Some photos in this publication were taken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and do not necessarily reflect current health and safety guidelines.

we think.
we dream.
we lead with integrity.
School of Education by the Numbers

Student Enrollment
1,049 undergraduate and graduate students in fall 2021

Alumni Reach
more than 32,000 alumni reside in 87 countries

Giving*
$6.8 million in gifts and pledges
1,923 total donors

2021 Pitt Day of Giving raised more than $65,000 from 347 donors

Research Impact*
$15.6 million in new grant funding
$18 million in active grants from prior years
73 grants awarded to faculty (a record high and a 14% annual increase)

68% success rate in grant proposals (two times better than the University of Pittsburgh average)

* Numbers are from July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021
Message from the Dean

I am excited to share with you my annual update for the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. In light of the ongoing traumatic and difficult times in which we find ourselves, our school remains committed to productive engagements in our teaching, research, and service. We are a community whose common purpose is to work for equity, justice, and innovation in education and human development. The contributions of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, and school district and community partners around the world inspire me to stay committed to igniting learning and striving for well-being for all.

As this report highlights, Pitt Education has made significant progress in the past year. Our school hired exceptional new faculty members to strengthen our programs, introduced several new engagement and programmatic initiatives, and had numerous alumni and students recognized for their positive educational impact.

In particular, I would like to call your attention to the following highlights from the past year:

- Our school received official approval from the University to establish a new four-year undergraduate teacher education program that will provide a pathway to state certification for preservice teachers.

- We were ranked the number-one public graduate school of education in Pennsylvania and 23rd nationally among all public graduate education schools by U.S. News & World Report.

- Our PittEd Justice Collective expanded into a powerful hub for scholars, practitioners, and leaders who continue to think deeply about equity as they work for justice. Together, we held webinars, convened study groups, supported new student research, and engaged with local and national school districts.

Undeniably, I believe that our school’s guiding force is our bold mission-vision, which calls for us to “commit to student, family, and community success”; to “disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures”; and to “address how national, global, social, and technological change impacts learning.” Related to our mission-vision are our cultural drivers; our strategic priorities; and our commitment to create and sustain meaningful partnerships with a variety of people, places, and organizations. I am thrilled to lead our school in these efforts and to collaborate with forward-thinking faculty, staff, students, families, and supporters.

There is much more work that still needs to be done. In the year ahead, we will continue to think together, design together, problem solve together, and more fully implement the promise and potential of the Pitt School of Education.

All my best,

Valerie Kinloch, PhD
Renée and Richard Goldman Dean and Professor
University of Pittsburgh School of Education

1 Based on our independent analysis of the ranking results
School News

Best in the State

The University of Pittsburgh School of Education claimed the top ranking among public institutions in the state of Pennsylvania, according to the 2022 U.S. News & World Report ranking of the country’s top graduate education programs. Overall, Pitt Education improved five spots in the ranking. Nationally, the school is ranked in the top quarter of all public institutions and is 34th among all schools of education.

Making History

The School of Education’s proposal to establish a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree with a major in teacher education has been approved by the University. The new program—to begin in fall 2023—will offer students an undergraduate pathway to teacher certification through the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The BS in teacher education will have six focal areas, five in the secondary (7-12) content areas of mathematics, social studies, science, world (foreign) languages, and English education and one in pre-K-12 special education.

“The creation of our undergraduate degree in teacher certification is indeed a historic moment for our school of education,” says Valerie Kinloch, Renée and Richard Goldman Dean of Pitt Education. “Through this program, our undergraduate students will learn evidence-based and culturally relevant pedagogies; engage in valuable student-teaching experiences; become leaders who contribute to an important profession; and serve as advocates for equity, justice, and inclusion inside classrooms and beyond. It also has the rich potential to productively contribute to diversifying teaching and teacher education.”

The program is expected to increase enrollment at Pitt Education and provide pathways for interdisciplinary study across the University. Furthermore, the program could increase the diversity and accessibility of teacher preparation for current Pitt students, transfer students, and students who are currently underrepresented in the teaching profession. These include students who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other Students of Color; students from low-income backgrounds; and first-generation college students.

