

# PittEd

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
SUMMER 2024

## Creating New Pathways into Education

Renée and Richard Goldman  
Dean Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher's  
vision for the University of  
Pittsburgh School of Education  
is sparking action



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# PittEd

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The University of Pittsburgh is an affirmative action, equal opportunity institution. Published in cooperation with the Office of University Communications and Marketing. 114557-0824



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## MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

During the 2023–24 academic year, I served as the University of Pittsburgh School of Education's Renée and Richard Goldman Interim Dean. I agreed to serve in this role after my dear friend and colleague, the fabulous Valerie Kinloch, stepped down to become president of her alma mater, Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Throughout the year, I lightheartedly shared that I would be in service as the substitute teacher. I was often asked if I was interested in being the permanent dean. I would reply that I was leading the class temporarily.

Yet, I realized I had a vision for the school's future and wanted to continue moving the school forward. Subsequently, I decided to put my name in the running and apply for the position. Following a comprehensive national search, I was selected to become the next Renée and Richard Goldman Dean of the School of Education on May 1, 2024.

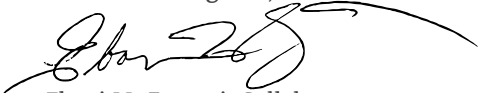
I am humbled, honored, and incredibly excited to serve as your dean, and I look forward to working together to further the mission-vision of the School of Education. In that vein, I am proud of what the School of Education has achieved during the past academic year. The following are among the highlights in this edition of PittEd magazine:

- A team of faculty members is grappling with big questions about the impact of generative AI tools like ChatGPT on the future of education (see page 11).
- A partnership with Pitt that offers community-based tutoring is poised to grow (see page 26).
- Alumnus Dennis Floyd Jones is working with Pittsburgh youths to reduce gun violence (see page 30).

Additionally, I've begun to outline my initial priority areas for the school. I encourage you to read the article on page 20 for information on these emerging possibilities, pathways for innovation, and forms of equity in education.

The past academic year has been an unforgettable experience, and I treasure the moments I have had to be in fellowship with our wonderful school community. I look forward to serving the School of Education as your dean.

With best regards,



Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher  
Renée and Richard Goldman Dean  
University of Pittsburgh School of Education





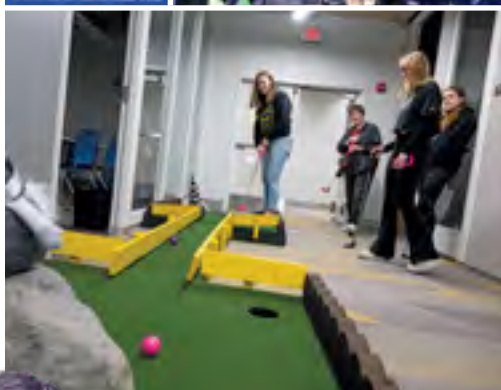
## Building Community One Event at a Time

■ BY GREG LATSHAW

Every year, the University of Pittsburgh School of Education calendar is packed with student events organized by staff and faculty. Activities include social functions, arts and cultural outings, and professional development. Jorden King, the school's assistant director of student and career services, strives to create events that strengthen a feeling of belonging among students and push them toward academic and professional success. The event planning requires creative thinking and teamwork. One afternoon this past February, the student services team went so far as to convert its office space into a mini golf course for students. For a few hours, students forgot the dreary winter weather as they played on the makeshift course, complete with lawn gnomes, bridges, lights, and tiny pencils for keeping score. The activity was one of the many offered to enrich the student experience.

### Highlights from 2023-24

"The Power of Moments" schoolwide read, 2024 Spring Commencement, student orientation, alumni panels on various career subjects, plant-potting event with City Grows Pittsburgh, homecoming festivities, attending a performance of "Mamma Mia!," painting and arts and crafts night, and a mini golf course in Wesley W. Posvar Hall







## Meet the Team



### Jorden King (MEd '22)

Hometown:  
New Kensington,  
Pennsylvania

Job Title: Assistant  
Director of Student and  
Career Services

#### What do you enjoy most about your job?

"I enjoy building community with students while also working with them to determine what I can do to help them feel like they belong and that they're supported in their career aspirations."



### Ella Tenido

Hometown: St. Helens, Oregon

Program: Master of Education in  
higher education student

Roles: Graduate student assistant  
for Student Services, event planning,  
student e-newsletter, and  
coordinating with Pitt Education  
Student Ambassadors

#### What are your goals after graduation?

"I plan to move back to Oregon to be closer to family and to work at a university for a little while, perhaps in first-year experiences or admissions, before I pursue a doctoral degree."





## Top EdD Program

The Doctor of Education (EdD) program at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education was named the 2023 EdD Program of the Year by the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate. Claiming the top spot among 140 programs nationwide, the Pitt EdD program was recognized for its comprehensive commitment to using equity, justice, and improvement science to guide scholarly practitioners.

“It was especially gratifying to receive this honor because we really have changed our program. It is very different from what it was five years ago,” says Tom Akiva, associate professor and former director of the EdD program. For the 2023 award, institutions submitted nominations to demonstrate how they made programmatic changes to transform their EdD degree.



## Curriculum Makeover

Associate Professor Linda DeAngelo received a 2023 University of Pittsburgh Provost’s Award for Diversity in the Curriculum for a curriculum makeover she gave to an institutional planning course she teaches in the school’s EdD program. The course, which is taken by many senior-level higher education administrators, was redesigned to approach collegiate strategic planning from a framework that emphasizes equity, justice, and inclusion.

“My research and commitments to equity and justice as a scholarly leader informed my approach to teaching and learning in this course and its modification,” says DeAngelo.



## Community Connection



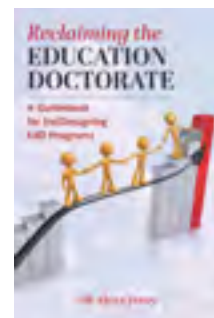
Assistant Professor Khirsten Scott received the 2024 Ernest A. Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement from Campus Compact. The national award recognizes early career faculty for their engaged scholarship through teaching and research. Scott’s work spans multiple organizations and initiatives. She is director of the School of Education’s Western Pennsylvania Writing Project, which improves the teaching and learning of writing by working with teachers and students. Additionally, she is the lead organizer of the HYPE (Homewood Youth-Powered and Engaged) Media digital literacy program for high school girls at Pittsburgh Westinghouse Academy 6–12 and is the cofounder and director of Digital Black Lit(–eracies and –eratures) and Composition.

“What brings these projects together is the emphasis on cultivating and sustaining networks of learners,” says Scott.

## Hot Off the Press

Professor Jill Perry has written a book on the education doctorate. Perry, who teaches in the school’s EdD program, is author of “Reclaiming the Education Doctorate: A Guidebook for (re)Designing EdD Programs.” Providing a step-by-step tool kit for university officials seeking to improve their EdD programs, the book touches on graduate outcomes, milestones, and admissions.

“This book serves as a practical guide for faculty and higher education administrators,” says Perry, who also is executive director of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate.



## CAREER Award

Assistant Professor Xu Qin received a 2024 National Science Foundation Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) Award in recognition of her educational research methods using causal mediation analysis and multilevel modeling. Her advanced statistical methods have applications in developmental, educational, and health research.







## Center for Urban Education Celebrates 20 Years

■ BY KAITLYN ZURCHER

In reflecting on the 20th anniversary of the University of Pittsburgh School of Education Center for Urban Education (CUE), Executive Director T. Elon Dancy II thinks about the broad relational impacts the center has had in the Pittsburgh community and beyond.

“The relationships we have with community residents, youths, faculty, and students have shaped every aspect of our work processes and outcomes,” says Dancy. “They are the core of the center’s impact.”

CUE hosted a wide range of events to celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2023, including a virtual documentary film screening; a two-day hybrid writing retreat; and a retrospective panel conversation with Dancy, CUE past directors Louis Gomez and H. Richard Milner IV, and former Pitt Education dean Alan Lesgold.

Additionally, CUE’s signature Summer Educator Forum honored the anniversary by focusing on memory, futures, and freedom relative to educational practice and communal responsibility. The 2023 sessions included conversations with mothers who had lost children to state violence, discussions on combatting racism in learning environments, and a daylong workshop on using the University Library System’s August Wilson Archive for research and teaching.

“The depth and breadth of our programming is owed to our creative team, which is devoted to collaborative work,” says Dancy. “Our programs are well attended because people understand these conversations to be important and relevant, and they push their understanding of what

urban education is. To that extent, CUE is not only an important research center, it’s an intellectual center.”

The anniversary year also included a self-study in which the CUE team met once a month to raise questions about the center’s purpose, practices, and goals and to think deeply about those questions.

“The self-study was an opportunity to rethink our mission and principles,” says Dancy. “As we look ahead, the center has become more focused on deep study as a praxis for transforming urban education.”

In turning an eye toward the future, CUE has established a strategy council comprising Pittsburgh-area educators, advocates, and community partners who will help to shape the center’s work.

“The strategy council will provide another level of support and thoughtfulness for our work,” says Dancy. “Getting feedback from them will help us understand what they feel is important for us to be thinking about and will introduce possibilities for collaboration.”

Dancy also is excited about CUE’s work with Pitt Education’s urban education programs and developing new ways to enhance students’ learning experiences.

“The center has always maintained a robust research agenda that is signified by both the faculty and students whose research questions are shaping the way we think about urban education,” says Dancy. “As these questions have gotten more diverse, the contribution of the center has broadened, which is exciting.” ■

## Fast Facts

- Each year, CUE’s MathUp Connections program helps more than 60 middle school students learn math through a literacies approach.
- Since 2020, CUE has partnered with retired teachers to deliver quality tutoring to nearly 100 K-12 youths across Pittsburgh.
- CUE has been the home institution for three prominent academic journals: *Urban Education*, *Educational Researcher*, and *Negro Educational Review*.
- A forthcoming book with the University Press of Kentucky will examine Black freedom struggles and anti-carcerality in urban Appalachia. It is cowritten by Pitt Education faculty members T. Elon Dancy II, Lori Delale-O’Connor, and Sabina Vaught; CUE Community Engagement Program Manager Christy McGuire; and former CUE postdoctoral fellow Juwan Bennett.

# Teacher Travels from Romania to Pittsburgh

■ BY GREG LATSHAW

Anda Iacob's teaching journey took her far from home. A native of Romania, she moved to Pittsburgh in 2023 to earn a master's degree in teaching the German language and culture.

Completing the 10-month program would fulfill her dream of becoming a certified teacher in the United States. But it required leaving her family behind and temporarily being separated from her husband of seven years. While it was a difficult experience, Iacob (MAT '23) was so busy with her full course load and student teaching placement in the Mt. Lebanon School District that there wasn't time to dwell on it.

"You don't have any life for one year," says Iacob with a chuckle. "But after one year, it is very rewarding. You have the experience and a master's degree in the United States, which makes you stand out."

Iacob is from Timisoara, a city in western Romania with a population of approximately 251,000 people. The area is home to more than 20 ethnic groups, and Iacob describes it as a "very multicultural city" and a "good place to live in compared to other places" in Romania, where issues of poverty, political corruption, and inadequate health care are more common.

When she applied to the University of Pittsburgh, Iacob was working as a German teacher at the German Cultural Center in Timisoara, a language

school accredited by the Goethe-Institut. To pursue her dream of obtaining a master's degree in the United States, she and her husband decided to sell their apartment to finance her education. While researching graduate schools, Pitt jumped out as her top choice. She liked that the program had a practice-based approach that prepares students to do the work of teaching while also explaining the theoretical foundations behind it.

