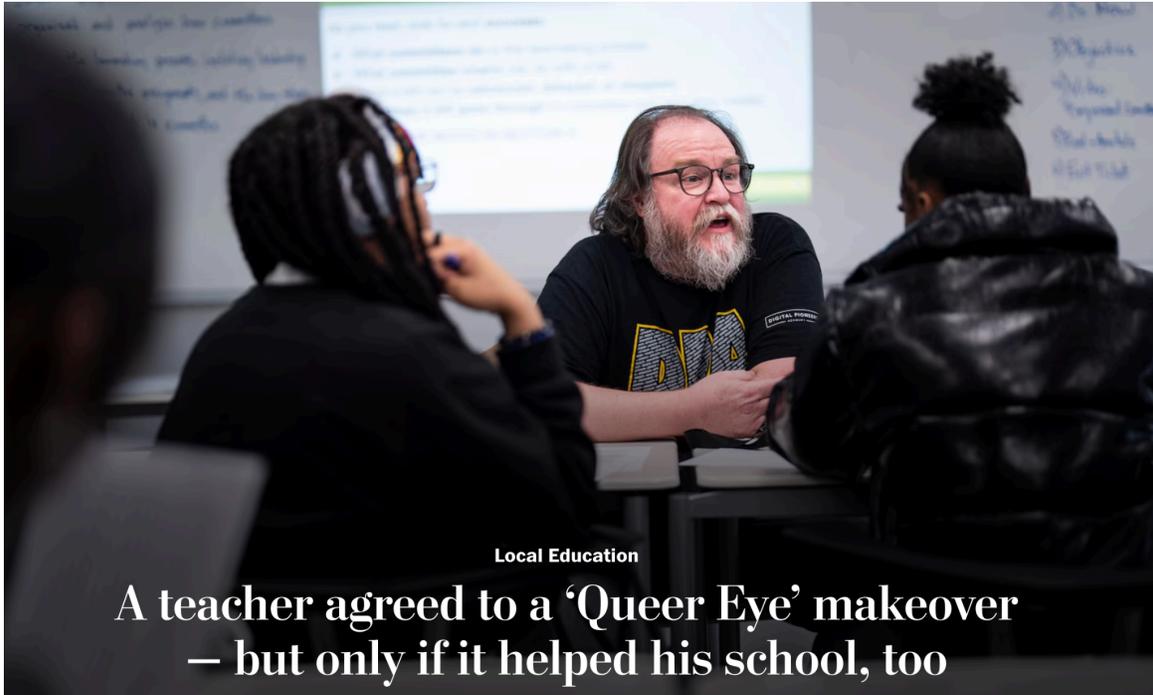


# The Washington Post

## Queer Eye's Fab Five give a D.C. teacher a new look and helps his school.

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By [Jonathan Edwards](#)



Local Education

### A teacher agreed to a 'Queer Eye' makeover — but only if it helped his school, too

*Michael Devereaux, who participated in "Queer Eye," teaches students during his history class at Digital Pioneers Academy High School. (Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)*

Michael Devereaux is the kind of guy who would pass out on an airplane because he puts everyone else's oxygen masks on first.

That brand of self-inflicted altruism made him a beloved father, husband and history teacher at a public charter school. It also turned him into a schlubby dresser with an unruly beard and scraggly, shoulder-length hair he cut once a year.

"He helps everybody else but doesn't take time to help himself," said Roe, the assistant principal of humanities at Digital Pioneers Academy, a charter school in Southeast Washington. "That's just who Mike is."

“Queer Eye” agreed with Roe’s assessment, selecting Devereaux as one of six D.C.-area residents to star in its 10th and final season, which Netflix released Wednesday.

And true to form, amid the pampering and clothes shopping, Devereaux also used his appearance to draw attention toward the pressures facing his profession. Rather than renovate his home, he insisted the show do something to help Digital Pioneers Academy. He also aimed to spotlight educator burnout, emotional strain and the sacrifices teachers make in a high-stakes, low-paying job — particularly in schools serving students affected by gun violence. In the 2022-2023 school year, as Devereaux was interviewing for a position at DPA, four students were fatally shot.

“These teachers are navigating such intense circumstances,” Jeremiah Brent, the Fab Five design expert, said in a cutaway shot that followed a scene in which Devereaux described the mental and emotional toll of working with students who carry trauma into the classroom.

“I just wanted to, like, be really, really clear and say, ‘Well, I don’t want to do this unless, like, the school and the kids can get something out of it,’ ” Devereaux said last week in an interview.