Given its potential to attract a different population of students, the program is not expected to have a negative impact on the school’s existing graduate programs in teacher education. Graduate students will continue to receive high-quality instruction and professional opportunities.
Staying Ahead of the Curve

Other new academic programs beginning at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education include the following:

**Master of Education (MEd) in pre-K-12 special education:** Ideal for both preservice teacher education candidates and those switching careers, this program provides certification for teaching special education in prekindergarten through high school. According to Sheila Conway, program coordinator and associate professor of practice at Pitt Education, “Our new MEd in pre-K-12 special education is a game changer for anyone who wants to make a positive difference in the lives of children and work in a field with great career prospects.”

**Online Master of Education in curriculum and instruction:** Aimed at in-service teachers, this continuing education program provides a master’s degree in curriculum development and certification in the Pennsylvania Integrative STEM Education Endorsement program.

**Master of Arts in education policy and Doctor of Philosophy in education policy:** Designed with a focus on equity-driven policy work, these programs examine systems that can contribute to a more just society that supports all students.

**Online infant mental health course:** Our school now offers a continuing education course in a convenient online format that is optimized for working professionals.
Welcome New Faculty

The School of Education added new scholars to its faculty ranks who joined the school community for the 2021-22 academic year.

Assistant Professors

**M. Beatrice Dias** is an assistant professor of digital media, learning, and leadership in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading. For the past eight years, she has held leadership roles in the Community Robotics, Education and Technology Empowerment (CREATE) Lab at Carnegie Mellon University. Dias holds a PhD in engineering and public policy from Carnegie Mellon.

“I want to understand how technology and innovation spaces can be empowered through the wisdom of educators and students whose voices have been largely absent from technology development thus far,” says Dias.

**Heather McCambly** is an assistant professor of critical higher education policy in the Department of Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy. She earned her PhD in human development and social policy from Northwestern University. McCambly has held several policy positions, including most recently as a consultant and project director at the Office of Community College Research and Leadership.

“I try to understand the conditions under which grantmakers actually invest in policies and programs in higher education that disrupt racial inequality rather than reproduce it,” says McCambly.

**Lisa Ortiz** is an assistant professor of language, literacy, and culture in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading. She earned her PhD in educational policy studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. For the past several years, she has worked in postdoctoral positions at the University of Iowa. Her research focuses on migrant experiences of Puerto Ricans in the United States, particularly in rural communities and other contexts.

“Focusing on Puerto Ricans allows me to learn how folks are using knowledge to negotiate similar and different ethno-racial realities related to citizenship, gender, and class in destinations that are not always imagined as having Latinx communities in them,” says Ortiz.
Watufani Poe will join the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading as an assistant professor of language, literacy, and culture in summer 2022. His start date is later because he has been awarded a one-year postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Black Studies at Amherst College. Poe earned his PhD in Africana studies from Brown University. His research focuses on the Black queer diaspora, Black Latin America, and questions of inequality and social movement.

“I want to know what we can learn from Black folks, particularly those written out of the archives and narratives of society, in terms of knowledge production,” says Poe.

Veena Vasudevan is an assistant professor of digital media and learning in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading. She earned her PhD in teaching, learning, and teacher education from the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. She has completed two STEM-oriented postdoctoral experiences with the American Museum of Natural History in New York City and with the New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

“It gives students a window into what real science is and what scientists do,” says Vasudevan.

Hayley Weddle is an assistant professor of education policy in the Department of Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy. She holds a PhD in education from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). After earning her degree, she served as a postdoctoral scholar at UCSD, where she worked on research-practice partnerships with K-12 school and state leaders. Additionally, she served on California’s Recovery with Equity Task Force, a group charged with developing plans for the state higher education system’s response to COVID-19. As a graduate student, she served on the University of California Board of Regents.

“In my research, I study how policies unfold across state and local levels and the equity implications for students,” says Weddle.
New Visiting Professors

Visiting Associate Professor George Barganier, of the San Francisco State University College of Health and Social Sciences, joins the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading. He specializes in the political economy of race and the Black radical tradition, with a special emphasis on criminal justice and gangs.

Visiting Assistant Professor Camilla Bell joins the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading. She holds a PhD in the cultural foundations of education from Syracuse University and, among other areas, specializes in Black women’s embodied pedagogies and family/school/community partnerships.

