

THE CHALLENGE (CASE STUDY)

What was the challenge you were facing? What goals were you trying to achieve?

The goal of expanding and tapping into the work already being done nationally to increase religious literacy throughout our schools and teaching profession has been both enjoyable and challenging. Our goal is to better expose teachers to the importance of understanding the world's major religions so that they can better educate our students, and better create safe spaces for students of all and no faiths in the classroom.

Summarize three points of frustration you faced.

The good news is there are many wonderful teachers, organizations, and academic institutions already working hard to create resources for teachers throughout the United States in order to help them become more religiously literate; however:

1. Creating a network of likeminded teachers throughout the United States has been a work in progress, but is coming along.
2. Working with various school bureaucracies and their restrictions, goals, and views on teaching about religion proves to slow down progress in collaboration.
3. Finding and convincing academic scholars of religion to participate and use their resources for teacher education programs has been challenging.

What strategies were you attempting to use before to solve this problem?

Using resources like Twitter has allowed us to expand our networks of resources in hopes of continuing to expand and create meaningful religious literacy programs for teachers.

What was the big "aha" moment when you decided you needed to try something new?

Persistence and perspectives are vital in developing professional development programs on an issue as contentious as world religion.

What was the top reason you selected this grant?

Having ASCD, NBPTS, and the U.S. Department of Education supporting an effort to expand religious literacy validates that religious literacy in the classroom is a topic that can be done secularly and on a national scale.

THE RESPONSE

How has the Teacher Impact Grant work helped you achieve your goals or solve a problem?

Over the past year, the \$15,000 that was given to our three programs has allowed more than 180 educators teachers, Since the 2016 presidential election, America as a whole has seen a spike in hate crimes. But since I received the Teacher Impact Grant I have been able to

- Have a feature article about my teaching on Islam in *Teaching Tolerance Magazine*.
- Be quoted in the *Washington Post* with advice for teachers about the importance of religious literacy.
- Be invited to speak with delegates from Western Europe, the Balkans, and Bangladesh about the importance of religious literacy in the classroom.
- Expand the pilot Religious Literacy for Educators course to a year-round course featured in the *Washington Post*.
- Expanded trips and speakers
- Received coverage from local TV (video link to the course) and national TV (video link to the topic).

How has it impacted your school/district/teachers/principals/students?

"I am impressed and grateful to have been a part of the experience. It was an enriching and valuable experience for all educators, especially social studies teachers. MCPS went above and beyond to plan, facilitate, and lead the course. From what I've seen, heard, and read, the course experiences were also a product of MCPS participation in a range of community experiences and partnerships all in the name of educating students and teachers."

Chris Ascienzo, Social Studies Content Specialist, Farquhar Middle School

"The speakers MCPS got for us were incredible & I can't tell you how lucky I feel to have been able to be a part of this and to have met such amazing people. I appreciate the effort MCPS put into making this class so phenomenal...I have grown not only intellectually this week, but emotionally and spiritually as well. I have already been researching religions more on my own since the class ended and cannot wait to impart some of my newfound knowledge to my students. Thank you for such a rich, fulfilling experience!"

Kimberly Maffeo, Spanish Teacher, Sligo Creek Middle School

"This class is needed in these awakening times to help educators to become more cognizant of our diverse students by looking at what we know and expanding our knowledge through an authentic immersive experience. Interacting with adults and students who are passionate about what they believe in, and giving us the space to listen, learn and inquire was so valuable. It is one of the best CPD classes I've taken and Chris is an amazing provider of resources, teaching tools, and facilitator of thought-provoking discussions."

- Rehana Ahmed, 7th Grade Science Teacher, Cohort 3, Spring 2017

"As I approach the end of this course, and my 57th PDO credit, I feel confident saying that the course's value is unsurpassed if not unrivalled by any of the previous courses I have completed. The past 15 weeks of "Religious Literacy for Educators" has been a meaningful and valuable journey for me as an educator, one responsible for teaching a diverse group of youngsters, and as a citizen of a diverse nation and world. I truly cannot think of another course I have taken that has exposed me to as many relevant and meaningful experiences to learn from and reflect upon."

