



## Critical Teacher Shortage filled by VCC Career Switcher - Teacher Makes Impact by Switching Careers and Stimulating Students

Changing careers is becoming a trend for many baby boomers, though the trend remains for teacher shortages even as Virginia's Community Colleges strive to place more and more Career Switcher teachers into public school systems via their fast-track teacher licensure program, EducateVA.

This partnership began at the request of the Virginia Department of Education in 2004, based on the VCC's 40-year track record of educational excellence and its proven ability to provide high quality accessible programs across the state of Virginia.

EducateVA is a hybrid program using a combination of online and onsite instruction and allowing candidates with a bachelor's degree and five years of work experience to receive their teaching license within sixteen weeks, all while maintaining their current job and responsibilities.

The program has helped hundreds of teachers to become employed in school divisions across Virginia, and this academic year alone 135 individuals will obtain initial teaching licenses in the critical shortage areas of English as a Second Language, English, Foreign Language, Mathematics and Science at the middle or high school and secondary levels.

One such teacher is Chris Elliott, Warwick High School French Teacher du jour.

Chris Elliott didn't grow up always wanting to be a teacher, but he did grow up in France. Well, sort of.

A native of Newport News, Virginia, Chris Elliott encountered his love of France by mere chance. During his 6<sup>th</sup> grade year, his family hosted a French exchange student instead of him being sent to Costa Rica. And after that, Elliott spent all of his subsequent summers and any holidays he could in France,

ultimately making the decision to leave Menchville High School in his junior year and finish high school in a public school in France with his 'French' family.

"I can't say I knew I always wanted to be a teacher, but it was in the back of my mind," explained Elliott, a 1997 graduate of William and Mary with a B.A. in International Relations. Elliott had returned to the states for college and used his French skills to take him in numerous directions, including working for Certain Teed, a subsidiary of La Compagnie de Saint-Gobain and Masco Corp.

Working primarily in sales for 11 years after graduating from college, Elliott decided he would put his experience of growing up in France to work helping high school students learn the language. "I tried getting into teaching in 2001 and had contacted the Suffolk Public Schools which were one of a few schools offering programs, but it seemed overwhelming at the time," explained Elliott.

Considering the leap a few years later and while attempting to determine what courses he would need to take, Elliott stumbled across the Career Switcher Program offered by Virginia's Community Colleges, EducateVA, while looking for online options. "When I found out the 5 courses I didn't take in college would be satisfied through this program, it seemed cleaner and easier."

Chris Elliott completed the EducateVA Program in 16 weeks and began teaching French at Warwick High School in Newport News in the fall of 2006.

After years of experience as a field sales representative for Masco Corp., a home improvement and building products supplier, Elliott found the switch to teaching cumbersome with paperwork, as compared to the computerized tracking and reporting he had become accustomed to.

The organizational aspect remains a challenge for Elliott, who if judged by the paper on his desk, is the self-proclaimed mad scientist of Warwick High. But he's involved with a lot more than just paperwork.

"I didn't know how involved I would get, but teaching students sometimes from 9th grade until their senior year, I get to see all the growth, not only in their learning but in each student as an individual. There are students that simply don't show up for some classes. It's nice to know when your students really want to come to your class," explained Elliott.

He finds creative ways to engage his students in French class. If there's an interesting question or debate as to the gender nature of a noun for example, why not call someone in France?

Elliott did. And much to his students' delight.

The topic of pizza came up, a very likely occurrence when relating to teenagers. Chris Elliott said he would bet his wife and kids on the fact that pizza is a masculine noun. A few students disagreed. With a flash of a dial pad, Elliott had a pizzeria in France on the phone. And after much ado determining why they were interested in the gender of this noun in the first place, they determined that pizza is indeed a feminine noun. The fate of his wife and kids resulted simply in a happy, content French Teacher who brings home 'la pizza' from now on after a busy day at school, not 'le pizza'.

Elliott's advice if you want to make the switch to teaching is to "bring your background and experience. EducateVA lets you know exactly what to expect, helps you get all your testing and licensing, and makes it flow seamlessly."

French is one foreign language subject with shortages of teachers in our public schools. It is spoken today by about 350 million people around the world as either a native or a second language, with

EducateVA | Page 3

significant populations in 54 countries. It is an official language in 31 countries and it is an official language of all United Nations agencies and a large number of international organizations. Although it has no official recognition on a federal level, French is the third most-spoken language in the United States, after English and Spanish.

For a complete list of critical teacher shortage areas contact your public school system or visit the Virginia Department of Education website at [www.doe.virginia.gov](http://www.doe.virginia.gov). For more information regarding Virginia's Community Colleges Career Switcher Program visit a nearby community college or [www.EducateVA.com](http://www.EducateVA.com).