

# Shaping Virginia education

*Alumna named superintendent of public instruction*

BY SARAH MEAD ('09)

**P**atricia Wright ('75) worked her way from a B.S. in mathematics at JMU to the "top teacher" position in Virginia. She was named state superintendent of public instruction this year.

"My undergraduate experiences at JMU gave me a solid grounding in mathematics and in teaching mathematics," says Wright, who has 33 years of experience in the education field. "Teaching for 10 years in diverse school environments and working with students both inside and outside of the classroom made me recognize the important roles teachers play in shaping a young person's life."

Wright's responsibilities as superintendent are imperative to Virginia education. She makes recommendations for education policy and programs to the state board, reviews decisions, speaks with stakeholder groups, reviews data on program effectiveness and devises new ideas and strategies to meet the goals of the Virginia Board of Education. She also works side-by-side with Virginia Gov. Timothy Kaine. On May 8, Wright and Kaine signed an agreement on the State Common Core Standards Initiative. The program will produce a core of academic standards to raise English and mathematics standards for grades K-12 and prepare students for postsecondary education and the workplace.


"Virginia remains committed to the Standards of Learning," says Wright, who has played a key role since

the mid-1990s in the development and enhancement of Virginia's nationally recognized accountability system. "But commitment to the SOL program does not preclude

contributing to an effort to raise standards nationwide and learning from the process."

Wright earned a Master of Education in mathematics from Virginia Commonwealth University, and a Doctorate of Education in mathematics with concentrations in mathematics, and research and evaluation from the University of Virginia. Prior to her appointment

as superintendent of public instruction, she held multiple titles during her tenure with the Virginia Department of Education. She served as mathematics supervisor, director of secondary instruction, assistant superintendent for instruction and deputy superintendent. Her work has enabled her to influence education policy and practices at the federal, state and local levels. "Through all of these experiences I have acquired new perspectives, knowledge and skills that I use every day in my role as state superintendent," she says.

Wright attributes her passion for mathematics and education to her Madison Experience. "I believe to be successful in any career one needs passion; you have to love what you do. I had great JMU professors who spurred my passion for teaching. They gave me inspiration to reach heights I only dreamed possible for others." 



**Patricia Wright ('75) works side-by-side with Virginia Gov. Timothy Kaine in her role as Virginia's superintendent of public instruction.**



**Marcia Dake, dean emerita of the nursing department, talks with Lisa Hess ('88), an R.N. at Greenspring retirement community.**

Marcia Dake, founding dean of the JMU Nursing Department (1980-89), lives in Greenspring retirement community in Springfield. "We have staff members responsible for promoting activities that involve residents and bring joy, laughter and esprit de corps," she told staff of *The Pulse*, the newsletter of the JMU Department of Nursing. Dake enjoyed promoting JMU at Greensprings' last "school spirit" day, and she met Lisa Hess ('88), an R.N. and new Greenspring staff member. Hess says, "Dean Dake officiated at my pinning ceremony at JMU."

Lee Morrison, professor emerita of physical education, participated in an Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women pioneers press conference in Florida in February. Morrison served as president of the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women in 1974-75 and worked tirelessly for the adoption of Title IX. The spring press conference was the first time the former AIAW presidents had met since 2003. Morrison coached JMU field hockey for 17 years and served as associate director of athletics. The JMU Morrison-Bruce Center for the Promotion of Physical Activity for Girls and

Women is named for her and her colleague Pat Bruce, professor emerita of swimming, sport psychology and motor learning. Bruce also supervised student teachers, advised Zeta Tau Alpha sorority, served as speaker of the JMU Faculty Senate and helped found the JMU Faculty Women's Caucus.

Former volleyball coach Pat Sargeant (1976-80) and "Skippy" Courtet, former swimming and diving team coach (1977-79), compete in the Master's Competition swimming events. Sargeant set the Dixie Zone record in the Master's Competition 200-back and 400-intermediate events in Greenville, S.C., last year. "The highlight of the meet for me was the 50 free," she says. "I finally broke 30 seconds (29.46)." During her trip to the event, Sargeant and her housemate visited Lee Morrison, professor emerita of physical education.



**Former volleyball coach Pat Sargeant (1976-80) and "Skippy" Courtet, former swimming and diving team coach (1977-79), compete in the Master's Competition swimming events.**

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