

# THE URBAN VOICE

TCNJ Urban Education Newsletter

## SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Issue 2 | April, 2022



## A CALL TO ACTION

The Urban Voice Newsletter is brought to you by The Urban Collaborative at The College of New Jersey. The Urban Collaborative at TCNJ was launched to centralize urban-focused programming in the School of Education. Under the leadership of Drs. Salika Lawrence, Tabitha Dell'Angelo, and Jonathan Davis, The Collaborative aims to enhance outreach, teacher education and professional development, and research in partnership with communities we serve at TCNJ and beyond. We provide a space for TCNJ students, faculty and staff, and community partners to add their voice, perspective and expertise to urban-related projects.

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Spring 2022 Editorial Team:

Dr. Salika Lawrence, Janelyn Rodriguez, Yashira Fernandez, and Ky'Ara McCray

# CURRICULUM UNDER ATTACK

by Ky'Ara McCray



House Bill 1134 or the “Education Matters Proposition,” was recently proposed by Representative Anthony Cook of Indiana. To the naked eye, this bill is portrayed as a living vessel; allowing parents and other guardians the opportunity to venture inside of their children's classroom and curriculum. To some, this bill is beneficial; to others who look at this bill under a critical lens, this proposition is presented as a golden opportunity for some parents to deny students the chance to learn about communities and issues outside of their own normal.

In all, this fifty four paged document covers several areas of public education, requiring schools to post educational materials to school websites; giving parents the option to opt their children in or out of materials centered around gender, sexuality, race, diversity and other forms of inclusive practice. This document also requires committees created by schools' governing bodies to consist of parents, administrators and community members. Those who argue against the ratification of this bill worry that its use will make it harder for newer generations to be ready for the real world outside of the classroom

While the future of this bill currently is uncertain, over the past few weeks educators, students, and community members across the country have been taking a stand against this controversial school house bill voicing their opinions and concerns regarding its dangerous and racist ideology. Across the country, Educators and parents who believe teaching diversity and evaluating the lasting impact of other injustices should remain in the curriculum have rallied in support of their fellow Indianan peers. Rallies, protests, sit ins, and other acts of civil disobedience have occurred across the nation; all to voice disapproval of House Bill 1134. These individuals understand the dangerous impact this bill possesses and its ramifications that can impact every public school, child, and teacher within the United States allowing some radicalized groups the ability to suppress historical truth and manipulate the curriculum to their own personal advantage.

**In a statement from the Indiana State Teachers Association, the organization's official statement read: “HB 1134 only serves to further a national narrative that does not exist in Indiana. All the while, teachers will be bullied out of having, or in some cases avoiding, difficult but necessary conversations and lessons with students – all out of fear of being sued or revocation of their teaching license. Obstacles to helping students with their social-emotional health remain in the bill as well.” The Indiana State Teachers Association website is also asking those who visit to show their support and challenge any unfair policy their state tries to impose on them .**

## How can we show our support for Indiana Educators?

While the state of Indiana may feel as if it is on the other side of the country, its location and impact is closer than we think; only being two states over. In terms of education, a bill that threatens one institution has the possibility of endangering us all. One of the ways we can show support to other educators across the nation that may be facing similar challenges would be by contacting/emailing our state representative to garner support in favor of dismissing House Bill 1134. Another Strategy you can use to show support for Indiana educators would be to bring this issue to the classroom. Inform your students about what's going on in their nation. Gather their opinions and transform this situation into a learning opportunity. Inspire your students to fight for what they believe to be right just as those educators who are fighting in Indiana.

# BANNING BOOKS



Since 213 B.C.E, the action of book burning has been seen as a controversial reaction to the power of written word. When the burning of paper began to lose its popularity in the “intellectual sphere,” governments took it upon themselves to ban or restrict access to books that challenge set societal norms for any given society. However, when we discuss book banning today, at least in the western world, we are typically discussing a specific choice made by individual schools, school districts, and libraries rather than a governing legislative force. These responses are typically made under the “moralistic outrage” of some groups and not necessarily the whole. These groups, although small, often have the controlling vote and ability to make impactful rules for the larger population without considering their wants, needs, and views on life.