"This was a master's degree I found with the teaching placement I wanted. Then I saw the Cathedral of Learning and I found that building so interesting. I said, 'This is the place I want to go. This is the only place.'"

Iacob enjoyed a smooth transition into the School of Education due to the school's welcoming environment.

"For me, it was very easy because I had already moved so many times. I like to travel and I like to learn new things—that's why it was so easy to me. [Completing] the master's degree was harder than adjusting to the United States," she says.

Iacob also felt right at home in Pittsburgh.

"It's a small city similar to [the] town where I grew up and where my grandparents are from. The people are very friendly and kind—everyone likes to help," says Iacob.



Anda Iacob in a Bavarian traditional dress



## Foundations in World and Heritage Language Education

Assistant Professor Heather Hendry Annegan, coordinator of the school's world and heritage language education programs, recalls Iacob as being "a joy to teach."

"Anda is a talented teacher. Everything we introduced in our course work she was able to seamlessly implement in her German teaching. She shifted her instruction from more traditional approaches to teaching language and embraced the approaches introduced in our classes," says Hendry Annegan. "I thought it was admirable how she left everything she owned, her home and her family, to be here and learn. It showed her dedication to be here as an educator."

While Iacob enrolled in the Master of Arts in Teaching program, most international students who study foreign languages in the School of Education choose the Master of Education degree, says Hendry Annegan, because they don't plan on earning Pennsylvania teaching certification. The teaching certification is required to teach in American public schools but isn't required in private schools or in the students' home countries.

"The world and heritage language education programs are an asset to our school of education. Our programs bring cultural diversity through our enrollment and curricular focus. We encourage students to think differently about education, to think more broadly, and to address educational issues with a global perspective," says Hendry Annegan.

### The Next Step in Her Journey

After graduating from Pitt, Iacob moved to Houston, Texas, to take a job as a high school German teacher. Her husband received a temporary visa, allowing him to join her there.

"After I graduated, I got so many job offers. The Pennsylvania teaching certification is great—it allows you to work anywhere in the United States," says Iacob.

Iacob enjoys her job, where she teaches grades 9–12 and German Advanced Placement courses, and likes living in the Houston area, but her work visa will expire at the end of July 2024. If she does not find a school to sponsor her visa, she and her husband will have to leave the United States.

"After finishing the master's program, I got one year to work in the United States. I would like to stay because I like it very much. I hope to be able to find another job," says Iacob. ■



## About Romania



**19M** Population: Approximately 19 million people



**Capital City:**  
Bucharest



**Official language:**  
Romanian, a Romance language similar to Italian

### Creating a Home Away from Home

The International Student Peer Network is a student-created, student-led organization that offers social and academic support to international School of Education students.

The school formed a global working group of faculty and staff whose goal is to further improve the experiences of international students.

The school's Institute for International Studies in Education gives students opportunities for scholarly research in the field of international development and global education.

### Multicultural Mixing Pot

The School of Education is home to students from 23 countries. Alumni from the world and heritage language education program have come from countries that include China, Colombia, Japan, Jordan, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Syria, Tibet, Thailand, and Taiwan.

### World Heritage and Language Education Programs

The School of Education offers foreign language and cultural education through its world heritage and language education programs. Degrees offered are a Master of Arts in Teaching and a Master of Education degree.

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

During the pandemic in 2020, Jennifer Ponce Cori's first term at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education as a Fulbright scholar in the Master of Education program in social and comparative analysis in education began online at her home in San Juan de Lurigancho, a district in Lima, Peru. But since arriving in Pittsburgh, she has fully embraced the student experience, becoming president of the Latin American Graduate Organization of Students, serving as secretary of the Council of Graduate Students in Education, and connecting with prospective students as a student ambassador. Her contributions to the Pitt Education community earned her the 2024 Dean's Distinguished Graduate Student Award. Now pursuing a PhD in education policy, the Equity and Justice scholar is looking forward to using her education to give back to her community.







# FROM PERU TO PITT

■ Y KAITLYN ZURCHER

Responses have been edited for length and clarity.

## What inspired you to pursue a PhD in education policy?

**Jennifer Ponce Cori:** I have a background in political science and community organizing and have worked with children, adolescents, and women in urban peripheral communities in Peru. During my master's program, I learned how to understand policy issues regarding education in the United States, which gave me frameworks that I can adapt in international contexts. In terms of research, I'm interested in many topics, and I'm taking the path of a three-paper dissertation so I can explore different interests.

## What research areas are you interested in exploring?

**Ponce Cori:** One is connected to urban community-based museums in Latin America and how they connect with the schools, students, and community organizers they serve. These museums are not just places that display objects or artifacts but are places where people can learn about local identity and hear stories about discrimination and resistance. I'm also interested in Indigenous pedagogies and decolonial frameworks as well as civic education in Latin American countries. With all these topics, I'm interested in how what is taught in the classroom is connected to local issues and how the local can inform regional, national, and international policies.

## What are your career goals after you earn your PhD?

**Ponce Cori:** My long-term goal is connected to my love for my community and my country. I want to create a nonprofit organization that researches education access and opportunities in a local context. I would love to offer a co-learning space for people to pursue their dreams, work on projects for their communities, or find ways to improve their education. The PhD program is helping me to think through how I can achieve that goal. In the short term, I would also like to experience working for an international organization so I can develop a lens that will help me better understand the big picture in terms of education policy and projects on a larger scale.

## What advice do you have for future international students?

**Ponce Cori:** I would tell them to start by reaching out to a student ambassador or another current international student in the program they are interested in. Having a conversation to learn more about their experience in the program and at Pitt in general is helpful. They can also join a group like our school's International Student Peer Network or one of the many cultural student groups to be part of a community. They should also find ways to engage with the broader Pitt campus and Pittsburgh itself. It's a beautiful city with a lot of different events and opportunities. ■



Jennifer Ponce Cori







# the Long read:



## GRAPPLING WITH AI AND EDUCATION



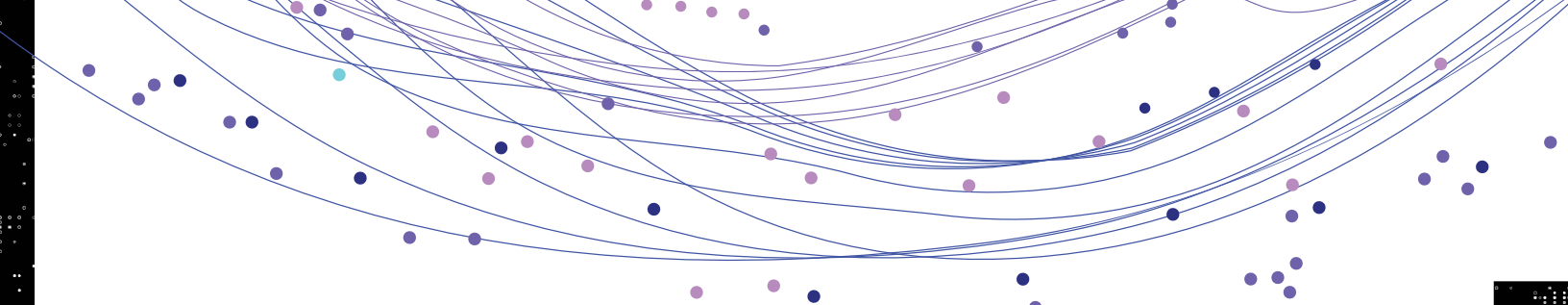
■ BY GREG LATSHAW

This past Valentine's Day, a group of technology-curious people from across the University of Pittsburgh met to ponder a big question: What does it mean to be human in a world where artificial intelligence (AI) is proliferating?

One participant shared her breaking point: "If my boyfriend sends me a text that ChatGPT wrote for him, I will break up with him."

That scenario, unthinkable a few years ago, is now reality.

The discussion was part of the Pitt School of Education project *Grappling with AI, Education, and Our Speculative Futures*. Faculty members M. Beatrice Dias and Tinukwa Boulder and Pittsburgh-area educator Michelle King led four study groups this past academic year that brought together students, faculty, staff, and community members to wrestle with thought-provoking questions at the intersection of education, AI, and humanity.



Among the topics they studied: What is the nature of intelligence attributed to machines? How are safety and power dynamics encoded in technology? What are the hidden labor and costs associated with AI? How might people imagine humanity's collective futures?

"The way technology is incorporated into education is often absent of teacher voices and student voices," says Dias, an assistant professor. "Typically, technology is incorporated into schools based on economic and technological trends—the 'latest and greatest.' But those aren't pedagogical decisions. I have always wanted to think about being intentional about technology."

These days, the unquestioned latest and greatest in technology is anything to do with AI. Bloomberg Intelligence estimates that the AI market will grow to \$1.3 trillion over the next 10 years, up from a market size of \$40 billion in 2022. NVIDIA Corporation, a United States-based semiconductor maker whose chips power artificial intelligence tools, doubled in value this year and is among the world's most valuable companies in the S&P 500, along with Microsoft and Apple Inc.

Generative AI programs like OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, and Microsoft's Copilot are sweeping across K-12 and college classrooms. Proponents see them as cutting-edge tools to improve learning, while critics raise concerns over ethics, data security, and labor displacement when computer-generated content is becoming unrecognizable from human-generated content. The effects are rippling across the School of Education and Pitt.

"The folks who get to make decisions about AI tend to be tech

folks, but educators are often left out of this space," says Boulder, who is the director of innovative technologies and online learning and associate chair of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading at Pitt Education. "Through the study series, we wanted to create a place for educators to talk about what we know about AI, how we are experiencing it, and what questions we have."

#### POLICY QUESTIONS AT PITT

While Dias, Boulder, and King were offering their AI series, faculty members in the School of Education were adapting to its growing presence in their classrooms.

A fall 2023 report by Tyton Partners found that about half of higher education students use generative AI, but less than a quarter of faculty members use it. The study involved more than 1,000 faculty members and 1,600 college students from across the country.

The University of Pittsburgh does not have a universal policy on the use of generative AI tools like ChatGPT in the classroom, says John Radzilowicz, director of pedagogy, practice, and assessment at the University Center for Teaching and Learning. This tracks with other universities nationwide. An Inside Higher Ed survey of more than 330 colleges and universities released in April 2024 found that only one in five institutions has policies in place governing the use of AI.

This past academic year, Radzilowicz cochaired the University's first-ever ad hoc committee on generative AI in education. Made up of more than 30 faculty members, staff members,

students, and administrators from across the University, the group was charged with providing a report to the provost and senior vice chancellor for research with recommendations on how Pitt should move forward with AI process, policy, and long-term strategy. The committee's final report is expected to be shared with the Pitt community shortly.

"Whether you like it or don't like it, AI is here to stay," says Radzilowicz. "We have to figure out what that means to us as an institution. Things like ignoring it or banning it have never been good policy approaches for things like this. We strongly suggest we embrace it and manage it rather than see it as a problem."

Among the concerns Radzilowicz cites are issues around equal access, privacy, and data security. However, those concerns are outweighed by Pitt's responsibility to prepare students for a world in which AI is a key force.

"I see it as an obligation: It's what the University owes its students," he says.

Annette Vee is an associate professor of English and director of the Composition Program at Pitt. She studies AI, digital media, and forms of automated writing and is the author of a forthcoming monograph titled "Automating Writing," which traces humans' attempts to automate writing and intelligence dating back to the 18th century.

"For me, as somebody who studies writing, AI is raising interesting questions about what writing is for," says Vee. "It's important as educators to think about how we are using writing."





M. Beatrice Dias, Michelle King, and Tinukwa Boulder



Vee helped to develop two policies around AI for her department within the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences. There is a policy for faculty and instructors who wish to forbid the use of generative AI entirely and a policy for those who wish to allow its limited use with disclosure. Both policies emphasize the responsibility writers have for their work, regardless of the technologies used to produce it.

With the help of colleagues, Vee has surveyed hundreds of undergraduate students in composition classes to get their feelings on the use of AI in their classes. Although the students represent many different majors across Pitt, they felt the same way: They want clear guidelines from Pitt, and they don't want to cheat.

"I think for the most part, Pitt students really want to do the right thing. They pay a lot to be here, they're earnest, they want to learn as they earn their degree," says Vee.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Across the University, some faculty members have embraced generative AI tools like ChatGPT.

Among those keeping an open mind is Cassie Quigley, professor and chair of the Department of

Teaching, Learning, and Leading in the School of Education. She recalls reading an article that compared the sudden emergence of ChatGPT—and people's fears around it—to when the graphing calculator first came out in the 1980s. Some teachers then wanted to ban the calculators from the classroom, and others asked if it was still necessary to teach math. However, nowadays, the graphing calculator is calmly accepted in math classes.

"I think that can be a good approach with AI," says Quigley. "We should help students understand what it is so [they] can know its limitations and the risk involved and also [should be] teaching them how to use it."

Within Quigley's department, the use of generative AI tools is governed by the rules of academic integrity.

Assistant Professor Loretta Fernandez uses an AI-powered software program called Packback to supercharge student discussion boards in her master's courses in foreign language education. The software gives students feedback, including a curiosity score, on both the questions they generate and the quality of their responses.


"What I notice is that the production of my students improved, not only in terms of grammar

but also in terms of the academic language used in the answers," says Fernandez.

Writing outputs are the tip of the iceberg for generative AI technology. Many tools also exist to generate machine-created images. While the results were originally clunky, the technology is getting better every day, making it more difficult to tell what was made by a human and what was made by a computer. This technology has given rise to "deepfakes," which are AI-generated images or videos of things that never happened.

Alison Langmead, director of the Visual Media Workshop at Pitt, received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities related to teaching art history with AI. She is working with 10 educators to help them integrate synthetic image generators into their large undergraduate lectures in art history. The goal is for students to see what AI can do and what it can't.

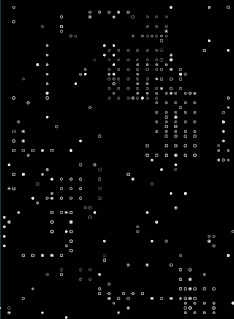
"Learning precisely how computers supposedly produce images serves as a very good foil against which you can see how humans produce it," says Langmead, who holds joint appointments in the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences and School of Computing and Information.



“ THE FOLKS WHO GET TO  
MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT  
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ARE OFTEN LEFT OUT OF  
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PLACE FOR EDUCATORS  
TO TALK ABOUT  
WHAT WE KNOW  
ABOUT AI, HOW WE  
ARE EXPERIENCING IT,  
AND WHAT QUESTIONS  
WE HAVE. ”

TINUKWA BOULDER





Attendees participate in an AI discussion at the Forum for Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents 2023 annual meeting.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Kirill Kiselyov, an associate professor in Pitt's Department of Biological Sciences, leads a laboratory that studies fundamental cell biology with a focus on cancer and degenerative diseases.

Last fall, he noticed that essays submitted by students in his undergraduate cell biology class were the most well written he had read in his 18 years of teaching the course. Once he figured out that generative AI was behind it, he wanted to see what else the technology could do. He began encouraging students in a graduate biology course to ask ChatGPT to help them identify blind spots in their research study designs.

"What I like the most is asking, 'What am I missing here?' I will write a specific case for a grant proposal. Ninety percent of what it says I missed isn't very useful, but that 10% is frequently a true novelty that I can use," says Kiselyov.

ChatGPT also delivers something that no human colleague can.

"It's like bouncing ideas off somebody who is always in a good mood and is always polite," says Kiselyov.

School of Education Associate Professor Rachel Robertson has experienced the benefits and pitfalls of generative AI. Last summer, she had doctoral students use ChatGPT during an in-class activity in which they practiced analyzing the qualitative data it generated. She also has tested it herself to create survey questions and an observation protocol for a study she is leading on the experiences of autistic adults taking yoga classes.

"The students really responded well to the activity. They were excited that we were using it and that it wasn't this hidden secret thing they are told to never look at," says Robertson.

However, Robertson draws the line at using AI to write academic papers. She recalls a time when she gave ChatGPT a prompt to summarize research on a paper using references. One of the references it generated was from a colleague she knew. But Robertson didn't remember him publishing the paper. She contacted her colleague, and he confirmed that the paper didn't exist.

"It was creepy because the reference indicated a real journal, volume number, [and] page numbers, but the actual article was completely hallucinated by ChatGPT," says Robertson.

AI also is driving an increase in submissions to academic journals.

Associate Professor Patricia Crawford is editor of the *Early Childhood Education Journal*. She estimates that annual paper submissions have more than doubled compared to five years ago.

"Our submissions have gone through the roof," says Crawford.

In addition to the heavier volume increasing the workload of journal reviewers, most editors are now questioning how much AI involvement is acceptable in terms of writing a paper, says Crawford.

## IMPACT ON K-12 SCHOOLS

AI in education also is a hot-button issue for Pittsburgh-area school leaders and teachers.

Pitt Education's Forum for Western Pennsylvania School Superintendents made AI the subject of its annual meeting with school leaders in fall 2023.

Visiting Assistant Professor and forum executive director Thomas Ralston sees generative AI as the next step forward in machine learning tools that offer personalized learning to students. Aside from concerns over academic integrity, among its benefits are being a "wonderful resource as an editor" for students writing papers, a "task automation tool" for teachers needing a starting point for lesson plans and presentations, and a translation tool for the growing influx of immigrants to Pittsburgh. He says teachers shouldn't fear technology because nothing can replace what they do.

"Nothing can ever replace the power of a really good teacher," says Ralston, a former superintendent of the Avonworth School District. "Good teachers are focused on teaching children first and foremost. They teach children first and teach the subject second."

Assistant Professor Bart Rocco, who runs Pitt Education's Tri-State Area School Study Council, also is hearing from many school leaders with questions about AI. He says that it's the role of schools to train students to be "good citizens, good communicators, and critical thinkers," and that means preparing them to use AI tools ethically.

Rocco, a former superintendent of the Elizabeth Forward School District, says that K-12 schools are in a challenging position because of the rapid rate of technological advancement. The districts that will

fare best are those that adapt to change while continuing to embrace the human side of education.

"Teachers and school leaders need to embrace AI and learn as much as possible about it so they can teach these new technologies to their students and staff," says Rocco.

## EMPOWERING MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

While there are drawbacks to generative AI in the education space, it can help students whose first language isn't English to write college papers.

Fernandez encourages international students in her graduate courses in Pitt Education to use ChatGPT as an editing tool for their papers.

"This was my first time using ChatGPT," says Xuesongzi Fang, a Chinese student earning her master's in world and heritage language education. "I heard of it connected to plagiarism. I was a little bit scared to use it because of that."

Fang, who plans to teach English at an elementary school in her home country, found that ChatGPT was useful for fixing her grammatical errors, improving her vocabulary, and improving transitional sentences in her writing.

At Fernandez's urging, Kawthar Almarzooq, a master's student in early childhood education from Saudi Arabia, also used ChatGPT to edit a paper draft. It helped her to overcome the challenge of sometimes thinking in Arabic while writing in English.

"When I'm writing my essays, I sometimes find myself forgetting about verbs and clauses. Some don't exist in Arabic," says Almarzooq.

Duojie Ji, a master's student in world and heritage language education from Tibet, had a similar experience when

using ChatGPT to revise her college essays.

"English is not my native language," she says, "so I will sometimes have difficulty explaining things well, especially when I'm writing articles."

## IMAGINING EQUITABLE FUTURES

The people who participated in the Grappling with AI series dared to dream of a more just future.

At a time when technology can make her feel isolated, Khirsten Scott appreciates how the series connected her to colleagues not only within education but also in fields as diverse as medicine, engineering, business, the humanities, and information technology.

"It feels like people are not going to have control, and that's the core of what people are afraid of. The advancing of technology is scary. But it is a tool. It can be used for good or for evil," says Scott.

Scott, an assistant professor who directs the school's Western Pennsylvania Writing Project, strives to reject the temptation of being either totally for or totally against AI.

"I am not filled with fear and anxiety, but I do have fear and anxiety," she says.

Through the writing project, Scott works with a teacher in the Woodland Hills School District who objects to how tools like ChatGPT are reinforcing dominant, Euro-centric ways of writing over linguistic diversity. "[The teacher] feels as though the AI is pushing students toward this sterile, perceived perfect writing that is devoid of their self-hood, that it is privileging a very particular way of writing and expression," says Scott.

Continued on page 18

## WHAT'S NEXT AT PITT?

Joseph Yun is involved in many of the emerging projects to incorporate AI across Pitt.

As the University's artificial intelligence and innovation architect, he helps units to implement the technology based on their business goals. Pitt is now using AI to categorize help tickets submitted to its information technology unit, and in some cases the system will respond automatically if the answer is in the knowledge base. Additionally, Pitt's Department of Pathology recently launched its Computational Pathology and AI Center of Excellence. Among its projects is a new system in which AI scans imaging results to help pathologists detect diseases.

Both examples are what Yun calls "rules-based" AI. This traditional AI is the technology that, years ago, helped IBM's Deep Blue supercomputer to beat the world's reigning world champion in chess.

The next leap forward will be through "brain-inspired AI," says Yun, who also is a research professor of electrical and computer engineering in the Swanson School of Engineering. This mimics the learning of the human brain's neural networks. Generative AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot are early examples of its potential.

"This is as transformative as when the internet started," says Yun. "On the individual side, everyone should begin using it as much as possible because it is not going to slow down. People who don't engage with it now are going to be very detrimentally affected by it in the future."

Yun predicts that white-collar jobs, even those in computer science and the STEM fields, will be the most adversely affected.

"I work in college and I'm a professor, so I'm not anti-college," says Yun, "but one of the areas that will be hard to automate are the trades—plumbers, electricians, those kinds of things. There's going to be a huge job need in the trades, and young people need to start considering that. They are going to be higher paid in the future than they are now."



# automating feedback and assessment

In English language arts (ELA) classrooms, students learn primarily through reading, writing, and classroom discussion. For years, researchers affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh Learning Research and Development Center (LRDC) and School of Education have worked to incorporate artificial intelligence tools to improve the quality of ELA learning.

Through a series of grants exceeding \$3 million, they developed natural language processing (NLP) models for a tool called eRevise. The automated writing evaluation system helped students to learn from their mistakes and improve their writing through revision. Researchers also developed a system called Discussion Tracker. It uses NLP technology to populate a dashboard for teachers on how to improve class discussions on ELA topics.

“Our view of writing all along has been [that] we want to teach students a process of writing to learn,” says Rip Correnti, a professor at the School of Education and research scientist at LRDC who worked on the eRevise project. “It puts them in a position where, if they can replicate that process, they can become knowledge generators.”

The researchers’ work with NLP models originally predated the emergence of generative AI tools like ChatGPT. These tools use large language models to generate predictive, human-like text. This technology auto-completes words on text messages and suggests grammar edits within Microsoft Word.

The latest study, titled *Using ChatGPT to Analyze Classroom Discussions*, is funded by an \$84,000 seed grant from LRDC. The project aims to generate results that will lead to a major multiyear grant in the future.