Visiting Assistant Professor Colleen Eddy joins the Department of Health and Human Development. She holds a PhD in counseling psychology from the University of Missouri.

New Faculty Spotlight: Thomas Ralston

Thomas Ralston is the new director of the Forum for Western Pennsylvania Superintendents at Pitt Education and also will serve as a visiting assistant professor. The forum is an organization that provides professional development, networking support, and other resources to superintendents across Western Pennsylvania. Ralston worked as an educator in Pennsylvania and West Virginia for more than 31 years as a teacher, principal, superintendent, and adjunct professor. Most recently, he was superintendent of the Avonworth School District in the Pittsburgh area for nine years. His responses below have been edited for clarity and length.

What goals do you have for the forum as its director?
“One thing I hope to bring to the forum is reframing our focus on the future of education. Just think about how much education has changed in the last 16 months due to the pandemic. We were forced to change, but if we weren’t forced to change, would we have changed?”

As a former superintendent, how did you benefit from your participation in the forum?
“I have been a member of the forum for a long time, and through it, I have been fortunate to interact with people who helped me to grow as an educator. There’s a lot of power in collaboration and in bringing together school leaders who are innovative, critical thinkers, and action oriented. That’s how you make a difference in the lives of children.”

What did you learn from the pandemic as a school leader?
“The pandemic accentuated inequity and the difference in resources among school districts. We also learned that students and parents are going to want more flexibility going forward. The experience also showed how every child is different, and we must continue to do a better job of personalizing education for every student so that we are in tune with them as learners.”

“I have been a member of the Forum for a long time, and through it, I have been fortunate to interact with people who helped me to grow as an educator. There’s a lot of power in collaboration and in bringing together school leaders who are innovative, critical thinkers, and action oriented. That’s how you make a difference in the lives of children.”

—Thomas Ralston
Leadership Change at Falk School

After leading the Fanny Edel Falk Laboratory School at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education for the past seven years, Jeff Suzik stepped down as its director on June 30, 2021. During his tenure, the K-8 independent school grew its enrollment; created new academic programs; undertook new work in equity, justice, and inclusion; and improved its financial profile. Suzik led these efforts while preserving the progressive and experimental principles of the school.

Following a search for a new director, Jill Sarada, assistant director of elementary learning, was selected as the next director and will begin in the position on July 1, 2022. During the transitional period, she has been leading the school as a co-director along with Joanna Newlin, assistant director of middle school learning. Additionally, Samantha Utley, coordinator of equity, inclusion, and justice, is serving as interim assistant director for student and family engagement.

“I often look to the iconic words of Fred Rogers, who himself was a Falk parent back in the day, at times like these,” says Suzik. “He said that when we think we are at the end of something, we are really at the beginning of something else, and that’s a powerful thing to think about as the next chapter of Falk’s history is drafted.”
Rénée and Richard Goldman Dean Valerie Kinloch was appointed to the board of trustees of her undergraduate alma mater, Johnson C. Smith University, a private historically Black university located in Charlotte, North Carolina. Additionally, Kinloch was selected as a 2021-22 fellow in the American Council of Education leadership program. She also is program chair for the 2021 Annual Convention and president-elect of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). The conference is scheduled for November 18-21, 2021, and its theme is Equity, Justice, and Antiracist Teaching.

Professor and Vice Provost for Graduate Studies Amanda Godley received the 2020 ELATE Richard A. Meade Award from NCTE. The award recognizes outstanding research in teacher development in the area of English and language arts.

Professor Suzanne Lane was appointed to the National Assessment Governing Board. The nonpartisan board is charged with setting policies for education assessment standards, and its members include educators, school officials, governors and state legislators, and business representatives.

Associate Professor Shannon Wanless was elected chair of the Social Emotional Learning Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association. Wanless also serves as director of Pitt Education’s Office of Child Development.

Associate Professor Gina Garcia was selected for the 2021-22 Student Experience Research Network Midcareer Fellows Program. The experience is for equity-minded education scholars who work collaboratively on federal and state policy topics in higher education.

Assistant Professor Karl Kokka received the National Science Foundation Faculty Early Career Development Program award. The award comes with a five-year $996,000 grant for her project, titled Partnering with Teachers and Students to Engage in Mathematical Inquiry about Relevant Social Issues.