In a New York Times article, Britten Follett, the chief executive of content at Follett School Solutions which has one of the country’s largest providers of books to K-12 schools explains that the notion of banning books is “driven by legislation, [banning books is] driven by politicians aligning with one side or the other. And in the end, the librarian, teacher or educator is getting caught in the middle.”(Harris and Alter. 2022)

On April 4th, 2022, The American Library Association (ALA) released their “Top 10” list of the most banned, challenged, and contested books in the United States schools and libraries of 2021. On the surface, these novels may appear to be simple books but under a critical lens, these books provide the reader with a small window into life and experiences outside of their typical normal.

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

By . Caitlin Viggiano

During the banned book read aloud, we read excerpts from *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. We had a discussion on the reasons why certain books are banned from public schools and libraries in our country. I find it quite ridiculous and frustrating that we are censoring students from reading about certain content. Especially when many middle and high school children experience these things in their everyday lives. Based on our conversation, it seemed like a majority of the books that are banned revolve around race, sexuality, and other “adult” themes. I cannot understand why those in power want to prevent adolescents from learning about these issues in an academic setting, where it would probably be most beneficial. Instead, these students may end up relying on their peers or the internet for guidance, which is harmful as these sources tend to be inaccurate or misleading. Allowing these books to be available allows for a safe space for students to learn about the topics that can be tough to talk about, but necessary for staying informed.



# Interview with the Creator of Hard Truths



## Teaching for Social Justice: Hard Truths Initiative

Anne Peel initially taught high school English for 14 years in public schools in Philadelphia and New Jersey. She is currently an Associate Professor of Literacy at TCNJ and continues to cultivate collaboration opportunities with a number of districts across New Jersey. One of the ways Professor Peel provides aid is by preparing different opportunities for professional development support in literacy instruction. Her pieces have been published in *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, *English Journal*, and *Literacy* among others, and she has presented her research at numerous national and international conferences. She was awarded the Edward Fry Graduate Fellowship in Literacy from Rutgers University. Professor Anne Peel has taken her work to answer the call. Through determination, Professor Anne Juele Peel created and curated the Hard Truths Initiative.

**"All of the stories we have collected here represent the best of American optimism. They model for youth how to maintain a sense of joy in the face of adversity without abandoning a hope for a more just and equitable world."**



## What is Hard Truths? What is its purpose? What sparked its creation?

Like many people I started to hear about various initiatives last summer/ fall from different, and I would call them radical, and even fundamentalist groups. These groups were attempting to challenge and censor any books that focused on two things. One of the focuses was on books with representations, specifically stories of people of color, black/latino people, and the history of this country's injustice, oppression and racism. Anything that kind of told the truth about that history was being challenged and then also any text with any kind of queer representation, LGBTQIA+. It started kind of locally and that's what sparked my interest. I heard about the York school district right next door in Pennsylvania. The kinds of books they were banning were things like children stories about integration, Rosa Parks, and these sort of well established historical incidents that are often taught about in schools. So I became really alarmed and started digging into some research and unfortunately things have only gotten worse over the last six months. We have over two thirds of states who have some kind of legislation or policy either on the books or in the works centered on this topic. All of this started under the rubric of Critical Race Theory, they were using the term CRT, using it incorrectly, but using anti-CRT language as a backdoor way to get diverse texts that challenge these injustices at our schools. It has only since then progressed to acts like the "Don't Say Gay" Bill passed in Florida, and there are I believe ten states trying to pass a similar bill. I was more than alarmed, I was infuriated, I was panicked. As somebody that teaches children literature, who sees children literature as a way to create more equitable futures for children, I found this to be really dangerous work. So we started last fall by having just a read aloud week where we invited people across campus for one hour each day for a week to come and read either a banned book or a book that had been challenged or a book that focused on some of what I was calling these hard truths. Books that told the truths about the fact that things are often hard in our country for children: for queer children, for children of color, for children growing up in under-resourced communities, for children with disabilities, etc. But there are so many ways that the world can be unfair to kids and we need to tell the truth about those stories so that we can make a difference.

-INTERVIEWED BY YASHIRA F.

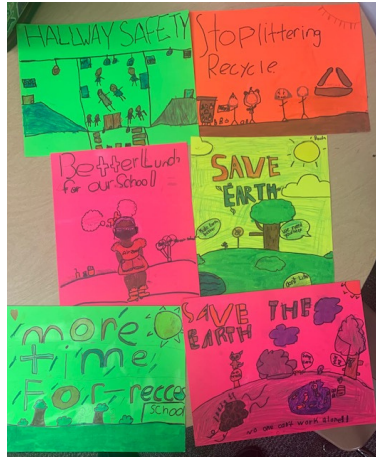


# A CALL FOR ACTION TO DIVERSIFY EDUCATION

## What does teacher activism look like?

by Ky'Ara McCray

The incorporation of activism and social justice within the classroom is an entity that has grown in popularity over the last few years within education. As educators, it is impossible to create active and socially aware members of society without addressing the ever changing world our students grow up in.



