



The Little Acorn



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Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind

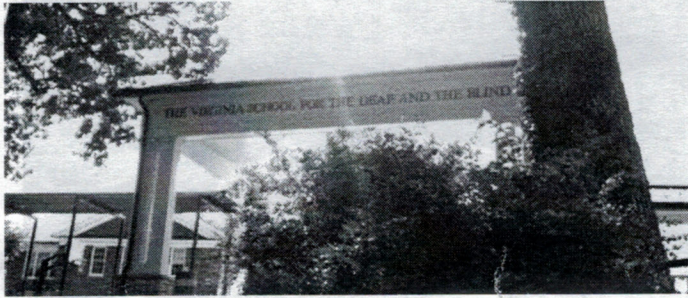
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Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind's quest to conquer COVID-19 learning obstacles

By Ayano Nagaishi, Staunton News Leader, published August 10, 2021



The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind is a state-run agency and it is Virginia's only school for the deaf and the blind. Operating for 182 years, VSDB is the oldest school in the nation that serves the deaf and the blind, according to Superintendent Trice. Photo credit: Ayano Nagaishi

STAUNTON — When COVID-19 hit school classrooms in March 2020, the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind had a different mountain to climb compared to other schools. Helping its students adapt to virtual learning was a whole different challenge.

“We were willing to do whatever we had to do,” Superintendent Patricia Trice said. “But the challenge was how to do this, and trying to was kind of like you're driving the car, but you're building it at the same time.”

Looking back on the year of the pandemic, Trice and her staff, along with all their students served as pioneers of the pandemic and made adjustments that the school, being the oldest institution for the deaf and the blind in America, has never had to face before.

In the driver's seat

Trice said that the school is a hidden gem. It's tucked away in Staunton without much attention from travelers, and sometimes even locals, despite its extensive history.



Supt. Pat Trice. Photo credit: Ayano Nagaishi

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Main Hall even once served as a civil war hospital.

Superintendent Patricia Trice has been in the education field for more than 40 years. Since when she was young, she knew she wanted to go into the education field and specialize in the Deaf community.

“I grew up with a deaf family in my neighborhood and I taught myself finger spelling. I was able to communicate with some of those children,” Trice said. “I believe it was a God-led path. When you look back, you figure out all of that kind of falls into place.”

After Trice got her undergraduate degree from University of Virginia, she got her master's degree at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. She spent her time working in public schools, private sectors and then was recruited to become the principal and now going into her eighth year as a superintendent, with experience under her belt she never could have imagined before 2020.

Navigating the shutdown

First came the packets.

It was the school's first mode of action in 2020 when children were sent home from school during the pandemic. Unlike public school where students are taught on a wider class-sized scale, the school for the deaf and the blind focuses on tailoring education to each student, creating a diverse and complex mix of education courses and levels for students.

According to Trice, the school had to prepare weekly or biweekly packets for each individual student and mail them, which proved to be a challenge within itself considering the shipping delays during the pandemic. Some were in Braille, some were in large text. If students were Deaf, the