Excellence in Student Affairs

Two Pitt Education faculty members received awards in 2021 from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). Associate Professor Darris Means received the NASPA Outstanding Publication Award for his coedited book, “Case Studies for Student Development Theory: Advancing Social Justice and Inclusion in Higher Education.”

Assistant Professor Maximilian Schuster received the NASPA Excellence in Research Award for his article, “An Experience Unlike Any Other: The Experiences of First-year Students with Minoritized Identities with Campus Climate during the 2016 Presidential Election.” The article appeared in the Journal of Diversity in Higher Education in June 2020.
High Praise from the University

Several Pitt Education faculty members received high honors from the University of Pittsburgh during the 2020-21 academic year.

Assistant Professor Lori Delale-O’Connor received a 2021 Chancellor’s Distinguished Teaching Award.

Associate Professor Tom Akiva received a 2021 Provost’s Award for Diversity in the Curriculum in recognition of his work to transform the curriculum of Pitt Education’s Doctor of Education program.

Associate Professor Gina Garcia received a 2020-21 Iris Marion Young Award for Political Engagement in recognition of her work to promote justice in higher education.

Introducing the Inaugural Dean’s Award Winners

In April 2021, Pitt Education honored faculty, staff, and students in the inaugural Dean’s Distinguished Awards Program. Because of the pandemic, the awards covered both the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. Congratulations to the winners:

Dean’s Distinguished Research Award: Associate Professor Gina Garcia

Dean’s Distinguished Service Award: PhD student Xhey Dawkins-Law Evans-El

Dean’s Distinguished Community Engagement/Research Practice Partnership Award: Assistant Professor Esohe Osai

Dean’s Distinguished Undergraduate Student Award: Rachael Stowe

Dean’s Distinguished Graduate Student Award: Aizat Nurshatayeva (PhD ’20) and PhD student Christopher Darby

Dean’s Distinguished Teaching Award: Assistant Professor Kari Kokka

Dean’s Distinguished Mentoring Award: Professor and Vice Provost for Graduate Studies Amanda Godley and Professor Leigh Patel

Dean’s Distinguished Staff Award: Director of Grants Thomas Bost and Admissions and Enrollment Coordinator Shelly Kinsel
Impacting Profession and Practice

Whether in the workforce or in academia, students and alumni from the University of Pittsburgh School of Education are leaders in the field.

Educators Who Change Lives

Lauren Wheeler, a high school physical education teacher in Minneapolis Public Schools in Minnesota, was one of nine finalists for the 2021 Minnesota Teacher of the Year Award. During the pandemic, Wheeler generated national media attention for a virtual boot camp program she created for her students and their families through a partnership with the Minnesota National Guard. Wheeler, who is a student in the Doctor of Education program at Pitt Education, strives to teach her students lifelong healthy behaviors.

“I always tell my students: ‘My class is not gym. A gym is a place, not a class,’ says Wheeler. “A lot of my students are shocked that I make it an academic class.”

Brianna Ross (BS ’14, MEd ’15), a social studies teacher at Deer Park Middle Magnet School near Baltimore, is the winner of the 2021-22 Maryland Teacher of the Year Award. Ross is a graduate of the Combined Accelerated Studies in Education program at Pitt Education. In her classroom, Ross strives to understand and respond with empathy to the experiences of her students, the vast majority of whom are Black or Latinx. She models her behavior after her own kindergarten teacher, Ms. Caruthers, who years ago not only made Ross feel loved, valued, and respected but also challenged her to be her best by setting high expectations and holding her accountable.

“I want my kids to know they are loved. Our work should be grounded in love 100% of the time,” says Ross.

Sarah Palazzi (EdD ’20), a Title I reading specialist, K-6 teacher, and instructional coach in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, is the winner of the 2021 Hollidaysburg Area School District Elementary Educator of the Year award. More than 30 teachers were nominated for this award. Palazzi graduated from the Doctor of Education program at Pitt Education with a concentration in language, literacy, and culture. Her colleagues and parents of her students nominated her for the award. Palazzi also was named to Blair County, Pennsylvania’s 20 Under 40 list a few weeks prior to being named Elementary Educator of the Year.

