

# What We Learned When We Got There

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**Abstract:** During the last four years, Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE), hosted at Old Dominion University Libraries, has created a catalog of relevant manuscript collections, school records, photographs, and pamphlets. Scholars can now find resources on school integration in public repositories in many areas of the state. More challenging are remote areas for which there is no known primary or secondary source material on school desegregation. This year DOVE formed a partnership with NAACP Virginia, AARP Virginia and Urban League of Hampton Roads to gather oral histories and documents in such areas. The first venue of the partnership's "School Desegregation: Learn Preserve and Empower" traveling exhibit was in a multiracial rural community dependent on farming and fishing on the Eastern Shore, geographically separated from the rest of the state by the Chesapeake Bay. The existing histories of the area are most telling for the absence of information on school desegregation or the education of African Americans. In fact, there are almost no sources on modern education for any children in the region. The DOVE traveling exhibit gathered documents and oral histories from African American teachers and students who lived through the Shore's segregated past. This material will provide a foundation for future investigation by researchers and expand DOVE's model for documented undocumented communities.

## About the authors:

*Sonia Yaco* is the Special Collections Librarian and University Archivist at Old Dominion University. She is the founder and co-chair of the Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) Project, a history preservation initiative. Ms. Yaco is a regular contributor to scholarly archival journals on topics that include confidentiality laws, the history of school desegregation, social activism among historians and archivists, and the use of voice recognition software in oral history projects. Previously, Yaco was a reference archivist at the Wisconsin Historical Society. She holds a Masters of Arts degree from the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin – Madison.

*Ann Jimerson* has always known a good story when she hears one. Recently, she co-designed and implemented the oral history collection component of a series of events sponsored by Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE). The chance to have their stories heard and recorded was a major draw for participants. The events drew together local communities and generated enthusiasm for ensuring that their shared history of the tumultuous era of school desegregation is preserved. Jimerson's oral history design included careful attention to promotion of the opportunity, specifications for digital recording standards, documentation of participant data, informed consent and signing of a deed of gift, and training of local volunteers. Ms. Jimerson's interviews helped participants to connect in a personal way to the state's largely-lost history of school desegregation and to open up about personal and emotional experiences. Ms. Jimerson has tapped people's stories in all the work she does, as part of, for example: primary school social studies curricula; art

education; an obesity prevention project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); and a program to increase ordinary Guatemalans' investments in public education, funded by US Agency for International Development (USAID). She is Senior Specialist in Behavior Change at FHI 360 in Washington, DC.

**Robert Sawyers** is a graduate student in History at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia and currently serving a special collections and archives internship at the university's Patricia W. and J. Douglas Perry Library. A researcher at heart, he gathered numerous primary and secondary sources to develop a traveling multimedia exhibit chronicling Virginia's school desegregation history for the Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) project intended to not only educate, but also evoke discussion, particularly among the oral history project participants. Mr. Sawyers also served as site historian, oral history interviewer, and cataloged donated primary source documents at DOVE sponsored events throughout Virginia during the spring and early summer of 2012. Having retired from the United States Navy in 2006 after thirty years service, Mr. Sawyers earned a B.A. in History from Old Dominion University in 2009 and looks forward to researching and writing on the subject of twentieth century Virginia and Chesapeake Bay history in the future.