- Zachary Brandt, Middle School English Teacher, MCPS, Cohort 2, Fall 2016

"Religious Literacy for Educators more than equips educators to be more religiously literate, it promotes discourse and meaningful relationships with students, colleagues and families who are religious minorities. The exposure you afforded us via site visits, guest speakers far exceeded my expectations. Your wealth of knowledge and commitment to the content of the curriculum made the course meaningful, relevant and evoked a new level of my commitment of support to these students and families as they matriculate within our school system. Every educator within MCPS should privilege themselves with this amazing opportunity. You are an amazing instructor with great insight and resources and are highly respected throughout the county and the DMV. MCPS is fortunate to have you serve in this capacity."

Falesia Jones, High School Counselor, MCPS, Cohort 3, Spring 2017

How has it helped you to overcome the challenges you had before?

Having access to funds for three teachers who are respected for bridging the gap of religious illiteracy has allowed for the creation of five specific trainings that brought in experts from all over the United States and Europe. This allowed for the training of more than 150 K-12 educators from eight different school districts.

THE RESULTS**What specific metrics can you share about the impact it had (having data for a graph/chart/figure or two is greatly preferred)?**

Kate Soules, a Ph.D. candidate at Boston College has collected pre-course data and is now conducting post-course surveys.

What is the single biggest reason you would recommend applying for a Teacher Impact Grant in the future?

The Teacher Impact Grant respects teachers as experts in their field and allows teachers to design programs with little re straight and great support.

Media Coverage

<http://chicagotonight.wttw.com/2017/07/19/we-teach-we-don-t-preach-public-school-teachers-find-space-religion-classroom#.WXAAMsd2BzA.twitter>

National education group recommends religious studies in K-12 public schools

Yes, you can teach religion in public schools and yes, it is legal when using an academic rather than a devotional approach.
Chicagotribune.com

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/for-sikhism-facts-middle-school-in-montgomery-become-the-teachers/2017/04/25/fc84d19a-29fa-11e7-b605-33413c691853_story.html?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.e4db3bc335b7

<http://worldreligionseducatorsblog.blogspot.com/2017/07/washington-metro-area-teachers.html>

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/mainstory/story/489099/Religious-Literacy/>

<http://www.tolerance.org/blog/our-new-magazine-issue-gives-gift-hope>

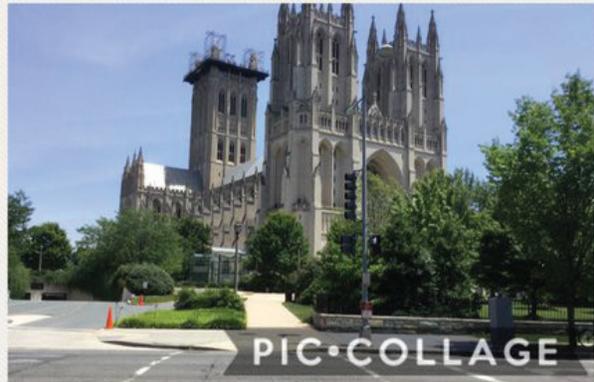
http://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=14077

<http://www.mymcmedia.org/teachers-learn-religious-literacy-at-local-faith-centers-photos/>



Chicago Teachers–Day 1

The Teacher Impact Grant Program is made possible by the support of ASCD, the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, and Carnegie Corporation of New York.















Falesia Jones, a school counselor at Northwood High School in Rockville, has been fitted with seven yards of material as she is fitted with a turban. On April 20, a local gurdwara, or house of worship, held a teaching session for Montgomery County residents who wanted to better understand their faith (Bill O'Leary/The Washington Post).

By Julie Zauzmer April 25 at 7:36 PM 