“I hope that my students leave my classroom knowing that they are loved and that I believe in them,” says Palazzi. “I hope they become lifelong readers, reading for the intrinsic joy it brings them and not just because they have to for their teachers.”
Randal Lutz (BS ´90, MEd ´96, EdD ´04), superintendent of the Baldwin-Whitehall School District near Pittsburgh, will have the new elementary school under construction named after him. Targeted for completion in August 2023, R.A. Lutz Elementary School will serve grades 3-5 with an anticipated enrollment of 1,200 students. Lutz has worked in the district for 25 years. Prior to becoming superintendent, he worked as a middle school vice principal, principal, supervisor of curriculum and instruction and as an assistant superintendent.

“To have the new elementary school named in my honor is really something special. It’s humbling for sure. This is not only the school district I work in, it’s the community I live and grew up in,” says Lutz.
Dissertations That Move the Needle

Alberto Guzman-Alvarez, a PhD student in learning sciences and policy at Pitt Education, received a 2021 dissertation fellowship from the National Academy of Education (NAEd) and the Spencer Foundation. In his work, Guzman-Alvarez seeks to use data analytics as a tool for social justice. His dissertation is meant to bridge the worlds of education research and computer science.

While the new research methods that Guzman-Alvarez is developing are complicated, he is guided by a simple truth in all aspects of his work: “The people behind my work are actual students and are not just numbers. They are more than rows on an Excel sheet,” he says.

Eben Witherspoon (PhD ’19) received the 2021 National Association for Research in Science Teaching Outstanding Doctoral Research Award for his dissertation on gender inequity in medical school. The national award is given annually to one doctoral dissertation that is judged to have the greatest significance in the field of science education. Witherspoon is the third student from Pitt Education to receive the award since its creation in 1992.

In his dissertation research, Witherspoon examined why undergraduate women who plan to enroll in medical school in the United States have a significantly higher level of attrition compared to men.

“There is a lot more than just grades that explain why people make decisions,” says Witherspoon.

Building Bridges through a Common Language

Two recent graduates of the Master of Education in higher education program at Pitt Education have received Fulbright scholarships from the U.S. Department of State.

Lynnea Lombardi (MEd ’21) will travel to Seoul, South Korea, to teach conversational English to students in grades 7-12. “I aspire to use that knowledge in my future career to support Korean international students as they transition to college in the United States,” says Lombardi.

Mackenzie Brown (BS ’17, MEd ’20) is completing her assignment at a university in Laos, a country located in Southeast Asia. She will teach students English while also studying instructional design in the country. “International exchange is important in the scope of instructional design work. We can learn so much from the pedagogy of other cultures, online and in person,” says Brown.
Center for Urban Education Updates

Guided by History

More than 600 people from around the world registered for the 2021 Center for Urban Education Summer Educator Forum, which was held online June 16-19. The conference theme was Forging Futures through Black Educational Histories. There were nine broadcasted talks led by accomplished historians; 22 breakout sessions featuring book studies, discussions, and webinars; and a keynote address delivered by Vanessa Siddle Walker, the Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of African American Educational Studies at Emory University. Additional presenters included faculty members from the University of Pennsylvania; Harvard University; Stanford University; the University of Virginia; the University of Illinois; Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey; Claremont Graduate University; Georgia State University; the University of California, Riverside; and Washington University in St. Louis.

“Our theme invited historians to join us in exploring Black educational imaginations over time as essential to forging futures of self-determination, collective responsibility, and freedom,” said T. Elon Dancy II, executive director of the Center for Urban Education and Helen S. Faison Chair in Urban Education at Pitt Education. “This year’s focus on Black education traditions assumes Blackness as expansive and not a category exclusive of ethnic and cultural realities.”

Visit cue.pitt.edu to watch the session recordings.
Making Math Matter

The Ready to Learn (RTL) program at the Center for Urban Education (CUE) provides after-school tutoring services each year to students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. This past year, 19 mentors from CUE supported approximately 45 Pittsburgh Public Schools students in grades 6-8 on math lessons. To make the experience more engaging, they used an adaptive math software powered by artificial intelligence and challenged their students to apply math concepts to real-world problems. At the end of the school year, students gave presentations on social justice-oriented projects on which they had worked for months. Topics included sweatshop conditions for Nike and Adidas workers, the coronavirus and access to care, systemic racism in policing, school suspensions, and an examination of wage inequality.

