

Dr. Janice Underwood, Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer



Dr. Janice Underwood, who strongly believes in servant leadership and culturally relevant reform, was appointed by Governor Ralph Northam as the Commonwealth of Virginia’s first cabinet-level Chief Diversity Officer (CDO). This position is also the first of its kind in the nation. As the Commonwealth’s CDO, she is committed to addressing racial, ethnic, disability, gender-based, and other cultural inequities in formal and informal policies and practices in Virginia state government. As a result, Dr. Underwood is working tirelessly to build the *ONE Virginia* statewide strategic plan for Inclusive Excellence across over 100 state agencies and with other public and private sectors. In her short tenure, she has been named one of “20 Women of Change” in 2020 by the Virginia Museum of History and Culture for the accomplishments and impact she has already had on the Commonwealth. Her goal is to make Virginia an exemplar for the nation, regarding diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence.

Prior to her appointment, Dr. Underwood served as Old Dominion University’s Director of Diversity Initiatives and as the chair of the President’s Task Force on Inclusive Excellence. She previously served as the Executive Director and Co-Principal Investigator for the Old Dominion University Teacher in Residence master’s program. Dr. Underwood also served for a number of years as a national board certified teacher for students with exceptionalities in Hampton City Schools. During her time as a classroom teacher, she served for two terms on the Virginia Advisory Board for Teacher Education and Licensure (ABTEL). As a national expert in the cultural contexts of public education, change management and leadership, and professional development/training, Dr. Underwood works to make the public and private sectors more culturally relevant. In doing so, she prepares professionals from a myriad of fields to meet the demands of working in diverse environments and address difficult truths, such as the school to prison pipeline, the lack of diversity in the workforce, and systemic and institutional bias.

She earned her Bachelor’s (1998) and Master’s (2002) degrees from Hampton University in Psychology and Behavior/Learning Disorders, respectively. In 2015, she earned her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Old Dominion University, where her research focused on culturally relevant pedagogy. She is happily married to Min. Johnnie Underwood and together they have two daughters, Jayla and Jordan.