The research team is made up of Correnti; School of Education professors Lindsay Clare Matsumura and Amanda Godley; and Diane Litman, a professor in the School of Computing and Information.

“I’m coming at it from the perspective of the teaching and learning process, the learning science perspective,” says Matsumura, also an associate director and senior scientist at LRDC.

The study is taking data sets of ELA discussions within elementary and high school classrooms and evaluating the effectiveness of ChatGPT at analyzing them. Its effectiveness is compared with evaluations generated by traditional NLP models and by humans.

“One of the things I find really exciting is the old traditional algorithm required a lot of training data, and that’s always a challenge with manual coding,” says Litman, who also is an LRDC senior scientist. “With new generative models, it works really well with less data.”

The work builds on earlier efforts in artificial intelligence.

“It’s actually pretty amazing so far with how well ChatGPT is doing with the outputs,” says Godley, who in addition to being a center associate at LRDC is the vice provost for graduate studies at Pitt. “I definitely see it as the future of research in this area of machine learning and natural language processing.”

#### **Featured recent and current artificial intelligence grants:**

Using ChatGPT to Analyze Classroom Discussions (2023–24)

Funder: LRDC

Investigators: Correnti (principal investigator), Godley, Litman, and Matsumura

Collaborative Research: Development of Natural Language Processing Techniques to Improve Students’ Revision of Evidence Use in Argument Writing (2022–25)

Funder: National Science Foundation

Investigators: Litman (principal investigator), Correnti, and Matsumura

Discussion Tracker: Development of Human Language Technologies to Improve the Teaching of Collaborative Argumentation in High School (2019–22)

Funder: National Science Foundation

Investigators: Godley (principal investigator) and Litman

EAGER: Discussion Tracker: Development of Human Language Technologies to Improve the Teaching of Collaborative Argumentation in High School English Classrooms (2018–19)

Funder: National Science Foundation

Investigators: Godley (principal investigator) and Litman

Response-to-Text Tasks to Assess Students’ Use of Evidence and Organization in Writing: Using Natural Language Processing for Scoring Writing and Providing Feedback at Scale (2016–19)

Funder: Institute of Education Sciences

Investigators: Litman (principal investigator), Correnti, and Matsumura

Response-to-Text Prompts to Assess Students’ Writing Ability: Using Natural Language Processing for Scoring Writing at Scale (2013–15)

Funder: LRDC

Investigators: Correnti (principal investigator), Litman, and Matsumura

Continued from page 16

Another series participant was Elise Silva, a postdoctoral associate for the writing project and for Pitt’s Institute for Cyber Law, Policy, and Security. She has studied the lack of transparency from tech companies not only on how their algorithms work but also on how diverse and representative their training data sets are.

“What we do know is that a maximum of about 26.5% of the ChatGPT3 training data was written by women, and it’s even harder to know what is written by people of color or other demographics,” says Silva.

This lack of diversity can reinforce prejudices. For example, AI-based facial recognition software might be more biased toward Black and brown people.

AI has the potential to widen the digital divide in America further.

“We must be mindful of the impact of equitable access and bias,” says Ralston. “Many households and communities still have limited access to the Internet, and the authenticity of source material that AI draws from can reinforce biases that exist in our culture.”

Another concern raised during the study groups is AI tools being used to commit violence. Dias says that the technology has been used to coordinate drone strikes led by the United States in the Middle East and in Israel’s bombing of targets in Gaza.

While there are many valid fears about the future of AI and education, the goal of the study series was to look toward the future in ways that reaffirm humanity, according to the event organizers. At the study group session held on Valentine’s Day, King explained to the audience what that fear can feel like.

“This is why we call this series ‘grappling’—because we don’t have the answers, and it’s for what we are thinking as people. It allows for discomfort, uncertainty, and being in community. That is what makes us human,” said King.

As AI isn’t likely to go away, Silva hopes people will transform their fear into curiosity.

“Rather than being scared, I hope educators come together and see themselves as influencers in this space,” says Silva. ■







# CREATING NEW PATHWAYS INTO EDUCATION

■ BY GREG LATSHAW

**Renée and Richard Goldman Dean Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher's vision for the University of Pittsburgh School of Education is sparking action and yielding results during the start of her tenure.**

**Her early academic priorities are to improve transfer-friendly pathways for community college students; launch more online degrees and certificates; and create new microcredentials, stackable programs, and noncredit credentials of value. She believes that this strategy will further advance the school's mission of preparing students to ignite learning and be the spark that inspires change.**







Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher



Robert Gallen



C'enna Crosby

**B**y participating in many activities outside the classroom, C'enna Crosby made her mark at Pitt Education. She served on the school's student engagement committee, participated in the University's Black Action Society, and was invited by the dean to give the school's undergraduate student commencement address.

The most impressive part is that Crosby did it all in two years.

Crosby transferred to Pitt in her junior year from Montgomery County Community College near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she earned her associate's degree in early childhood education.

"Transferring into Pitt, I felt very prepared and already had student teaching experience. I was able to finish school with barely any loans. Everything just really worked out," says Crosby.

At Pitt, she earned a Bachelor of Science in applied developmental psychology in 2021 and a Master of Education in 2022 through the school's Combined Accelerated Studies in Education program.

Today, Crosby is a second-grade math teacher at Propel Schools in Homestead, Pennsylvania. "I really enjoy it. I love my kids," she says.

## DEVELOPING A TRANSFER PIPELINE

Crosby is an example of the type of transfer student that Zamani-Gallaher wants to attract to Pitt Education.

Currently, approximately 6% of undergraduate students enrolled in the School of Education have transferred to the school from two-year institutions. Zamani-Gallaher wants to boost that number by developing new transfer pathways into the school. Among her goals are agreements to simplify credit transfer, new scholarships for community college students, and developing a transfer-friendly student culture. Additionally, she has established various projects and initiatives pertaining to community college research, praxis, and leadership in the school.

"Some of the finest students are at community colleges, and people aren't aware of that," says Zamani-Gallaher, who was appointed the Renée and Richard Goldman Dean of the School of Education on May 1, 2024, after serving as interim dean for nine months. "They are not there because they aren't academically capable or because they have deficits or skill gaps. There are a lot of high-achieving students at community colleges."

Community colleges have been a central focus throughout Zamani-Gallaher's academic career.

She is executive director of the Council for the Study of Community Colleges and formerly was director of the Office of Community College Research and Leadership at the University of Illinois. Through her

scholarship, Zamani-Gallaher has received nearly \$10.5 million in grant funding for projects related to higher education research from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation, and others.

At Pitt, Zamani-Gallaher is leading efforts to build new relationships with the 15 community colleges located in Pennsylvania.

In collaboration with the Pitt Office of the Provost, the School of Education held its inaugural Transfer Pathways Summit on May 17. The event energized students, faculty, and staff from two- and four-year institutions across the state around the theme of Building Bridges and Facilitating Student Mobility.

"Community colleges are allocated the least funding resources—the crust off the pie—but they are expected to do the most. That's why they matter to me," says Zamani-Gallaher.

## INVESTING IN ONLINE EDUCATION

Online learning is another space viewed as ripe for development. At Pitt Education, Zamani-Gallaher is advocating for adding more fully online degrees, graduate certificates, microcredentials, and stand-alone courses that can funnel students into a credit-bearing program.

In the past several years, the school has made progress. The Department of Teaching, Learning and Leading offers new online graduate certificates in STEAM education, critical technology and digital media for learning, and instructional design and technology.



The graduate certificates interface with a new master's degree in curriculum and instruction that is fully online and asynchronous.

Additionally, the school moved its K-12 principal certification program from an in-person program to a fully online, asynchronous format.

"These programs are designed for working professionals who can't always come to campus but need flexible learning experiences. We design and offer online programs that meet their learning needs," says Tinukwa Boulder, director of innovative technologies and online learning and associate chair of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leading.

A former instructional design professional, Boulder works directly with faculty members who are considering making the jump online. She's the first to admit that "not all programs should be online" and that those that work well must have "faculty active in the design process." Boulder helps to guide the course development process, which involves working with instructional designers from the University Center for Teaching and Learning to map out the course and film video lectures.

"We try to build interactivity into the online course," says Boulder. "Each course has short video lectures and modules and is typically seven weeks in length."

The online portfolio at the School of Education is poised to grow. Next in the pipeline is shifting the master's degree program in educational leadership from an in-person format into an online format and creating new online graduate certificates in justice and the social determinants of health and a behavioral medicine specialization.

Associate Professor Robert Gallen has seen the impact that even a single online course can have.

Several years ago, he created a stand-alone online course called Foundations of Infant Mental Health. The course is offered for \$399 through Pitt Professional (the non-credit professional and continuing education platform at the University Center for Teaching and Learning) and addresses the social and emotional health needs of children from birth through age 5.

The Pennsylvania Department of Welfare often purchases course seats for its workers statewide because it is aligned with the academic requirements of the Infant and Early Child Mental Health Endorsement through the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health. More than 100 slots were purchased this year, and more than 500 have been purchased to date, Gallen says. The students hold a variety of jobs in early intervention, including service coordinators, home visitors, social workers, therapists, and developmentalists.

"The feedback is overwhelmingly positive," says Gallen. "In general, people report that they like that the class is focused not just on knowledge building but also on applying that knowledge to supporting children and families. People say they're able to use the stuff from class in their daily work."

## MULTIPLE ON-RAMPS FOR PROGRAMS

Gallen's course is like an appetizer and is meant to entice students to later enroll in a certificate or degree program.

This approach relates to what is called "stackability." Zamani-Gallaher wants the School of Education to develop more pathways into its programs by bundling and sequencing courses to count toward additional certificates and degrees.

The model already exists. Students who complete a certificate in STEAM education or critical technology and digital media for learning can apply those credits toward the master's degree in curriculum and instruction. Likewise, students who earn the master's degree in curriculum and instruction automatically earn the two certificates because the curricula overlap.

"A priority of mine is talking about ways that we can create multiple entry points and on-ramps and to think about building additional inroads into our programs of study," says Zamani-Gallaher. "Our online strategy that has stackability will create more flexibility for our learners as well as increase opportunity and mobility."

Another area primed for development is that of microcredentials. Microcredentials are earned through the completion of at least nine postbaccalaureate academic credits instead of the 12 credits required for a graduate certificate. Zamani-Gallaher has encouraged the school community to think of specializations and endorsements that could be offered through a microcredential.

"Part of creating broader participation and having broader impact is thinking of education in a more incremental fashion—hence microcredentials for additional competencies and tools that are industry recognized," says Zamani-Gallaher.



Pitt Education is committed to learning with and from communities through its engagement opportunities.



**Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher** became the Renée and Richard Goldman Dean of the School of Education on May 1, 2024. She had been serving as interim dean since August 2023, after Valerie Kinloch stepped down after six years of leadership to become president of her undergraduate alma mater, Johnson C. Smith University.