“The social justice math presentations are important to the overall RTL program because they help our students to build critical thinking skills and social consciousness by applying math to real-world situations and using data to understand what is happening in the world,” says CUE Director of Special Projects Cassandra Brentley. RTL is funded by the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and the Heinz Endowments.
Community Leisure Learn Update
Thinking Outside the Box

The Pitt’s Kids program at Pitt Education regularly offers an eight-week summer camp for children ages 7-14 at Trees Hall on the University of Pittsburgh campus. However, when operations shifted to a virtual format in 2020 and 2021, Community Leisure Learn Director Kyle Kenia and his team got creative and developed activities that students could complete from the safety of their own homes. While logging in through Zoom, children had a blast completing cooking demonstrations, science experiments, arts and crafts, fitness games, and board games.

“We wanted to see how many activities we could run all from a computer screen that would excite kids and get them to exercise and move while having fun,” says Kenia.

Kyle Kenia
Office of Child Development Update

Traveling on a Racial Journey

In 2018, a small team from the Office of Child Development found themselves asking a question: How can adults who work with children develop racial literacy? The question spanned disciplines, from education and medicine to social work and law, and was without a clear answer. In response, the team, led by Director Shannon Wanless along with Aisha White, Medina Jackson, and Adam Flango, created an answer called My Racial Journey.

Launched at the 2020 University of Pittsburgh Diversity Forum, My Racial Journey is a racial literacy curriculum that seeks to challenge the ways that adults—often unknowingly—participate in racism by developing their basic knowledge and skills about race. The self-guided resource, available at mrj.pitt.edu, is a free tool designed to be an introduction for novices as well as a refresher for seasoned race scholars. Across 10 lessons, participants learn about four progressive ideas: racial humility, racial knowledge, racial communication, and racial beliefs.

The clarity of the message resonated with a global audience. Within the first year, hundreds of people in 20 states and six countries had used My Racial Journey. Participants included school districts in Texas, nonprofits across Pennsylvania, and groups of individuals gathering virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regardless of the setting, My Racial Journey users have found common ground in their dedication to developing racial literacy.

Said one participant who completed My Racial Journey, “I will continue to accept people and fight for their rights and for a better education system that distributes opportunity equally.”
Research with Impact

The University of Pittsburgh School of Education conducts forward-thinking research in teaching and learning; health and human development; and the systems, policies, and organizational cultures underpinning educational structures around the world.

Highlights

- $15.6 million in new grant funding, which is in addition to $18 million in active grant funded research
- 73 grants awarded, a record high and a 14% annual increase
- 68% success rate in grant proposals, which is more than two times better than the University average
- 29 faculty members with newly awarded grants

* Figures are for fiscal year 2021

Top Funding Agencies

- National Science Foundation
- U.S. Department of Education
- National Institutes of Health
- Spencer Foundation
- Heinz Endowments

Community Support

Family Foundations Early Head Start ($4.3 million from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) provides comprehensive child development and family support services to low-income families who have children from birth to age 3 and are located within under-resourced neighborhoods in the greater Pittsburgh area.

Transforming Teacher Education

Pitt Education received a $2 million grant from the McElhattan Foundation to develop a new and more effective model for teaching and teacher preparation programs in schools and universities. With this new model, preservice teachers will continue to learn pedagogy and complete student teaching placements in K-12 schools. Additionally, they will complete learning experiences infused with elements of Black knowledge traditions and social justice. They will participate in diverse, multigenerational study groups referred to as micro-collectives. The micro-collectives will match them with an undergraduate student, a high school student, an in-service teacher, and an experienced Black educator.

“We understand that schools of education are the gateway to the teaching profession,” says Valerie Kinloch, professor and Renée and Richard Goldman Dean of Pitt Education. “Focusing on freedom and transformation will allow us to think differently about teaching and teacher education, what it is, and what it can become. Freedom allows us to truly commit ourselves to the work of equity and justice instead of simply placing the focus on inclusion and yet never getting beyond inclusion to reach transformation.”

The other coprincipal investigators on the project are T. Elon Dancy II, executive director of the Center for Urban Education and Helen S. Faison Chair in Urban Education, and Sabina Vaught, professor and inaugural chair of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading.