*Devereaux only agreed to appear on the show if it could help his school.  
(Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)*

Devereaux's arrival at DPA marked a midlife career change. For 15 years, he worked as a pastor, shepherding congregations in Minnesota and New York. Over time, he grew dissatisfied with ministry and found himself craving work with more tangible outcomes.

"When you're building a house, the change is evident before you," he said. "It's sort of like that with young people."

He began teaching part time and studying to get his master's in the field. Then, the pandemic hit, scrambling his plans. He bought a rundown RV, fixed it up, loaded his wife, Nicole, and their two daughters, now 17 and 13, inside and spent two years traveling the country's highways and backroads.

When Nicole decided in 2023 to go to law school at American University in D.C., Michael began looking for teaching jobs and came across DPA's website. He was struck by the way founder and CEO Mashea Ashton spoke about education and the school's mission.

"It was clear to me how she's just a visionary leader," he said. "It really appealed to me."

The family moved that July into a two-bedroom apartment in Van Ness.

In three years, Devereaux has become a fixture at the school, though he would never describe himself that way. As a whole, DPA's teachers are deeply committed to students, Roe said, but Devereaux stands out in noticeable ways. He is one of the few who arrives an hour before classes begin and often works 10-hour days. Devereaux said he works for several hours on Sundays to prepare for the week ahead.



*“When you’re building a house, the change is evident before you,” Devereaux said. “It’s sort of like that with young people.” (Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)*

When Roe suggested to Ashton that the school consider participating in the D.C. season of Queer Eye, they considered potential candidates. It did not take long to land on Devereaux, with his ever-present DPA T-shirts, khaki shorts and black socks that would make him right at home at a Doobie Brothers concert.

But there was a deeper reason Roe thought his friend deserved some TLC. In January last year, Devereaux was told an MRI had revealed a brain tumor, triggering weeks of existential crisis before doctors determined the machine had malfunctioned. Soon after, doctors found a tumor in his colon, although he later learned it was benign.

“I had a real rough year,” Devereaux said.

When the Queer Eye opportunity arose, his instinct was to decline. But he followed a newer resolve to “do whatever comes my way and not say no and just see where it takes me.”

On episode 2 of the new season, which is titled “Back to School Burnout,” interior designer Brent works to renovate a teacher’s lounge at DPA. The old room — which during the pandemic was used as an anteroom for coronavirus testing — was cramped, cluttered with supplies, and home to a copy machine and what Queer Eye grooming expert Jonathan Van Ness described as “an all-terrible Keurig machine,” Ashton recalled.

“It’s kind of embarrassing, to be honest, to describe it,” Ashton said Tuesday in an interview.

No one lingered there. Teachers came in to complete a specific task — make coffee, grab supplies, scarf down lunch — and then retreated to their classrooms. Devereaux told the Fab Five that the lounge was a place of transit rather than rest.

In the renovated version, teachers can — and do — actually lounge.



*Devereaux speaks with Digital Pioneers Academy CEO Mashea Ashton in a lounge made over by the “Queer Eye” team. (Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)*

“Queer Eye” also hooked up students. Life coach Karamo Brown donated \$15,000 total to fund scholarships for the 38 students from DPA’s first graduating class who went to college last fall,

Ashton said. He was moved to act after a DPA alum told him an outstanding summer school bill was preventing him from enrolling for the fall semester, she added.

Brown wants the new college students to use the money to overcome those kinds of “last-mile” obstacles that can derail first-generation college students, whether that means buying a laptop, paying an unexpected bill or being able to afford a trip home, Ashton said.

For his part, Devereaux said he loved the experience. Everyone on “Queer Eye,” from the Fab Five to the behind-the-scenes staff, was kind and sincere. They bucked the phoniness he suspects infects most other reality shows, describing the on-screen interactions and emotions as “really authentic, earnest, heartfelt.” He felt a “brotherly vibe” with Brent and has stayed in touch with several people from production.

“There’s something so real and authentic about the relationships for the whole week,” Devereaux said. “It was powerful.”

Tan France, if you’re reading this, stop now. The next part is not for you.

Is he gone? Good.

In the nearly six months since the Fab Five’s fashion expert urged Devereaux to work in blazers and other complexity into his wardrobe, he has largely reverted to his old uniform: clothes chosen for comfort rather than style, Roe said.

What has not regressed is the teachers’ lounge. Unlike the cramped, lifeless pre-“Queer Eye” version, DPA’s teachers hang out in the new one all the time. Away from the stresses and isolation of the classroom, they relax, commiserate and build community.

Wearing his DPA-branded T-shirts, khaki shorts and long black socks that stretch up to his legs, Devereaux is right there with them.