The "Activism Project" is a classroom activity that can be done with a variety of students as a way to equip our students with the tools they need to make changes to policies and laws in the future. Inspired by a project done in the Methods of Teaching Social Studies from a Multicultural Perspective by Professor Greer Burroughs, this Activism Project is an amazing opportunity to promote critical thinking, teamwork, and a passion for change within your students. This unit project is designed to highlight several aspects of collaboration, and creativity within the hearts and minds of young students.

Within this project, students identify an issue in which they are passionate about and as a team, work together to propose a possible solution. Through various lessons, students create signs, construct speeches, and orchestrate presentations for their peers about their issues and proposition for change. Although done during Black History Month as a way to highlight the many different Black activist and social leaders throughout history, this project can be done at any point throughout the year.

***Ky'Ara McCray, in her fifth year of the Urban Education Program created a way to incorporate activism and social justice into the curriculum with her third grade class in Woodrow Wilson Elementary.***

## TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

By Yashira Fernandez.

Ms. Pacuta initially started teaching in Newark, NJ but ultimately came to teach English in Trenton Central High School. During my student teaching experience, Ms. Pacuta exemplified all the things an aspiring educator would hope for. She made sure to set the tone for the school year by creating lessons that centered on identity, culture, and community. Ms. Pacuta made sure that even if the schools curriculum did not include diverse perspectives that she found pieces that reflected not only her students but also included voices that may have not been heard. As she worked with students, Ms. Pacuta would create a space for the whole child. As each student entered the classroom, she would greet them and do mini check ins. This made students feel cared for and that someone was willing to listen to them. This form of communication and relationship building skills positively impacted students as they progressed through their academic journey that semester. Students that initially refused to participate or complete work, began to liven up in class. They realized that Ms. Pacuta was there to support them, not fail them.

# A CALL FOR ACTION TO DIVERSIFY EDUCATION

**ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT**  
By Javier Nicasio.

*Below you will find a number of interviews with men in education, LGBTQ individuals in education and POC in education. The intention is to expand the voices and perspectives in the educational field!*

## Why are there few men in the educational field? How can we change that?

"I think that the lack of men in teaching is a direct result of the stereotypes that society holds to men. Teaching as a profession requires thoughtfulness and mindfulness, two attributes that the archetype of the 'tough and unfeeling' man naturally discourages. Even when there are men in the educational field, you see them mainly in administrative positions, where it is more akin to being the boss in an office (another stereotypically male position) than being interactive with kids (a stereotypically female position). In order to close this gap, we need to deconstruct the layers and years of stereotypes that we as a society continue to perpetuate."



**-Kordell Forrest**



"Honestly I believe the best way to get more men into education would be by creating more coaching and mentoring opportunities. A lot of students, but especially young boys need a positive male role model especially if there isn't one at home. These relationships carry and affect who they are and grow to become."

**-Hugh Donaghy**

I am a TCNJ alumnus from the Urban Education Program. I had many influential teachers that influenced my decision to enter the profession, but the most significant was Ms. Polo, my seventh and eighth-grade language arts teacher. Ms. Polo was different from most of my teachers because she was one of the few Latina teachers in my life and grew up in my childhood neighborhood. Ms. Polo taught me very early on the importance of representation and service to your community. Because of her, I enrolled in the Urban Education program at TCNJ.

As the only male and one of few Latinos, I was proud to be a part of a program that sought to bring justice and equity within our education system. My peers within the cohort became my best friends, support network, and teacher family. Till this moment, we all rely on one another. We share our successes, challenges, and everything in between. I am forever grateful for their validation and encouragement. Additionally, I was fortunate to have professors like Dr. Dell'Angelo, Dr. Mawhinney, Dr. Richardson, and many more who championed diversity. They made me feel seen, welcomed, and accepted as a student. Being the only male or Latino in a group can make anyone feel like an outsider. In other circles, it did but, in the urban ed program, I felt seen.

# A CALL FOR ACTION TO DIVERSIFY EDUCATION

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## Why did you join the educational field?