Another goal of this initiative is to increase the number of pre- and in-service Black teachers and, by extension, other Teachers of Color. In the state of Pennsylvania, Black teachers constitute only 4% of the total teacher population. This is problematic because, relative to white classmates, Students of Color with white teachers are far more likely to face disciplinary measures or to be misclassified in the educational system.

The project is titled Practices of Freedom: A Model for Transformative Teaching and Teacher Education. Work began in summer 2021 and will continue through June 2025.
Alumni Reach

2021 Distinguished Alumni Award Winners

The School of Education recognized members of the school community for their transformative work in the field of education in a virtual ceremony held on March 25, 2021. The information on award recipients was accurate at the time of the awards.

Distinguished Alumni Awards

Isabel L. Beck (BS ’53, MEd ’64, PhD ’73) is a professor emerita in Pitt Education and a senior scientist at the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh. Her academic, research, and professional contributions span the major areas of reading, including decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Linda Rose Frank (PhD ’90) is a professor in the Department of Infectious Diseases in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. She has been on the front lines of fighting the HIV epidemic since 1988, providing training, consultation, and technical assistance to organizations, clinics, and programs.

Distinguished Early Career Awards

Seth A. Creasy (MS ’13, PhD ’16) is an assistant professor in the Division of Endocrinology, Metabolism, and Diabetes at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus.

Jasmine D. Williams (MS ’14, PhD ’18) is a senior research scientist at the Committee for Children in Seattle, Washington.

Distinguished Pre-K-12 Educator Awards

Virginia R. Hill (EdD ’14) is the founding principal of the Environmental Charter School high school in Pittsburgh.

Janet Marie Sardon (MEd ’99, EdD ’03) is superintendent of the Yough School District in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.

Departmental Awards

Administrative and Policy Studies
Mary Catherine Reljac (EdD ’16) is superintendent of the Fox Chapel Area School District in Pittsburgh.

Health and Physical Activity
Niall M. Moyna (PhD ’93) is a professor in health and human performance at Dublin City University in Dublin, Ireland.

Instruction and Learning
Rebecca S. Pringle (BA ’76) is president of the National Education Association, the labor union for educators.

Psychology in Education
Cynthia J. Popovich (MS ’84, EdD ’16) is a retired professor who taught for 21 years at the Pitt School of Education.

Student Leadership Award
Sarah E. Kurz is a third-year PhD student in the higher education program and was president of the Council of Graduate Students in Education at Pitt Education.

Outstanding Alumni PhD Dissertation Award
Rachel Anne Schles (PhD ’20) is an assistant professor of practice and coordinator of the Visual Disabilities Program at the Peabody College of Education at Vanderbilt University.

Outstanding Alumni EdD Dissertation Award
Julia Adele Cavallo (EdD ’20) is the director of assessment and institutional research and a lecturer at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.
In her home country of Kuwait, Salwa Aljassar (PhD ’91) has devoted her career to improving public education from kindergarten through higher education and to advancing the workplace rights of women.

In 2009, she became one of the first women elected to the parliament of Kuwait and served in office until 2015. As a legislator, she led committees on health, social work, and women’s rights. Aljassar worked to pass more than a dozen laws that supported women in work. The legislation expanded maternity leave from two months with full pay to 100 days with full pay, plus an additional three months with half pay and up to a full year without payment.

“One of my most memorable experiences and accomplishments in life is being part of the University of Pittsburgh family. The changes I have led in my country could not have been possible without the education and mentorship I received from Pitt,” says Aljassar.

Aljassar earned her PhD in curriculum, instruction, and learning. At the time of her graduation, her country had been invaded by Iraq’s military, which sparked the Gulf War. When she returned home, the country was in critical need of public education reform.

Today, Aljassar is a professor in the Kuwait University College of Education. Aljassar previously served on the national committee for curriculum development and teachers’ training for all K-12 public education in Kuwait. Under her leadership, schools introduced English as a second language and began its instruction in the first grade.

“Education is one of mankind’s most fundamental pillars. This is why I have devoted my life to this career, and I continue to learn something new every day,” says Aljassar.