**Hometown**  
Chicago, Illinois



**Family**  
Husband James Gallaher Jr., vice chancellor for human resources at the University of Pittsburgh, and two adult twin children, Nala Gallaher and Nia Gallaher



**Degrees**  
BS in psychology and MS in general experimental psychology, Western Illinois University, and PhD in educational organization and leadership, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign



**Research Areas**  
Equitable participation in higher education; racial equity and campus climate; transfer, access, and retention



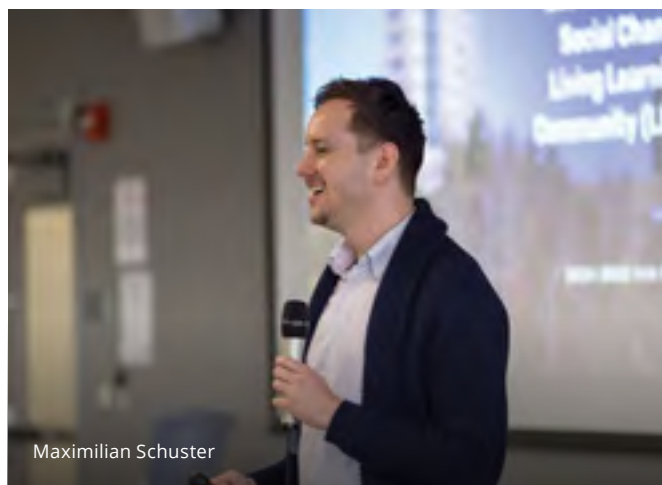
**Previous Experience**  
Professor and associate dean for equity, justice, and strategic partnerships, University of Pittsburgh School of Education; associate dean of the Graduate College, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; professor and associate department chair, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign College of Education; director of the Office for Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; and professor and graduate program coordinator, Eastern Michigan University

## PLANTING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

While the School of Education has historically been perceived as a graduate school, its undergraduate offerings are increasing. In addition to offering minors, the school provides bachelor's degrees in applied developmental psychology; exercise science; and, as of fall 2023, teacher education. The school's undergraduate enrollment increased by more than 50% this past year.

In fall 2024, the school will further expand its undergraduate presence through a Living Learning Community (LLC). LLCs are specialized living environments for incoming first-year students that center on a theme or academic interest area. The school will have two floors within K. Leroy Irvis Hall on Pitt's upper campus.

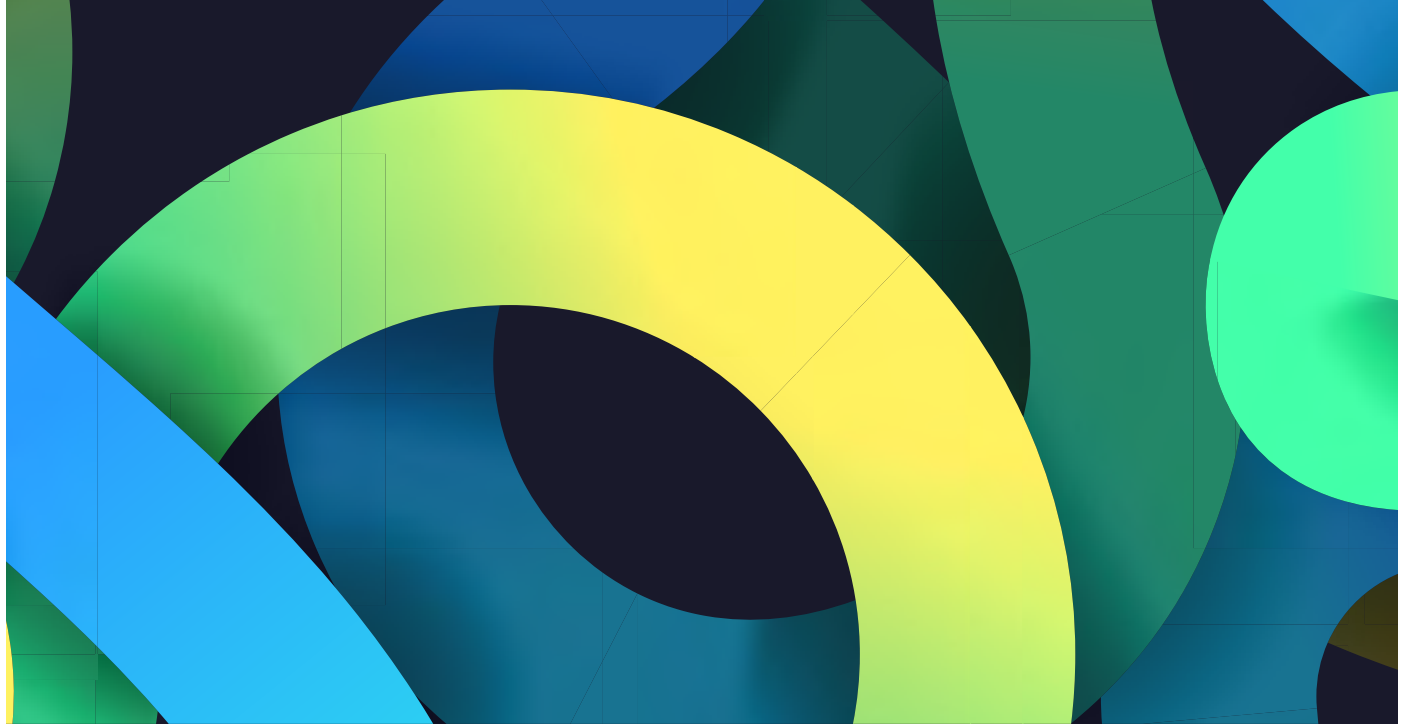
"As we think about the future direction of the School of Education and the increase in our undergraduate programs, certificates, microcredentials, and endorsements, this becomes an avenue for us to have a greater presence in the first-year community," says Maximilian Schuster, an associate professor who is helping the school to launch its LLC.



Maximilian Schuster

Schuster envisions first-year students in the Pitt Education LLC being invited into the School of Education in various ways as well as engaging with faculty and staff outside the classroom. For example, first-year students could receive "exclusive access" to school events, participate in the annual schoolwide read, and be invited to sample courses. In addition, faculty might give coffee talks in the residence hall, go on educational outings with LLC students, or partner with the Division of Student Affairs on cosponsored events.





“We want to show students that the School of Education could be a home for them and that we have amazing faculty and staff ready to welcome them as soon as they set foot on campus,” says Schuster.

Another area where partnerships have been fruitful to the school is within rural education.

The school’s Rural and Community-based Education Initiative, led by Associate Professor Darris Means, has engaged with students, faculty, and staff across the University and Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Assistant Professor Mariko Yoshisato Cavey, an initiative advisory board member, is excited by the community-engaged focus of the work. She is director of higher education partnerships at the National Partnership for Student Success, a Biden-Harris administration initiative aimed at increasing the number of people serving in pre-K-12 student support roles. Among the priority areas are building the educator pipeline, addressing the educational impacts of the pandemic, and supporting students’ holistic thriving through long-term cross-sector collaboration.

Yoshisato Cavey aims to bring this work into the School of Education.

“One of the opportunities I enjoy most in community-engaged work is the potential to always remain

connected to the many key groups that shape and are shaped by what is going on in education,” she says.

## MOVING PEOPLE TOWARD MATTERING

As a first-generation college student herself, Zamani-Gallaher says that higher education is a “game changer” in people’s lives. Her parents were part of the “vast-neglected majority” of people who had completed some college courses but hadn’t earned a degree.

“Our school’s mission-vision talks about disrupting and transforming inequitable educational structures,” says Zamani-Gallaher. “This work helps us to really walk our talk.”

Due to their open-access mission, community colleges are the “to-and-through” pathways into college, she says. Earlier this year, University of Pittsburgh Chancellor Joan Gabel and Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor Joseph J. McCarthy tapped her to serve as the University’s senior leader for the American Talent Initiative, a national community college transfer effort that will enact major community college initiatives with seven other higher education institutions.

“In terms of what drives my work in this space, in a word, it’s about ‘marginalization.’ If there was a second word, it’s also about

‘minoritization.’ Those go hand in hand,” says Zamani-Gallaher. “I want to bring people from the margins and center them as mattering. There are so many people whose trajectories would have been so different if not for community colleges.”

Crosby is one of those students.

“When I graduated, I felt very prepared going into my career field,” she says.

After graduating from the School of Education, Crosby stayed connected to the school. Last summer, she worked at the school’s Genius, Joy, and Love Summer Academy, a four-week workshop that inspires Black high school students from Pittsburgh schools to become teachers. The experience was so impactful that Crosby traveled to Philadelphia on April 11 to give a presentation on it at the American Educational Research Association 2024 Annual Meeting.

“If you want to diversify teacher candidates, who better to partner with than community colleges?” says Zamani-Gallaher. “They have a wider cross-section of folks of color and people from working-class families who want an education and a career educating students who are diverse.” ■



# Enriching Educational Partnerships in Pittsburgh Neighborhoods

■ BY KAITLYN ZURCHER

The summer before Bryanna Checo started her junior year in the Combined Accelerated Studies in Education (CASE) program at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education, she saw a job posting for a PittEnrich tutor. She quickly decided it was the perfect fit for her.

As someone who dreams of becoming an elementary school teacher, she jumped at the chance to gain experience tutoring first- through fifth-grade students from Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood.

"It sounded like a cool combination of both in-school and out-of-school tutoring experience and also a great opportunity to get into the classroom before I started student teaching," says Checo, who is now in her final term of the CASE program.

Pitt's Office of Engagement and Community Affairs developed PittEnrich in 2019 with a donation from The Gismondi Foundation, an organization created by Pitt alumnus

John Gismondi and his wife, Lisa. The program offers in-school tutoring at Pittsburgh Faison K-5 and Pittsburgh Lincoln PreK-5 as well as Saturday learning-through-play sessions at Pitt's Community Engagement Center in Homewood.

"PittEnrich does a great job of preparing future teachers," says Checo, who served as a tutor for the in-school and Saturday programs. "It allows you to build relationships with these kids, and you become a person in their life who they look forward to seeing every week."

## Broadening Community Outreach

As of October 2023, The Gismondi Foundation has committed more than \$1 million to support Pitt's community engagement programs. The gift established The Gismondi Neighborhood Education Program and enables Pitt to further strengthen educational support in Homewood and expand its programming into the Hill District, Oakland, and Greater Hazelwood neighborhoods.

"Through John and Lisa Gismondi's generosity and warm support, our ability to invest in our youngest learners was put on steroids. The Gismondi Neighborhood Education Program deepens Pitt's educational commitments in these neighborhoods by expanding our educational offerings for elementary and middle schoolers in ways aligned with what our neighbors have asked Pitt," says Lina Dostilio, Pitt's vice chancellor of engagement and community affairs. "What's magical is that through The Gismondi Foundation's support, our college students are also benefited by having high-impact learning and career exploration experiences in education. It's truly a win-win."

The Gismondi Neighborhood Education Program provides a collection of education programs and services for elementary-aged students in the Pittsburgh neighborhoods where Pitt has made a long-term commitment to community engagement.





## Measuring Impact

23 / 64

During the 2022-23 academic year, PittEnrich provided in-school tutoring in 23 Homewood-serving elementary school classrooms and out-of-school tutoring for 64 students on Saturdays at the Pitt Community Engagement Center in Homewood.

69% / 97%

The program demonstrated improved academic growth for the participants. Of the children who took the pre- and post-assessments, 69% showed improvements in math skills and 97% showed improvement in their composite reading scores, with 61% showing considerable improvement with a reading score increase of at least 30 points.

The focus of the educational programming in each neighborhood is shaped by community partnerships and goals: literacy and math tutoring in Homewood, STEAM and digital equity in the Hill District, life sciences education in Greater Hazelwood, and homework help and mentoring in Oakland.

As each neighborhood education initiative expands, the Office of Engagement and Community Affairs will collaborate with Pitt Education on developing pedagogically sound curriculum and evaluation methods.

"The School of Education has been a vital partner in ensuring the success of PittEnrich since it was launched in 2019. From the very start, faculty have helped to design and evaluate programs, and former dean Valerie Kinloch and dean Eboni Zamani-Gallaher grabbed onto the unique ways the program could be a distinctive part of School of Education students' experience," says Dostilio. "Through our partnership, exponentially more School of Education students

will be involved and, in turn, exponentially more kids in our neighborhood commitment areas will be supported."

### Empowering Future Educators

After two years as a PittEnrich tutor, Checo is now a graduate student assistant for the program, providing support for the tutors and helping with lesson plans. In addition to the leadership experience she gained, she values how the program taught her about the power of building relationships.

"The academics will come, but you won't learn from me unless we build a relationship first," says Checo. "Seeing the students' trust in me grow over time is what makes this worth it to me."

"This program provides our tutors with real-world teaching experience," says Branden Ballard, director of the Gismondi Neighborhood Education Program. "It prepares them for what it truly means to be in a classroom, and it equips them with a

lot of transformational and transferable skills."

Taylor Ellef, a junior in the CASE program, became a PittEnrich tutor in fall 2023 after learning about the opportunity from fellow CASE students.

"My time as a tutor has been such an informative and preparative experience for my future as an early childhood educator," says Ellef. "I was kindly welcomed into the school community, and I love walking into the building and being greeted by the teachers and students I work alongside."

As an in-school tutor at Pittsburgh Faison, Ellef says that the experience has been priceless.

"My favorite part of being a PittEnrich tutor is seeing a child 'get it,'" says Ellef. "Being able to watch students grow academically from one-on-one and small-group tutoring is so rewarding." ■



# MARKING 40 YEARS OF THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT

■ BY KAITLYN ZURCHER

As a K-12 educator, Olavé Sebastien sees a strong connection between building a writing practice and teaching a classroom of students.

“Writing requires a lot of patience along with the creative process,” says Sebastien, a teacher at the Environmental Charter School in Pittsburgh. “I can directly apply that patience and creative problem solving when working one on one with my students.”

For the last several years, Sebastien has participated in professional development opportunities through the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project (WPWP), an organization housed in the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. Since 1984, WPWP has provided teacher-centered professional learning and youth literacy programs for educators and students in more than 50 Western Pennsylvania school districts.



Khirsten L. Scott

“Education is a quickly changing landscape and has to stay responsive. The writing project elevates teachers as scholars who are masters of their practice, which is a beautiful thing,” says Khirsten L. Scott, an assistant professor in the Pitt Education Department of Teaching,

Learning, and Leading and the project’s director since August 2022. “Through the writing project, teachers gain connection with others who understand their struggles, triumphs, and motivations for being in the profession.”

WPWP is part of a national network of 175 university-sponsored sites dedicated to improving the teaching of writing and learning in schools and communities. Each site partners with area school districts to build communities of “teachers teaching teachers” that span disciplines.

In stepping into the director role of a regional writing project site with a 40-year history, Scott did a lot of listening and observing to understand the community behind the network.

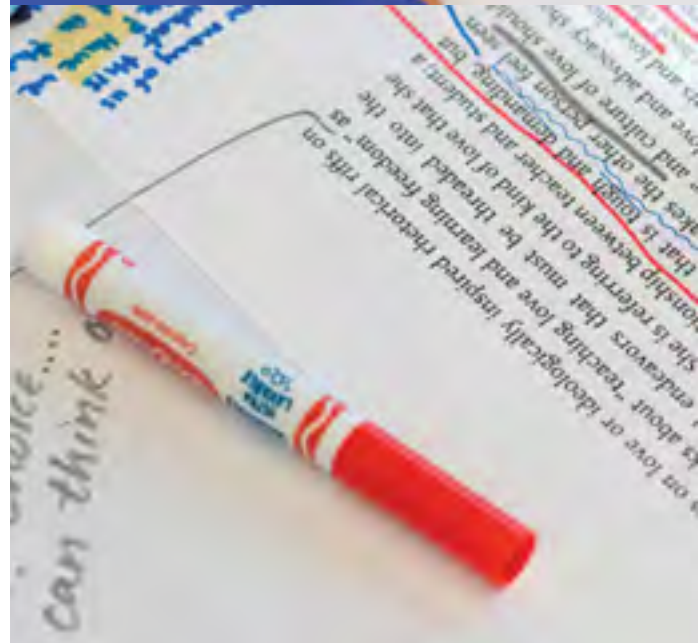
“I wanted to meet people and see what made the project the project, what made the network the network. I was met with people who really love to write and have found community through the writing project,” says Scott. “They share the idea that, through the vulnerability of writing and through sharing space for communing, laughing, crying, and sharing resources, you really do grow professionally.”

One of WPWP’s signature programs is its annual Summer Institute for Teachers. The four-week program develops educators’ personal and professional writing skills and explores ways that writing can be a tool for education equity, access, and social justice.

“The summer institute provides a space for restoration, exploration, and connection with peers in the profession and university partners. It also gives teachers an opportunity to reconnect with themselves as writers,” says Scott.

Sebastien first engaged with WPWP at the 2016 Summer Institute for Teachers. He says that it was an all-encompassing experience that went beyond a typical





professional development opportunity and transformed his approach to writing on a professional and personal level.

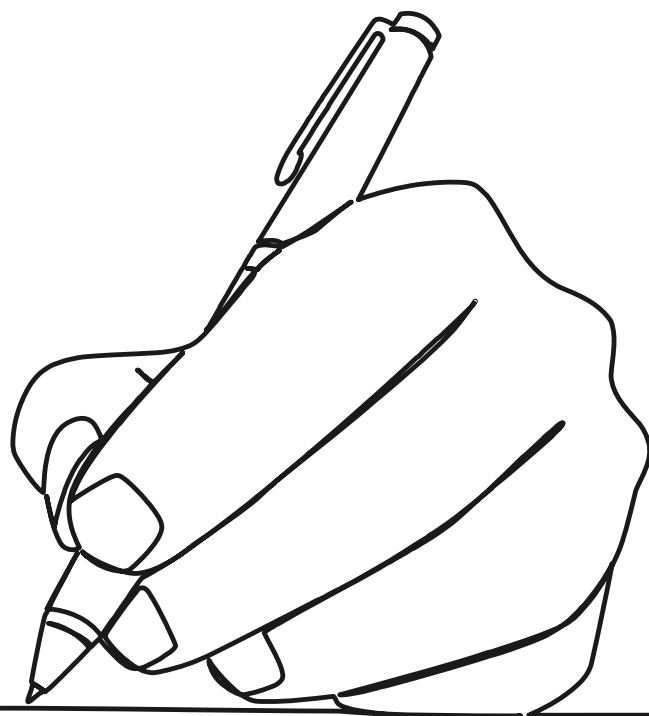
“The writing project has built a community around improving ourselves as educators for the betterment of our students,” he says. “When you’re teaching a lesson to a classroom of 30 students, there’s no perfect way to execute it. With the writing project, you’re able to put ideas into play, see where there’s room for error, and figure out what you can improve. You can start to see ways to benefit every student, not just the few who pay attention.”

Each summer, WPWP also offers its Young Writers Institute for students entering grades 4–12. During the eight-day institute, students develop their writing skills through a broad range of learning experiences led by classroom teachers, writers, and advanced writing students from regional colleges and universities.

In addition to the two summer programs, WPWP is marking its 40th anniversary in 2024 with a series of events designed to celebrate its community of educators, students, and writers. This includes a monthlong writing marathon in May that invited people to write together at museums, cemeteries, parks, schools, and other places across the region. The anniversary celebration culminates on Aug. 9 with a reception and panel discussion with Scott and past WPWP directors.

Looking ahead, Scott is excited to continue collaborating with the WPWP community to enhance local partnerships and grow the ways it supports literacy education in the region.

“My core responsibility is to give space for teachers to elevate themselves as expert practitioners and scholars in the field of teacher education,” says Scott. “I hope that the writing project is a space of refuge and restoration where teachers feel empowered to explore and be the best at what they do.” ■



# EMPOWERING YOUTHS TO PREVENT VIOLENCE

■ BY KAITLYN ZURCHER

“If there’s anything I can do, I will not see another one of my kids killed in senseless gun violence—not on my watch.” Dennis Floyd Jones



# “Survive to thrive—and dream!”

Again and again, this chant echoed from 350 Pittsburgh-area teenagers at the University of Pittsburgh Petersen Events Center. They were gathered for the Youth Enrichment Services (YES) second annual Violence Prevention Symposium, held in July 2023.

The phrase was a prominent rallying cry during the symposium and often was led by Dennis Floyd Jones (PhD '88), founder and executive director of YES.

“What we do to help address gun violence doesn’t need to be an overly complicated intellectual situation,” says Jones. “It’s about helping people understand, value, and respect each other and, most importantly, to be responsible for their own actions.”

Jones formed YES in 1994 to provide educational opportunities for underserved children living in public housing and in economically disadvantaged communities in Pittsburgh. YES has since served more than 5,000 youths through mentorship, education, and enrichment programs.

Under Jones’ leadership, the YES team created the symposium in 2022 after several of their youth participants were killed by gun violence in a short span of time.

“It’s not natural for kids to see each other being buried and to have someone’s life cut short just because they were at the wrong place at the wrong time,” says Jones. “If there’s anything I can do, I will not see another one of my kids killed in senseless gun violence—not on my watch.”

During the three-day symposium, teens learned about the mental health impacts of gun violence, strategies for dealing with trauma-induced grief, and ways to build a positive self-identity. They also were encouraged to think about the lives

they want to build for themselves through nearly two dozen breakout sessions that included workshops on starting a business, cooking healthy food, pursuing careers in STEM, and embracing the power of storytelling.

“We’ve built around this idea that we understand their pain, trauma, and grief, but we also want to educate them and share stories of what other people have overcome and achieved,” says Jones.

Taylor Richardson, a 17-year-old who attended the symposium, says that it was valuable to hear from a range of people talking about these issues, from community leaders like Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey to other teens who shared their experiences and perspectives.

“Hearing from a lot of different people about how to prevent violence was a key moment for me,” says Richardson.

Brashaun Williams, 18, agrees: “Being able to hear the voices of people our age talking about what they’re experiencing, we can know that we’re not alone.”

Richardson and Williams say that their experiences at the symposium affirmed the importance of having young people lead and engage in these difficult conversations.

“During the symposium, they were really emphasizing how we’re the future,” says Williams. “It was a good reminder that you’ve got to surround yourself with the right people and avoid peer pressure.”

“People our age are more exposed to violence because of social media or hearing about it in songs or movies,” says Richardson. “It’s good for kids to be in these conversations so they know how to steer clear and think about their futures.”

Alongside the youth sessions, the symposium also included

opportunities for local professionals and advocates to engage in strategic planning sessions and share resources. This is part of a larger initiative from YES to build a collective impact group composed of community-based nonprofits that can aid each other in supporting children and families in crisis.

“The ecosystem is a force multiplier,” says Jones. “We believe that we can find a way to combine and work together so that we can effectively serve thousands of kids in our communities.”

Alongside his work at YES, Jones served as an associate professor for 32 years at West Virginia University in what is now called the College of Applied Human Sciences. In 2023, he received the Distinguished Alumni Award from the Pitt School of Education Department of Health and Human Development for his community engagement and scholarly work.

In summer 2024, the third annual Violence Prevention Symposium will offer a two-day skill-building seminar for teens to learn strategies for serving as leaders and mentors among their peers. Recruited from the collective impact group agencies, these teens will become certified ambassadors for nonviolence who give talks on the subject within schools and the organizations they represent.

As the symposium expands its reach, Jones says that the event and other YES programs provide spaces for youths to be optimistic about the future.

“I want them to realize that they can move past this,” says Jones. “You’ve got to dream. You’ve got to look at opportunities. You’ve got to challenge yourself. You’ve got to wake up and commit to making something better for yourself.” ■

## ALUMNI NEWS & NOTES



**Cameron Barnett** (MAT '21), a middle school social studies and language arts teacher at Falk Laboratory School, published his second book of poetry, "Murmur," and gave a reading at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Lecture Hall on Feb. 29, 2024.



**Jaime Cohen** (MED '95) was promoted to senior manager of education and docent engagement at the Museum at Eldridge Street in New York City.

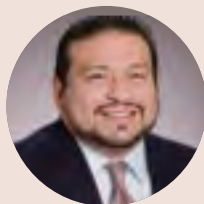
**Trisha Cousins** (EdD '20) was awarded the Outstanding Abstract award from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics for her dissertation, "Breastfeeding Experience and Barriers among Mothers with Perceived Insufficient Milk Supply."

**Nikki Cristobal** (PhD '22) is a board member of the Hawai'i People's Fund, which created a fund to support grassroots-led efforts by Native Hawaiian and local organizations to help those impacted by the wildfires in 2023.



**Jerlean Daniel** (PhD '75), an emeritus faculty member and member of the School of Education Board of Visitors, received the 2023 Bill Baierl Distinguished Alumni Service Award from the Pitt Alumni Association. She and her husband, Jack Daniel, have supported the school for many years through the Jerlean E. Daniel Book Award.

**Jamilah "Jamie" Ducar** (EdD '22) is the 2024 recipient of the Nadinne Cruz Community Engagement Professional Award from Campus Compact. Ducar is assistant vice chancellor of the engaged campus in Pitt's Office of Engagement and Community Affairs.



**Osly Flores** (EdD '17), assistant professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, received the American Educational Research Association Division A Emerging Scholar Award.



**Richard Goldman** (MED '66, PhD '70) was included in "Florida 500," a publication of the 500 most influential executives in the state. Goldman is the founder of several education companies and schools, including Smart Horizons Career Online Education, Xceed Preparatory Academy, and Xceed Anywhere.

**Serena Gray** (MS '23) was a member of the U.S. women's volleyball team that competed in the NORCECA Women's Pan American Cup, which was held in Puerto Rico in August 2023. She was the first Pitt Panther to be named to the team.

**Nosakhere Griffin-EL** (MED '08, PhD '11) received a Black Excellence in Education Award at the 2023 Black Excellence in Education Awards.

**Ryan Hardesty** (MAT '09), the 2023 Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year, was featured in a segment on NBC's "Today" show on Jan. 2, 2024. The segment documented a day in his life as a teacher at his middle school in Beaver County, Pennsylvania.

**Caroline Johns** (EdD '17), superintendent of Northgate School District, and **Todd Keruskin** (EdD '05), vice president of professional learning services at McGraw Hill, were named inaugural members of the Remake Learning cabinet.

**Matt Marx** (MAT '15) is the creator of MisterMarx.com, an education platform that delves into mathematical concepts, teaching methodologies, and resources for educators and learners.

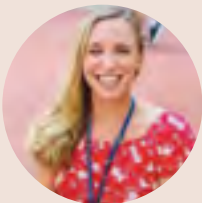


**Christine McClure** (EdD '18) received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2023 Black Excellence in Education Awards.

**Mark Milovats** (MAT '91) is the creator of a podcast titled "The Solutions Network," which addresses topics in education.



**Shallegra Moye** (EdD '22) won a Jefferson Award from the Pittsburgh Chapter of Multiplying Good in recognition of her service to students in the Pittsburgh area. She is the associate director for equity, justice, and strategic initiatives in the Pitt Office of Child Development.



**Cristina Restrepo-Harner** (BS '15, MEd '16) received the 2023 District of Columbia Public Schools' Outstanding School Staff of the Year award. She is a program coordinator and behavior analyst at Shirley Chisholm Elementary School.

**Lisa Roberts** (EdD '22), along with current EdD students Corey Flynn and Rudy Pineda, was selected for a 2023 Salk Health Activist Fellowship. Roberts is the school and youth program coordinator for Chautauqua Health Network.



**Ashley Shafer** (BS '14, MS '16, PhD '23), an Early Head Start postdoctoral fellow at the Pitt Office of Child Development, was elected a Pennsylvania Association for Infant Mental Health Western Region board member for 2024.

**Ted Serrant** (MEd '00, PhD '13) was promoted to the role of coordinator 2 – grants reporting: assessment, accountability, and compliance in the Houston Independent School District.



**Shaun Tomaszewski** (MEd '10), principal of Baldwin High School, was appointed to the steering committee of the Collaborative for Advancing Science Teaching and Learning in K-12. The group is within the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

**Timothy Wagner** (MS '09, EdD '13) was named the 2023 Pennsylvania Principal of the Year (Secondary – High School and Middle Level) by the Pennsylvania Principals Association. He is the principal of Upper St. Clair High School.



**Jenay Willis** (PhD '23) received the Chance Memorial Dissertation Award from the National Rural Education Association. The award recognizes a doctoral graduate whose dissertation contributes significantly to rural education and addresses issues of current concern.



**Benjamin Wilson** (EdD '21) was appointed to the Council of Higher Education of the Pennsylvania Board of Education. He is a senior consultant with TPMA and an adjunct professor at Erie County Community College.



**Giorgiana Zeremenko** (BS '18) was named an assistant coach of the University of Pittsburgh softball team. She was the former catcher and utility player on the team that, in 2015, reached the ACC Championship and NCAA Regional Final.

### Share Your News

Have you changed jobs or received a promotion? Let us know by emailing [soenews@pitt.edu](mailto:soenews@pitt.edu). In addition to printing updates in the magazine, we share alumni news on the School of Education social media channels and through articles on the school website, [education.pitt.edu](http://education.pitt.edu).

To update your alumni information, please contact Michael Haas, director of development and alumni affairs at Pitt Education, at [mbh26@pitt.edu](mailto:mbh26@pitt.edu).

# Pitt Education Grad to Lead ACSM

■ BY GREG LATSHAW



When Stella Volpe (BS '85) was in her senior year at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education, her exercise science professor, Fredric Goss, gave her some advice. He told her to join the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) and to consider attending Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) for graduate school.

Nearly 40 years later, Volpe is now president of ACSM, where she was elected by her peers to lead the world's largest sports medicine and exercise science organization. She also is a professor at Virginia Tech, where she runs the university's Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise.

"I joined ACSM because Dr. Goss said something in class," recalls Volpe. "It just shows you what one comment can do for somebody."

Prior to joining Virginia Tech in 2020, Volpe held faculty positions at Drexel University, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She conducts nutrition and exercise research and studies athletes at all performance levels. Currently, she and a team of graduate students are researching the inflammatory effects of certain foods, including turmeric and pistachios.

"Very simply, I use nutrition and exercise to help prevent obesity and diabetes in individuals," she says.

At ACSM, Volpe will complete a three-year term with roles as president-elect, president, and immediate past president. She began her presidency in June 2024.

"It's very fulfilling to do this service because you feel like you are helping the greater good. ACSM is the most premier sports medicine organization in the world, with more than 50,000 members worldwide," says Volpe.

In recognition of her impact on the field, Volpe received the School of Education's Distinguished Alumni Award for the Department of Health and Physical Activity in 2009.

Volpe's commitment to healthy lifestyles extends outside the classroom.

A former college field hockey player, she is a member of the over-60 Women's Masters team of USA Field Hockey. In March, the squad traveled to Nottingham, England, to compete in the world competition, where the team earned a bronze medal. Volpe, who plays midfield, has played in previous World Cups held in Barcelona, Spain, and Cape Town, South Africa.

"My coach is a former Olympian. I've also played with former Olympians on these teams. For me, it's truly an honor," she says.

Volpe has come a long way since college, and she credits her time at Pitt with changing the trajectory of her life in a positive way.

"Pitt was a true foundation for me for so many reasons," she says. ■



# In Memoriam

**Margaret Becker** (MEd '66, PhD '70) died on June 7, 2023, at the age of 92. She was an emeritus professor at the University of Pittsburgh and founded the North Hills-based counseling and consulting firm Psychological Associates, Inc.

**William Bickel**, professor emeritus at Pitt Education and former senior scientist at the Learning Research and Development Center, died on May 19, 2024.

**Patricia “Penny” Bloom** (BA '64, MEd '75, PhD '86) died on Nov. 20, 2023. She was a retired dean of several community colleges in Western Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New York.

**Professor Emeritus William “Bill” Cooley** died on July 17, 2024, at the age of 94. He was a former director of the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh and previously served as president of the American Educational Research Association.

**Tony Eichelberger**, an emeritus professor at the Pitt School of Education, died on Jan. 9, 2024, at the age of 83. His wife, Rita Bean (MEd '66, PhD '74), also an emeritus faculty member, is a member of the school's Board of Visitors. Eichelberger was widely published as a researcher and authored the book “Disciplined Inquiry: Understanding and Doing Educational Research.”

**Kathleen Mary Huebner** (MEd '71, PhD '80) died on Oct. 14, 2023, at the age of 78. During her 45-year career, Huebner advanced teacher training in the field of blindness and low vision through her work at multiple higher education institutions and the American Foundation for the Blind. In 2011, she received the Pitt

Education Distinguished Alumni Award, and in 2020, she was inducted into the Hall of Fame for Leaders and Legends in the Blindness Field.

**Lawrence “Larry” Holleran** (BA '56) died on March 5, 2024, at the age of 93. He served in the U.S. Army in the Korean War, was a vice president of human resources for FMC Corporation, and later taught in the MBA program at the University of Illinois Chicago.

**Conway Jeffress Jr.** (MEd '68, PhD '71) died on Feb. 13, 2023, at the age of 79. He served as president of Schoolcraft College in Livonia, Michigan, from 2001 to 2020.

## Tips from Alumni

The inaugural Tips from Alumni series was offered this year to give advice to current and future students in the School of Education. Four sessions were held between October and April, with career-related topics geared toward PhD, EdD, higher education and education policy, and teacher education students. The panelists ranged from school superintendents to human resources directors for special education institutions. The initiative was sponsored by the school's Offices of Student and Career Services, Admissions and Enrollment, and Alumni and Development.



Scan the QR code to watch the playlist.

[bit.ly/Alumni-Tips](https://bit.ly/Alumni-Tips)

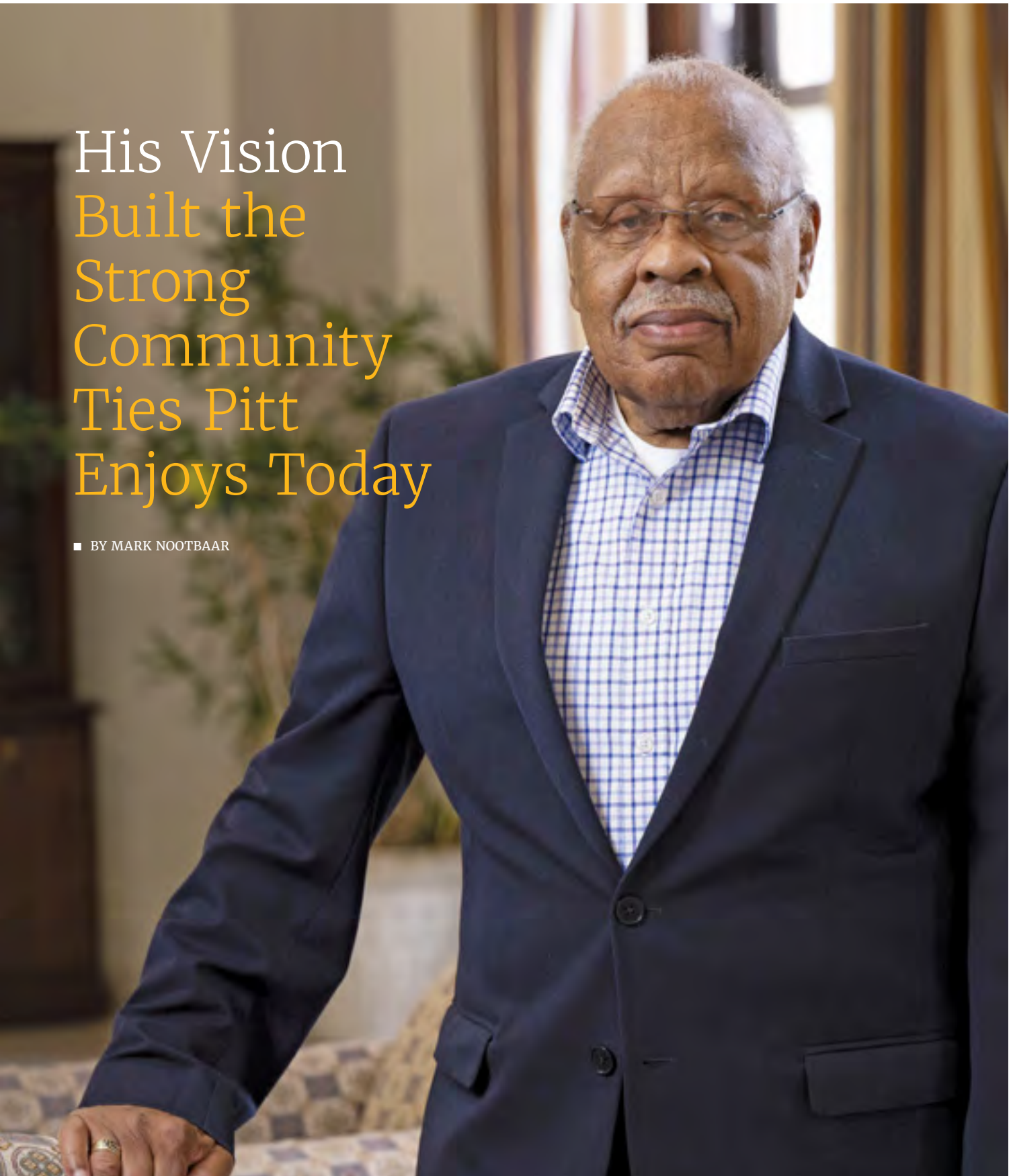
## Empowering Girls' Rights

**Kakenya Ntaiya** (PhD '11) dreams of a future in which girls around the world don't face barriers to their health and education. She is the founder and president of Kakenya's Dream, an international nonprofit that aims to provide life-changing education and leadership services to young women in rural Kenya. Ntaiya, whose work has been featured in TIME magazine, returned to the University of Pittsburgh School of Education in March 2023 to deliver a lecture on her advocacy efforts. Dozens of students and faculty and staff members from the school attended Ntaiya's presentation and learned about the ongoing impacts of extreme poverty, child marriage, early pregnancy, gender-based violence, and patriarchal gender norms on girls in her home country of Kenya. During her campus visit, Ntaiya also received the 2023 Exemplary Leader Award from the Johnson Institute for Responsible Leadership at Pitt's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs.



# His Vision Built the Strong Community Ties Pitt Enjoys Today

■ BY MARK NOOTBAAR





When John Wilds (MEd '70, PhD '78) came to work at the University of Pittsburgh in 1985, he did not imagine he would be with the University until his retirement—34 years later. With three degrees from Pitt and having grown up in the city, Wilds knew it was a great institution. However, his biggest motivations for coming to Pitt were that his current job was ending and that he needed to stay close to home to care for his mother.

Fortunately for the University and the Pittsburgh community, Wilds found great joy in his career at Pitt and a reason to stay that transcended geography and a paycheck.

“You could not ask for a better group of people to work with,” Wilds says. “I had other offers over the years, but there is no better place to be than at the University of Pittsburgh.”

Wilds’ story is similar to many of his generation. His father moved from the South to work in Western Pennsylvania’s mills as part of what is known as the Great Migration. Wilds worked summers and nights in the steel industry until the U.S. military draft disrupted his college plans.

“My parents said the best way to move forward in life was to get an education,” Wilds says. “I graduated high school in 1952, worked for a year in the mill to make some money to pay for school, and then enrolled at Pitt in what was then called the School of Liberal Arts and later declared as a physical education major.”

When his ability to defer the draft ran out, he joined the U.S. Army and served stateside for several years before returning to Pitt, this time majoring in the social sciences and psychology.

“I just felt being a gym teacher was not going to do it for me,” Wilds says. “I wanted something different and thought human relations would be a better fit.”

Wilds’ father’s good reputation at the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation mill, along with having worked there himself, helped Wilds to get a summer fill-in job

in the company’s human resources department. His Pitt degree helped him to parlay that position into a full-time job.

Wilds was the first Black person to work in the Jones and Laughlin headquarters in Pittsburgh. He stayed there for a number of years before accepting an offer to run the human resources department of the Warner Cable Company. It was a short-lived opportunity: A year later, in 1985, Warner became Time Warner, and Wilds was given the option to transfer to another city or leave the organization.

“I was the one responsible for taking care of my mother,” Wilds says. “My wife, young family, and I needed to stay in Pittsburgh.”

An offer from Pitt Chancellor Wesley W. Posvar came at just the right moment, and Wilds became the director of the University’s Office of Human Resources. Roughly 10 years later, he was asked by Chancellor J. Dennis O’Connor to focus on community relations in the Office of Governmental Relations. Wilds’ position slowly morphed into assistant vice chancellor of community and governmental relations, where he focused mostly on the community relations side of the office—which included lots of meetings with local leaders and politicians.

“The meetings we had while developing the University’s master plan might have been the hardest meetings,” Wilds says. “Some in the community thought we were not being open and transparent.”

Wilds’ roots in Pittsburgh, affable demeanor, and human relations experience helped him to gain the trust of community organizations, while his PhD in education gave him the credentials and respect to build consensus. He also had a vision for how the University and the community beyond Oakland could work together by having the University consider establishing a place-based presence in underserved neighborhoods.

“We asked them, ‘What do you need? What are the issues you are facing?’” Wilds says. “I knew we

might have programs or could jointly assist community organizations in the development of programs to address those situations.”

The result of that mindset and those ongoing conversations encouraged Wilds to find grants that would facilitate the importance of establishing University/community partnerships that eventually led to the creation of Pitt’s Community Engagement Centers (CECs).

“During his decades at Pitt, John championed the University’s role as a partner and resource to our communities,” says Lina Dostilio, Pitt vice chancellor of engagement and community affairs, who was highly recommended by Wilds to build the CECs. “Today, John’s influence is felt in every aspect of how the Office of Engagement and Community Affairs operates.”

Along with his professional commitment to the University, Wilds has long been a financial supporter. He made his first gift to the University in 1975 and has given nearly every year since. He splits his giving among funds associated with the African American Alumni Council, the School of Education, and the Department of Athletics.

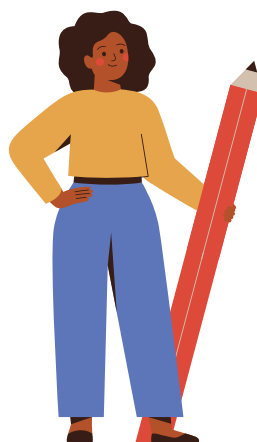
“I give annual gifts because the University needs scholarship monies now,” Wilds says. “I was able to fund my education by working in the mills. There are Pitt students with great aspirations who have to drop out because they cannot afford to stay in school. That should not happen.”

Wilds also is proud of his efforts to connect students with the community through programs such as PittServes, which creates volunteer opportunities that cultivate relationships within the community that will lay the foundation for students’ lifelong commitment to service.

“In life you have to give back,” says Wilds, who serves on several boards, including that of the School of Education Alumni Society. “If you can make the world a better place for someone else, you should do that. I’ll support Pitt financially and volunteer until I am no longer able.” ■

# Preparing Teachers for an Ever-changing Landscape

■ BY KAITLYN ZURCHER



As the world navigates technological advances and systemic inequity, Sharon and Alan Lesgold believe that now is an important time to support high-quality teacher preparation.

“We need to transform our society dramatically to ensure that we are preparing lifelong learners and giving people the best possible grounding to live in a world of rapid change,” says Alan Lesgold. “Part of the solution to surviving that transition lies in education.”

This thinking led the Lesgolds to establish the Lesgold Family Endowed Scholarship, which provides support for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in teacher education program at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education.

Alan served as the school’s inaugural Renée and Richard Goldman Dean from 2000 to 2016 and was a Pitt faculty member for more than 45 years. Sharon Lesgold previously worked at Pitt’s Learning Research and Development Center and Carnegie Mellon University’s Pittsburgh Advanced Cognitive Tutor Center. The Lesgolds are longtime supporters of the School of Education and have made several philanthropic commitments to the school.

The Lesgold Family Endowed Scholarship will fund tuition and other education-related expenses for undergraduate teacher education students, with preference given to those interested in teaching math or STEM or who transfer from a community college.

“The only way to make our public schools better is to increase the supply of really good teachers,” says Alan. “Having enough good teachers is a big piece of achieving equity in education.”

Placing a focus on community college transfer students became a priority for the Lesgolds after a conversation with Pitt Education’s Renée and Richard Goldman Dean Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher, whose research focuses on expanding knowledge and support for community colleges.

“The reality is, who can afford to become a teacher? We’re interested in ways to make it possible for more people to become teachers through the community college pipeline,” says Alan.





In addition to providing scholarship support, funds from the Lesgold Family Endowed Scholarship will support the development of learning opportunities for future teachers about artificial intelligence (AI) in the classroom. This may include discussion about and training in the use of intelligent tools for developing personalized learning opportunities and conducting formative assessments.

“With some of the things that are passed off as AI for instruction in the classroom, students can find ways around actually learning from them,” says Sharon. “We hope the students and their teachers learn to ask questions and will be able to see this technology as a tool, not a pain.”

“We wanted to make sure that a rich understanding of artificial intelligence was part of how teachers

are prepared at Pitt,” says Alan, who was a founder of Pitt’s AI doctoral program more than 30 years ago. “Pitt has the resources, with lots of AI talent spread throughout the University. With this fund, we want to make sure those resources can be tapped for high-quality teacher preparation.”

The Lesgolds hope that students will graduate from the undergraduate teacher certification program fully prepared and excited to tackle the field’s current and future challenges.

“We need to be preparing the next generation to engage that world positively,” says Alan. “Given the strong progress that the School of Education has made with its focus on equity, we want teachers to know that the real goal is that every kid comes out of school able to have a good, decent life.” ■



#### **Make Your Gift**

Support future education leaders by making a philanthropic gift to the School of Education. To learn more, contact Michael Haas, director of development and alumni affairs at Pitt Education, at [mbh26@pitt.edu](mailto:mbh26@pitt.edu).



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# Registration is open for Pitt Homecoming 2024

The Pitt Alumni Association is hosting Alumni and Student Homecoming 2024 on the University's Pittsburgh campus Sept. 16-22.

Honor the achievements of fellow graduates at the Alumni Awards Celebration on Sept. 19, meet local alumni who are brewing up some of the best beverages in Pittsburgh during

the Ale to Pitt welcome reception on Sept. 20, and show blue and gold pride during the annual tailgate before watching the Pitt Panthers take on Youngstown State University on Sept. 21 at Acrisure Stadium.

Throughout the week, students can take part in some of the University's favorite traditions, like Paint the Town, Spirit of Pitt, The Snake, I Love Pitt Day, and the Blue and Gold Bash.

Space is limited for some events, so register today.

