

PittEd






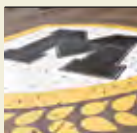
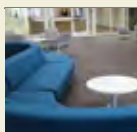

University of Pittsburgh School of Education Summer 2020

A Dynamic Transformation

Our School Reimagines Its Purpose and Place



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PittEd

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On the Cover:

Stockpiles of multicolored pencils are among the tools awaiting the students in the Fanny Edel Falk Laboratory School. The K-8 school is part of the School of Education. During this past year, the School of Education underwent its most sweeping transformation in decades by restructuring its academic programs and departments and completing extensive renovations to Wesley W. Posvar Hall (Page 18).

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

Message from the Dean



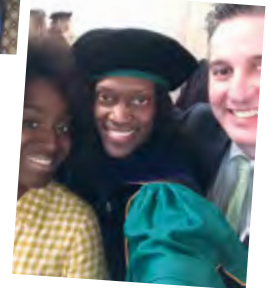
As our world experiences the devastating impact of COVID-19, and as we live with the damaging realities of inadequate health care, systems of racial profiling, and educational inequities, I hope we deeply contemplate ways to remain connected to, and be coconspirators for, one another. With the recent murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, we must commit to antiracism. Writings by Toni Morrison, Ana Castillo, June Jordan, and Bettina Love keep me inspired. Activist efforts by Winter BreeAnne, Alicia Garza, and Tamika Mallory keep me encouraged. Justice commitments of educators Donja Thomas and Michelle King keep me motivated. And innovative work to “remake learning” keeps me hopeful that intergenerational coalitions of children, youths, teachers, administrators, families, and caregivers will lead and produce dynamic transformations for equity and equality.

In our School of Education, our mission-vision statement frames our approach to dynamic transformations. It asks us to “ignite learning” and “strive for well-being for all.” It calls on us to “learn with and from communities” as we “innovate and agitate” and “teach with and for dignity.” While the global pandemic requires us to be socially distant and foster community from afar, we remain committed to determining “how national, global,

social, and technological change impacts learning.”

As we continue social distancing, I must admit I miss my face-to-face interactions with our school community. From time to time, I review the thousands of pictures, mainly group selfies, that I have collected since arriving at Pitt. My pictures are from graduation ceremonies, student orientations, retirement celebrations, school meetings, homecoming receptions, and board of visitors sessions. I even have random selfies from running into many of you in the hallways, across campus, and in communities. I hope that sharing a few of them here brings you fond memories until we can gather again.

Along with my selfies, I hope the stories featured in our PittEd magazine bring you joy. This edition highlights our commitment to equity and improvement science within a Dallas-based community engaged partnership. This edition also highlights our connections to the ideals of Fred Rogers and to the new maker space movement at our Fanny Edel Falk Laboratory School. Finally, our mission-vision is evident



in the dynamic transformation of our school, which includes restructuring our academic programs and departments, strengthening our operations and culture, and recently completing comprehensive building renovations.

I cannot wait for us to reconvene and celebrate our dynamic transformations—those that have happened and those still waiting to happen. When we gather again, be ready for random selfies. Until then, be well.

Valerie Kinloch
Renée and Richard Goldman Dean



Gina Garcia at her book launch in 2019

New Book Sparks National Interest

There are over 435 Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) in the United States—a number that is growing each year. These institutions are two- and four-year colleges and universities that, under the U.S. Department of Education classification, have an undergraduate enrollment of at least 25% Hispanic students. Unlike Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other minority-serving institutions, which make serving specific racial and ethnic populations part of their institutional mission, not all HSI institutions plan on becoming an HSI. Many schools are HSIs by virtue of a surge in the Latinx population in their region, something that will continue as the demographics in the country continue to change. To help college administrators and student affairs practitioners navigate this changing landscape, Associate Professor Gina Garcia published the book “Becoming Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Opportunities for Colleges and Universities” (Johns Hopkins University Press). The book draws on her experience in institutional research as well as her own experiences as a member of a Latinx community and a graduate of an HSI, California State University Northridge. Garcia’s book has received rave reviews and is inspiring positive change.

“HSIs are often evaluated for their effectiveness within a system that values racially White norms and measures, thus entirely negating culturally responsive programming and pedagogy. This book is meant to be a guide for institutional transformation,” says Garcia. ♦

Pitt Education New Home for International Society

The Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) will be based in the School of Education through 2022, following the appointment of M. Najeeb Shafiq as executive director of CIES. With over 3,000 members located around the world, CIES is a global association for educators and practitioners with an interest in systems and practices in international education. ♦



Summit Kick-starts Healthy Lifestyle Research

The impact of noise pollution from wind turbines on sleep. The rise of unhealthy eating behaviors in Kenya. The use of in-home Latinx community health professionals to increase activity levels of Latinx children. These were some of the research projects that received funding as part of the School of Education’s Healthy Lifestyle Institute (HLI) Pilot and Feasibility Funding Program, which awarded a total of \$100,000 in grant funding this past year. Faculty from education, nursing, economics, and rehabilitation sciences presented their projects at the HLI Summit in December. Keynote speaker Timothy Church, chief medical officer of ACAP Health Consulting in Dallas, Texas, spoke about the challenges and opportunities of transitioning from working in academia to the private sector.

“The goal of the summit was to reimagine our collaborative efforts and to position Pitt as the leading institution in health and lifestyle research regionally, nationally, and internationally,” said John Jakicic, director of HLI and Distinguished Professor in the School of Education. ♦

Student Honored for Educating Others on Disabilities

Timothy Grebeck is a student in the Combined Accelerated Studies in Education (CASE) program that provides dual certification in teaching and special education. He also is on the autism spectrum. During his sophomore year of college, he created the educational organization Talking 4 Autism. His goal was to educate his peers and clear up misconceptions about autism, a condition that is estimated to affect about one in 59 children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In recognition of his impact on the community, Grebeck received the 2019 Dick Thornburgh Disability Service Award from the University of Pittsburgh. He was honored this past October at a luncheon where he met with Thornburgh, former governor of Pennsylvania, and with children and families affected by disabilities.

“Tim is a true joy to have in the classroom. He teaches us as much as we teach him,” says Anna Arlotta-Guerrero, assistant professor of practice and coordinator of the CASE program.

Grebeck intends to change public perception of autism by reaching one person at a time. “The world is a big and confusing place, but through open dialogue, we have the ability to teach each other how to better navigate

it. I’m here to help others do exactly that,” says Grebeck. ♦

Timothy Grebeck





Conference Examines the School-to-Prison Pipeline

In July 2019, the Center for Urban Education at the School of Education hosted its Summer Educator Forum, Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Reimagining Policies, Practices, and Politics in Education. Over 500 educators from around the world, including as far away as Turkey, attended the three-day event. There were over 50 presentations from leading thinkers in education, including some who had formerly been incarcerated or had family who were incarcerated. Michelle Alexander, author of the best-selling book “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,”



Michelle Alexander

implored the audience to collectively combat racist practices in schools.

“It is absolutely essential for us to think about organizing right where you are in your school and to have a conversation with like-minded people about what is happening in our schools to see what we can do here to help young people,” said Alexander. ♦



Visit education.pitt.edu/news for the latest school news. If you have news to share, let us know at soeinfo@pitt.edu.

Honors

Assistant Professor **Maureen Porter** received the 2018 David Portlock Outstanding International Educator Award from the Pennsylvania Council of International Education.

Professor **Rick Donato** received the Frank Mulhern Outstanding Professional Leadership Award of the Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association in 2019. This award recognizes a member who has provided outstanding leadership in the teaching and learning of world languages and cultures.

Visiting Assistant Professor **Jon-Philip “Jay” Imbrenda** received the 2019 Arthur Applebee Award for Excellence in Research on Literacy. Jointly offered through a partnership between the Literacy Research Association and the School of Education at the University at Albany, State University of New York, the award is given annually to honor an influential article in literacy research published in a refereed journal in the previous calendar year.