A Pitt-Powered Hub for Networking

All members of the School of Education community can sign up for Pitt Commons, the University of Pittsburgh’s online community for networking and professional development. Alumni and students can join the Pitt Education group and/or other groups across the University. Similar to LinkedIn, Pitt Commons is an online community that offers access to the profiles of thousands of Pitt alumni, current students, faculty, and staff. Alumni can use it to advance their own careers and to help young professionals who are just starting out.

Create your account:
1. Visit commons.pitt.edu.
2. Create your profile.
3. Join the Pitt Education group by searching for School of Education.
4. Search for other members with whom you want to connect.
Philanthropy and Giving

There are numerous ways to support the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. For more information, contact Michael B. Haas, Pitt Education director of development and alumni affairs, at mbh26@pitt.edu or 412-648-1789.

Types of Giving:

- Cash gifts online or by mail
- Planned giving trusts
- Real estate gifts
- Employer matching gifts
- Stocks or securities
- In-kind gifts

Funding Priorities:

- Student scholarships and resources
- Faculty fellowships and chairs
- Initiatives of centers and institutes
- Building and facility improvements

A New Fund for Justice

Pitt Education has created a new fund to support the school’s PittEd Justice Collective. Gifts to the fund support a variety of initiatives committed to equity, justice, and antiracism. Created on June 1, 2020, the PittEd Justice Collective is a working group that seeks to engage students, faculty, staff, alumni, school district, and community partners in efforts to advocate and work for justice in teaching and learning spaces. Learn more at education.pitt.edu/justice.

Giving Spotlight:

Giving When It Counts the Most

Renée K. Goldman (MEd ’65) and Richard M. Goldman (MEd ’66, PhD ’70) made history in 2014 when they gave a $3 million gift to establish an endowed dean’s chair in their name at Pitt Education. In January 2020, on the brink of the pandemic, the Goldmans took the extraordinary step of paying off the balance of their cash gift early.

“Our goal is to be a role model to encourage other donors at Pitt to do the same in this climate, if they are able,” says Richard Goldman, a member of the school’s Board of Visitors.

The Renée and Richard Goldman Dean’s Chair supports the salary, professional development, recruitment, expenses, and other scholarly activities of the dean of the Pitt School of Education. It also provides broad financial support for areas of greatest need and strategic importance across the school.

The Goldmans have made other important gifts to Pitt Education. In 2013, they established the Richard M. and Renée K. Goldman Educational Entrepreneurial Fund with a $50,000 gift to support the development of online programming in the area of educational entrepreneurship. Additionally, the Goldmans fund an annual $2,500 award to a student in the school who has overcome barriers in their education.

Keeping the Music Going

This past academic year, the Fanny Edel Falk Laboratory School faced a crisis in music education. During the pandemic, students could not play instruments with mouthpieces because of mask requirements. There were not enough other instruments for all students, and students could not share instruments because of social distancing. Fortunately, Betsy Levine-Brown and Marc Brown stepped up to solve that problem: They made a gift that allowed the school to purchase authentic African drum sets for use by elementary school students. The instruments quickly became student favorites. Many happy days were filled with students thumping on the drums and dancing to the beat.

“The drums disguise what I would otherwise say are boring music theory lessons,” says Maria Sassani, a longtime music teacher at the school. “My students picked up a lot more this year by having something immersive to bang on and interact with versus only watching a video or reading about it.”

The Browns are the proud parents of two adult children who are Falk alumni: Andrew, age 29, and Rebecca, age 26. Previous gifts by the Browns also supported arts education at Falk in the form of a kiln, an upright electric Yamaha piano, a mixing console for musical performances, and a portable public address system for large school assemblies.

“Falk gave our kids an opportunity to appreciate learning and to be themselves. I think those two things are a gift,” says Marc Brown.
Pitt Education Mission-Vision

**We ignite learning.** We strive for well-being for all. **We teach.** We commit to student, family, and community success. We commit to educational equity. We advocate. **We work for justice.** We cultivate relationships. We forge engaged partnerships. We collaborate. We learn with and from communities. **We innovate and agitate.** We pursue and produce knowledge. **We research.** We disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures. We approach learning as intertwined with health, wellness, and human development. **We address how national, global, social, and technological change impacts learning.** We shape practice and policy. We teach with and for dignity. **We think.**

**We dream.** **We lead with integrity.** We are the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh.