations that Juliet faces.

While discussing this novel with many other people of different ages, gender, and backgrounds, we were all able to find connections not just within the book but within ourselves. After discussing just the book in groups, everyone came together and we talked about all of our books.

One conversation that stood out was how these novels all seemed to be coming of age stories and there are great mental transitions within the characters throughout the duration of their novel. We concluded the book club by talking about how these novels affect education, how it is taught, and what it means for those who teach it. This was by far what I would call one of the best discussions of my life. We discussed the definition of success for not just teachers but students, which is something that is so huge to me because as a student, I've always had a difficult time being 'successful' in the eyes of my teachers, due to medical issues and just life in general.

One of my biggest goals as a teacher has been to treat my students as people with outside lives and to be very cautious of that. To me, a student is successful if they are happy, healthy, and ready to go out into the world and produce something positive.

One brilliant teacher taught me that, "Sometimes what students need when they are in your classroom is not what is on your lesson plan, but in your heart". This thought has allowed me to be a smarter and kinder educator, and it was so nice to see professors reacting positively to my teaching philosophies. It made me feel great to know that my ideals as a teacher are heading in the right direction. It was also really inspiring how professors were asking how they could better teach students in certain areas. With this, we were able to establish that no great teacher is done learning, and it was great to see so many amazing TCNJ professors taking so much information to heart and really trying to learn more. We additionally talked about how these books could be perceived, and we ended up concluding that it's great how it goes against teaching this huge cannon of books that's been created, and going against the cannon is probably going to receive a lot of backlash. This led us all to consider that the best way to go about it is to teach with your heart. This entire book club was so inspirational and it gave me so much motivation at a time where most of us are lacking. The discussions that we had together created a bonding moment between students and educators, and made me remember how much I can't wait to be a teacher. Being a high school educator has been my dream since before I even graduated high school, and the amazing conversations that we had together were a huge step in the right direction of doing right by our students and their future, and truly becoming the best educator that we can all be.



Student Perspectives on Social Inequality During COVID-19 Pandemic

Jocelyne Guzman

I have decided to go back to my old high school, which is an all girls Catholic high school, and gain the student and teacher/administrator perspective on education during COVID-19. It has been really interesting to gain both perspectives and they both have indicated the struggle of online learning. I hope to combine these two perspectives and draw the similarities and differences between the two. Both interviewees have added a lot to my understanding of online learning during the pandemic. It has been an adjustment for everyone, but we hope that the next school year will see some normalcy.

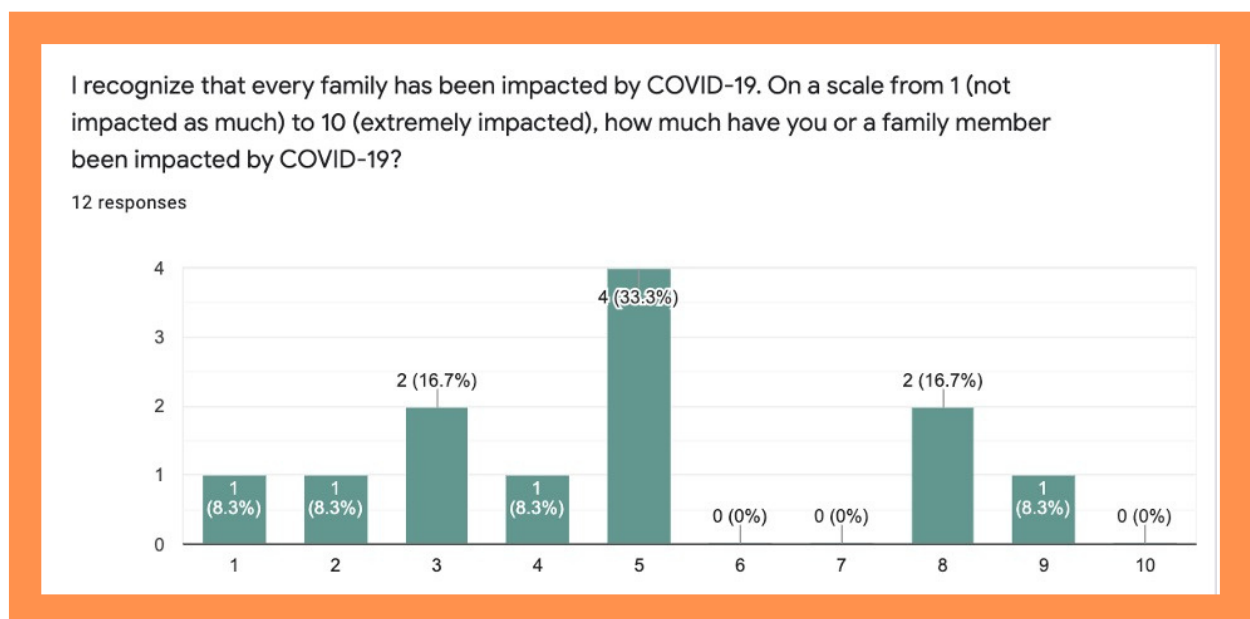
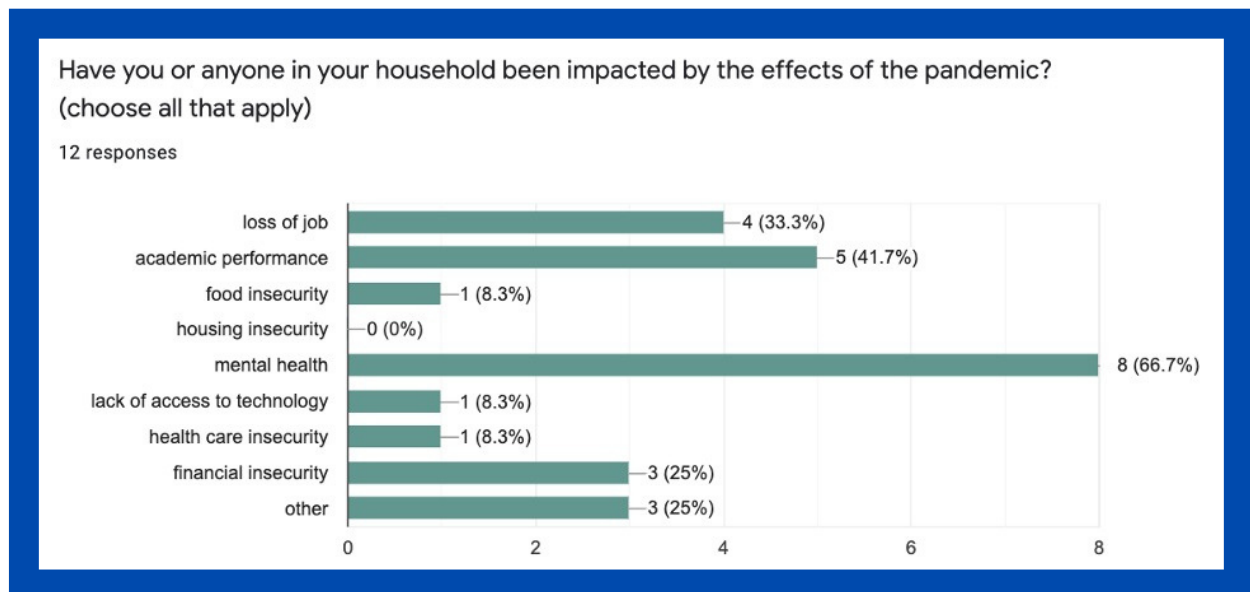
Cait Viggiano

My research focuses on the ways that COVID has impacted communities and the education system. Specifically, I wanted to address how elementary-age special education students may be disproportionately affected by the educational changes that have occurred. Similarly, how their corresponding teachers have dealt with these changes and how they've adjusted their curriculum to cater to the special ed students' needs. For my first interview, I talked with a veteran educator who has 30 years of teaching experience to learn about the ways in which education has shifted, especially over this past year. For my second interview, I thought it would be important to hear the experiences of someone on the opposite side of the spectrum: a first-year teacher. It was interesting to see the commonalities and differences of how these educators have conducted their classrooms through online, hybrid, and in-person models, while still dealing with the safety precautions necessary due to COVID.

Student Perspectives on Social Inequality During COVID-19 Pandemic

Other Research Topics

- Shari Goldberg: Technology resources and school budgets
- Katy Zierold: Female offenders incarcerated with COVID-19
- Brady Kardos: Comparing virtual instruction in a rural and urban high school in New Jersey
- Julissa Feliz: Impact of immigration policies and food insecurities on immigrants in low income communities in Washington, DC
- Yohanny Rosario: Teacher-student interactions during virtual instruction at a middle school in Paterson, New Jersey
- Jess Abolafia: Digital divide, internet issues, absenteeism, and learning from home
- Allison Chang: Teachers' years of teaching and the transition to virtual instruction



Thinking About Diversity and Inclusion

Why "LGBTQ+ Issues in K-12 Education" Should Be Required in TCNJ's Education Department Curriculum

In the fall of 2018, I enrolled in "WGS 342: LGBTQ Issues in K-12 Education." This course reached beyond my expectations and I often find myself making important connections in my education classes. I feel strongly that this course should be included in TCNJ's education department requirements and not falling neglected, hiding in the enrollment shopping carts of students who are just trying to meet graduation requirements. I reflect on my growth in this course with humility. The recollection is as follows...

Before entering WGS-342, I had limited knowledge of the hardships faced by members of the LGBTQ+ community not only throughout their schooling but in every aspect of life. In addition, I had failed to realize that systemic oppression against members of this community followed them throughout their entire lives. The impact of gender roles and expectations on students is discussed in courses such as EFN 299 and SED 224, but the education department has never provided me with the cold hard facts about LGBTQ+ bullycide rates and how many of these students are living in fear. My understanding of intersectionality was deepened greatly throughout the span of this course. Intersectionality had been taught in most of my other education classes, but other professors seemed to brush over LGBTQ+ intersectionality, possibly because they felt uncomfortable speaking about it, or maybe they simply did not view it as a sizable enough issue. In this course, we examined the intersectionality of LGBTQ youth and homelessness, minority races, and religion. Additionally, we discussed the importance of creating better support systems and systems of bully-behavior intervention, using modules from Welcoming Schools and the Human Rights Campaign.

Not only was I ignorant of the issues and obstacles faced by LGBTQ students in their years of schooling, but I was also unprepared to handle situations I may be faced with as a teacher in that area. The resources shared throughout this course helped me feel more confident in appropriately addressing issues linked that students in the LGBTQ+ community may face. While in session, New Jersey passed a law mandating the inclusion of LGBT history in the state curriculum. This law went into effect for the 2020-21 school year, making this course even more vital for all education majors. One lesson from this course that will follow me through the rest of my life is the tips for being an ally: understand your privilege, speak up and not over, and being an ally is a verb- actions speak louder than words. Furthermore, this course forced me to spark conversations with friends, family, and classmates outside of the classroom that I would not have had otherwise. I did not know what I was getting myself into when I signed up for WGS 342, but I know now that it was one of the best decisions I could have made for establishing myself as a teacher that my students can rely on in the future.

Leah Castellano

Senior History and Secondary Urban Education Major at The College of New Jersey

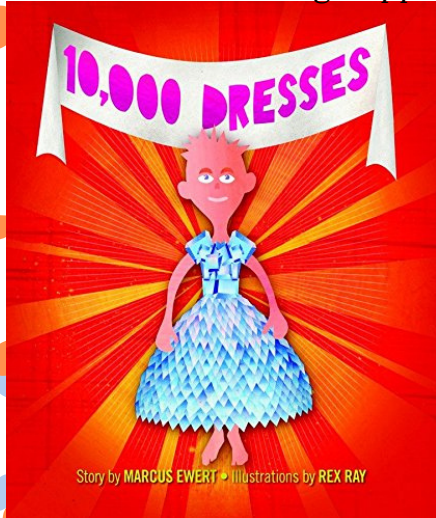


Welcoming Schools

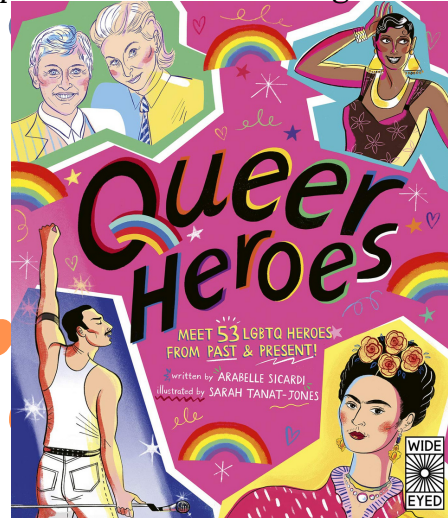


Suggestions for Diversifying Children's Literature: LGBTQ

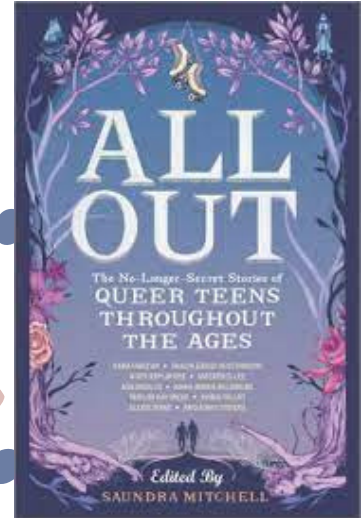
Many books have overlooked, marginalized, or included LGBTQ characters on the periphery as secondary characters. Young (2019) recommends a few books for discussing gender identity and sexual orientation that center these characters in authentic ways. These books can be used to talk about diversity and representation in developmentally appropriate ways in K12 classrooms. It is recommended that you research and make informed decisions for age-appropriate instruction using these texts.



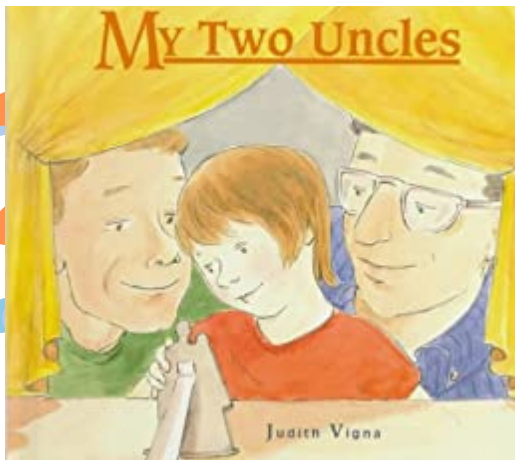
10,000 Dresses



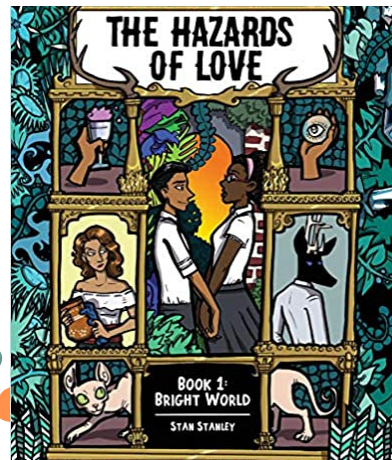
Queer Heroes



All out



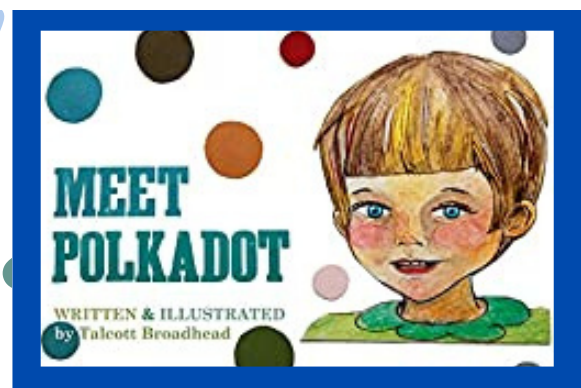
My Two Uncles



The Hazards of Love



This Day in June



Meet Polkadot

Student Voice

In April, we sent out a survey to Urban Education students asking them to share their experiences as TCNJ students and pre-service teachers.

What resources or support you would benefit most from as a student from the school or program?

"Educational fees should be covered by the step office"

"Advice from Former Students and Teachers from Urban Schools."

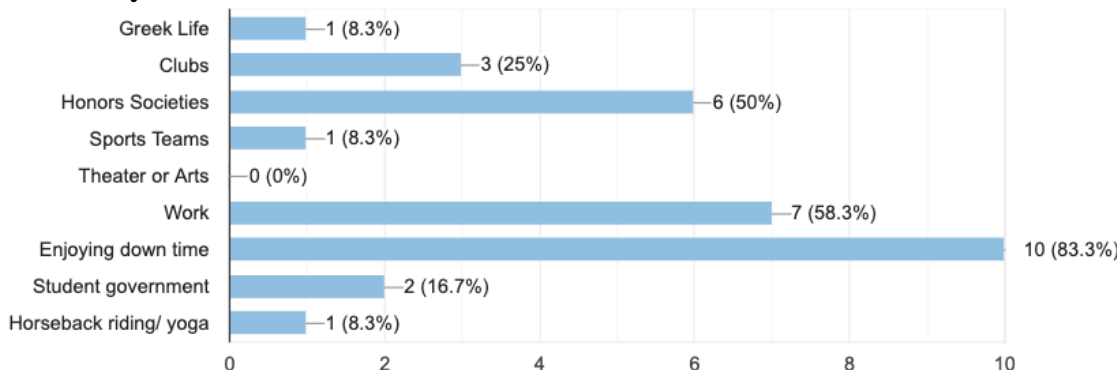
"More professional development about teaching in urban schools. Possibly teaching hard history, teaching inclusion, multicultural books, etc."

"A spring break would have been nice!"

Describe your remote learning experience as a student or teacher in one word.

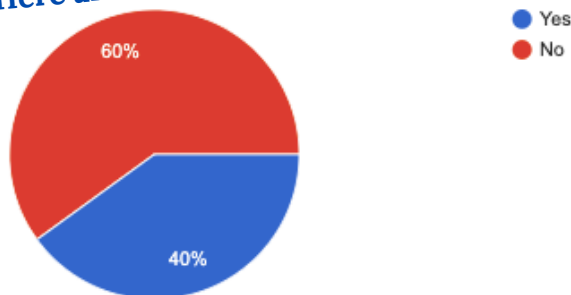
challenging
enlightening
adjustment
frustrating
adequate
unfair
tiring
unending
hard
amazing

What are you involved in outside of The School of Education?



"One of my favorite things about the Urban Ed. experience is meeting new people that share diverse backgrounds and experiences."
-Leah C.

We also asked non-urban education students if they ever considered joining the Urban Education Program at TCNJ. Here are the results:



Do you have ideas for the Fall 2021 issue? Send your comments, feedback, recommendations to urbaneducationnewsletter@gmail.com.

What social media accounts or websites would you recommend for new teachers to follow?

ig-educatorsforjustice
ig-educatorsforjustice
ig-zinneducationproject
ig-teachandtransform
teachingtolerance
pinterest
tiktok-awalmartparkinglot
tiktok-preschooltherapy
tiktok-typebteacher
scholasticbookclub
ig-redfishstream
tiktok-tiktokinteacher
ig-decolonialatlas
ig-urbaned
tiktok
ig-teachersforblacklives
teacherspayteachers
classdojo
ig-urbaned