“I got into teaching because I love the day-to-day interaction and challenge that the students bring into the classroom with them everyday. I enjoy being in a service role where I am able to genuinely help people and try to make a difference. I know I can’t single-handedly change the world and the issues therein, but if I am able to make even one student’s life a little bit better, then I feel I will have succeeded.”

**-Anthony Di Lillo**



“A big reason I got involved in education was that I was in a number of leadership positions throughout high school. In these roles as team captains, department heads, and others I had the chance to be a resource and create these supportive environments that gave me a greater sense of direction and purpose. That withstanding, a major factor that dictated how I interacted with these roles was that as a gay man, or kid at that point, I didn't feel constrained to not explore the above aspects due to it being unmasculine and felt free to recreate the roles in a different way then my predecessors had. “

**-Kordell Forrest**

## Why Urban Ed?

I entered the educational field as a general ed major, yet found myself feeling unfulfilled. As an aspiring educator, I wanted to receive the essential experience needed to become the best within my field. I found that as an English Urban Secondary Education major I continually gained tools necessary to not only work with a diverse group of students, but simultaneously cultivate an environment that perpetuates inclusivity and empathy. I have learned of numerous strategies and methods meant to effectively support and empower my students as they navigate through their academic journeys. Urban education is a community that is centered on creating a safe and impactful space for learning!

*-Yashira Fernandez, English Urban Secondary Ed*

I became interested in Urban Education, specifically teaching ESL during my senior year of high school. I was a teacher's aide at a school in my town with a large population of students whose first language was not English. Ever since I decided to study education, I knew I wanted to earn my masters degree and the Urban Education program allows me to earn two degrees in just five years!



*--Brianna Floystrop, Urban  
Early Childhood Education & ISTEM*



# Interview with the Dean of School of Education



## Why do you think it's important to be a part of the committee to diversify educators?

TCNJ has a great reputation for preparing teachers but when we look at the comparison of our population of teacher candidates to the state populations in terms of demographics we know that more than 50% of kids in the state of New Jersey are kids of color. Many of them come from homes where more than one language is spoken. Many of them come from homes where their families have recently immigrated from another country and our population of teacher candidates does not reflect what is true about the population of kids in the state of New Jersey. So, if we really want to do a good job for all of our kids in New Jersey, we have to do a better job of making sure that our teaching workforce looks more like New Jersey looks. A lot of data shows that when kids have a teacher of color they're more likely to succeed. That's all kids, not just kids of color. All kids are more likely to be taught by white women who are different in some way.

At TCNJ our diversity is actually not that bad but when we really drilled down to data. Where we are failing it is in recruiting teachers who are Black or African American and/or Hispanic. We have other kinds of racial and ethnic diversity within our teaching workforce but we need to do a much better job of giving ourselves that specific goal of increasing that kind of diversity and the other area where we need to do a much better job as it is in recruiting teachers who are not monolingual almost all of our teachers speak only one language and that's just not what the state of New Jersey looks like. [We need to recruit] people who speak more than one language to be teachers.

## What are some things TCNJ is doing to diversify future educators?

We've got some plans and some of them are short-term plans and others are long-term plans. What are the ways that we recruit students to TCNJ and this is true no matter where you go if we look at the list of students who are College Bound and what their interest areas are – So you'll probably remember when you took the PSAT on our list who is interested in education what we're doing is were drilling down those lists so we're trying to look at the most diverse school districts in the state of New Jersey and physically try to recruit by doing some letter-writing campaigns and some other things to recruit people who are from the school to express an interest in education that's kind of low-hanging fruit. The next thing we're going to do is, we're going to try to have some days in the spring where we invite people from some of our schools that's probably in a Future Educator Association and Tomorrow's Teachers classes from the most diverse school to have that to come to campus for a day to meet people like you, who are our future teachers, to start to get to know them and talk with them about TCNJ and hopefully that will then transition into a relationship. Education students are also working to develop some programming some really specific program connections out in the field to make sure that they get a chance to have a voice and talk about the way that they are experiencing their teacher preparation and then long-term and you've heard me talk about this, what I think it's a mistake to keep on looking only at students graduating from high school for our pipeline. We need to do a better job of creating articulation programs with community colleges and we need to do a better job of opening up graduate programs to career changers and making sure that we are supporting people. While student teaching is a hard financial prospect for many people, if you are a person who is supporting a family with your salary, it's almost impossible to stop that and start teaching. So we really need to do a better job of figuring out what are the funding sources that will allow us to recruit people who want to be teachers and help them and support them in their preparation.

-INTERVIEWED BY JANELYN R.

**"If we really want to do a good job for all of our kids in New Jersey, we have to do a better job of making sure that our teaching workforce looks more like New Jersey looks. A lot of data shows that when kids have a teacher of color they're more likely to succeed. "**





# ANSWER THE CALL



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This opportunity is not affiliated with TCNJ.

## TCNJ URBAN ED MAJORS!!!



SEEKING URBAN ED  
MAJORS TO  
INTERVIEW FOR A  
DOCUMENTARY

We desperately want to hear  
from you!! Especially those  
who attended an urban  
school district or were once  
ELLs

WHAT IT'S  
ALL ABOUT

The documentary will highlight  
TCNJ's Urban Ed program, and its  
students and faculty. While also  
addressing critical issues plaguing  
the US education system.

PLEASE CONTACT AMANDA MURILLO AT (848)-247-8562 IF YOU ARE INTERESTED

## CHECK OUT OUR PODCAST

With special guest Dr. Marissa Bellino, Leah Castellano,  
Ky'Ara McCray, Janelyn Rodriguez, Kordell Forest, and  
Serina Grasso

SCAN ME



# Educators 4 Equity Re-Launch

Educators 4 Equity is a recognized student organization that is back in action after the world shut down due to COVID! The new E-board has many ideas and are eager to bring this club alive again!

"I really hope to see this club flourish and become a form of support not only for students in classrooms in need of mentors but for our club members as well. I can not wait to see how the club will work together to create equitable events or work with programs in need of assistance. I see us having theme meetings with discussions on equity as it revolves to race, class, gender, etc and the disadvantages that different students face. The first step to bridging the gap between our education is talking about ways to help our students and I truly feel that through different opportunities like paraprofessional events, mentoring, after school programs, and more we can work towards a more equitable future for students of color. "

-- Kiara Fernandez, Vice President,  
Secondary English Urban Education



"I am so happy for the relaunch of the student led organization, Educators 4 Equity! Our plans include bringing together a diverse group of TCNJ students together by volunteering for the community, mentoring, tutoring, offering support for preservice teachers, and possibly soon putting together a professional development for the campus with student-faculty collaboration. So far we announced many nearby volunteer opportunities for members and are seeking more! Being a part of this organization is beneficial for future educators OR if you're interested in serving the community. Anyone is welcome to join and we hope to have a larger group."

-- Marissa Logiudice, President, Urban  
Elementary Education & Spanish Major



"I'm very excited about Educators 4 Equity's return (although I haven't been here long) because kicking up an Urban Education club has so much potential! This club has so much to offer TCNJ, including but not limited to volunteering opportunities, professional development, and Urban Ed resources. My time with E4E thus far has been collaborative and incredibly rewarding. Beyond that, I can't help but look towards the future for this club with high hopes. As a first year student and member of the e-board, I'm looking forward to experiencing how this club takes off over the next couple of years, especially with all of the ideas that TCNJ students can offer. Regardless of your major and experience with Urban Ed, it's my honest belief that there's really no better time than the present to start making a difference in education!"

--Anish Nagireddy, Secretary, Mathematics Urban Secondary Education



# Placement Experiences

As field visits resumed after COVID-19 quarantines, a questionnaire was sent out to aspiring educators to learn what their first experience in the classroom was like for Practicum and Clinical. The intention is to share experiences to help future teachers as they enter the education field!

## What would you tell a nervous future teacher about to enter the classroom for the first time?

**"Take a deep breath!!! You are doing this because you are meant to be here and because you love it! also, the kids are most likely more nervous than you —unless you show your cards (never show your cards lol)."**

**"Embrace your anxiety! It's important to remember that you're human and mistakes are inevitable. If you make it known to your students that you are trying new things just to see how they go, they'll be more than willing to help you out. Remember the reason you wanted to become a teacher in the first place! Build connections with your students as people and really get to know them because you'll cherish those relationships forever."**

**"Eat breakfast, bring lunch. Be chill, but know how to be stern. Or be stern, but know how to be chill. You teaching is not the same as them learning, so definitely practice getting an accurate read of the room and adjust your teaching accordingly. PLEASE don't over-rely on planning. Like, have contingency plans and backups and stuff—those are great—but don't lean too heavily on any one thing!"**

## What was your first time in the classroom like? What made it like that?

**"My first time in the classroom was great! Because of COVID, my practicums and Clinical I experience were all online. Stepping into the classroom for the first time as a student teacher was amazing because I realized how far I have come in my teacher journey, and I'm finally able to make my dreams of being a teacher a reality!"**

**"I was pretty glad to be there. Was a tad awkward, because there was the whole transitioning-from-co-op-teaching-to-me-teaching-over-the-next-several-weeks thing going on, so I had to stand there at the front and get the kids used to my presence for awhile, but even so It wasn't super stressful or anything, I felt in my element."**

**"My first time in a class was through practicum. It was a bit overwhelming but with time it became natural."**

## What is something you wish you knew when you first entered the classroom?

**"Something I wish I knew before I entered the classroom was that students feed on creativity. When your teaching a lesson, make sure you capture their attention early on and hold it throughout the lesson"**

**"I wish I knew how physically and mentally demanding teaching was! You really don't know until you start teaching."**

**"Not every lesson will be a home run, and that's okay. As teachers, we want every lesson to be amazing and to engage every single student, but this isn't a reality for a majority if not all teachers. Some lessons will just be good enough and that doesn't mean you're settling. You're just being realistic!"**

# Urban Education Round Table

by Leah Castellano

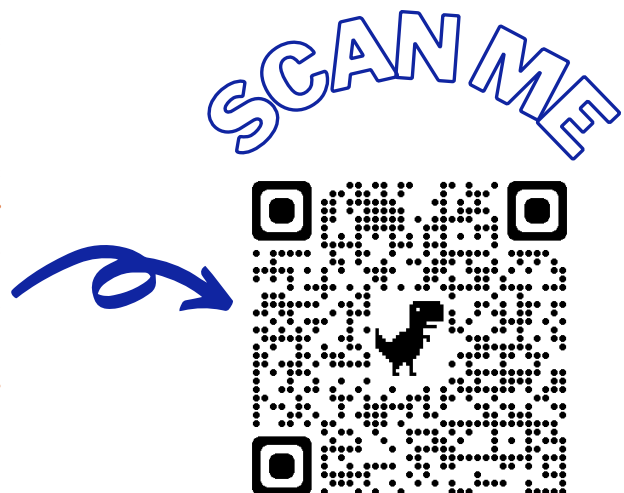
I have had the pleasure of assisting Dr. Lawrence in developing the Library of Congress Urban Education Roundtable professional development project since September of 2021. When I took on the role of graduate program assistant for the project, I was nervous but eager. The program appealed to me in many ways, my inner “history nerd” and teacher heart was bursting at the seams thinking of all the possibilities using the Library of Congress resources to develop materials for teachers to use in their elementary, middle, and high school classrooms in partnering schools.

The Library of Congress has an extensive online database with sources dating back to the 10th century, although our focus for resources has primarily been in the building of America. I have found myself to be living the best of both worlds at our monthly Roundtable professional development events with teachers from local schools because I have the dual role of supporting the development of curriculum resources, but also participating in the line of collaborative inquiry that unfolds when working with the teachers in our program.

We developed a website based on the thematic unit plans teachers are developing for their classrooms. The themes currently focus on Local Sources, Multiple Perspectives of America, Childhood, and Social Justice. We have built a website that is accessible for both teachers and their students to explore primary sources with additional prompts for interacting with the sources.

During our monthly meetings we often use the phrase “down the rabbit hole” as if it is our unofficial slogan, and in one visit to the Library of Congress website, you can understand why. We talk about why teaching with primary sources requires that we understand how to select appropriate sources. Sifting through the sources, you will find yourself jumping from one to the next, narrowing down your search until you find that perfect source that fits the exact idea you had envisioned, and that is exactly what we do when working on curricular units with the teachers. As we review and evaluate the materials we think about the needs of students, ways to better engage students and help increase their understanding of texts, and the local contexts to help make connections to students' lives.

You can visit our site by scanning the QR Code below!





# TAKE ACTION!



## STUDY SESSION

Looking for a study group? The School of Education recently launched the ROSCOE program, a mentoring initiative for first generation students. Join us for a study session on April 20th, 2022 from 12:00pm to 1:00pm outside of the Education building. Come early to network and listen to live music at 11:30am.

## TCNJ'S MIDDLE SCHOOL DAY

Each spring, in April, we create a unique experience called Middle School Day for young people to explore college life and learn from students at TCNJ. If you missed it this year, get involved next year.



## PLAN AHEAD FOR YOUR FUTURE !

### TEACH Grant:

<https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/grants/teach>

### Federal Teacher Loan Forgiveness

<https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/teacher>