Assistant Professor **Tessa McCarthy** was awarded the 2019 Alan J. Koenig Research in Literacy Award. Granted to one person every two years, the national honor is one of the highest forms of recognition for educators of people with visual impairments.

Assistant Professor of Practice **Max Schuster** was selected for the 2019-20 NASPA Emerging Faculty Leader Academy. The academy is a one-year program designed for early career faculty in student affairs and higher education graduate programs.

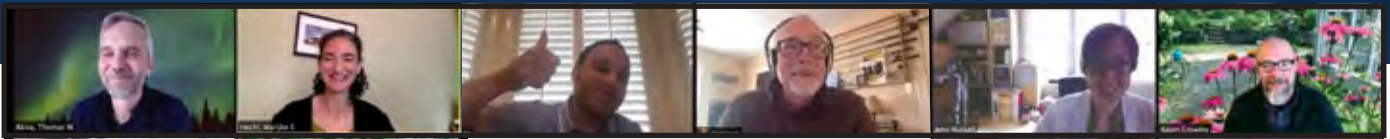
Assistant Professor **Lori Delale-O’Connor** received the 2019 University of Pittsburgh Provost’s Award for Diversity in the Curriculum for her active work to integrate equity and social justice work into their classroom instruction. She was recognized for her design of a qualitative research course taken by doctoral students.

Assistant Professor **Sharon E. Ross** was selected for the 2019-20 Extended Diversity Experience at the University of Pittsburgh. She joined a cohort of nine faculty members from across the University who will work to promote equity and justice in their curricula.

EdD student **Lauren Wallace** (MEd ’14), director of undergraduate recruitment at the University of Pittsburgh Office of Admissions and Financial Aid, was named to Pittsburgh Magazine’s 2019 40 Under 40 list for young professionals. She also was a 2019 recipient of the University of Pittsburgh Chancellor’s Staff Award along with MEd student **Dana Romano**, associate director of the Career Management Center at the University’s Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business.

Resilience and Community during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Joining with institutions around the world, the University of Pittsburgh School of Education enacted safety measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus during the spring academic term. All spring and summer courses were moved to remote learning. Faculty and staff were instructed to work from home. Large in-person gatherings, like the school's spring graduation, were cancelled or postponed. Faced with an unprecedented environment of social distancing, the school forged ahead with its mission to ignite learning and to support the health and well-being of all.



School of Education doctoral candidates, like Marijke Hecht (second from left), conducted virtual dissertation defenses.

Academic Life

Pivoting to Online Learning

Professors and students accustomed to interactive class styles faced an adjustment with the sudden switch to online courses. Gina Garcia, an associate professor in the area of higher education management, used the Zoom video-conferencing service to hold live sessions for her lectures. She also tapped into the website Padlet to simulate the experience of writing on a chalkboard in class.

"Student presentations and small group discussions play a central role in my pedagogy, so those were my biggest concerns," says Garcia. "Luckily, this approach has worked well for both."

Courtney Ross, one of Garcia's students in the school's Master of



Education in higher education program, agreed. "I still feel like I'm learning and getting the content," she says.



Mounting a Virtual Defense

Doctoral candidates moved their dissertation defenses to a virtual format.

Marijke Hecht was the first to conduct her defense via Zoom because she could no longer do it in person.

"It was obviously very different than I expected it to be, but there were also some nice aspects to it, too," says Hecht. For example, Hecht was able to invite all dissertation committee members, including one person from California, as well as dozens of her friends and family who normally could not have attended in person. Her dissertation was titled "Relational Processes between People and Place: Understanding Environmental Interest and Identity through a Learning Ecosystem Lens." At the very end of the dissertation defense, her committee chair, Kevin Crowley, associate dean for faculty and research at the School of Education, took every person off mute and asked them to give Hecht a round of applause. She had passed her dissertation defense with flying colors. She was now Dr. Hecht. "That was really cool and a super sweet moment," she says.



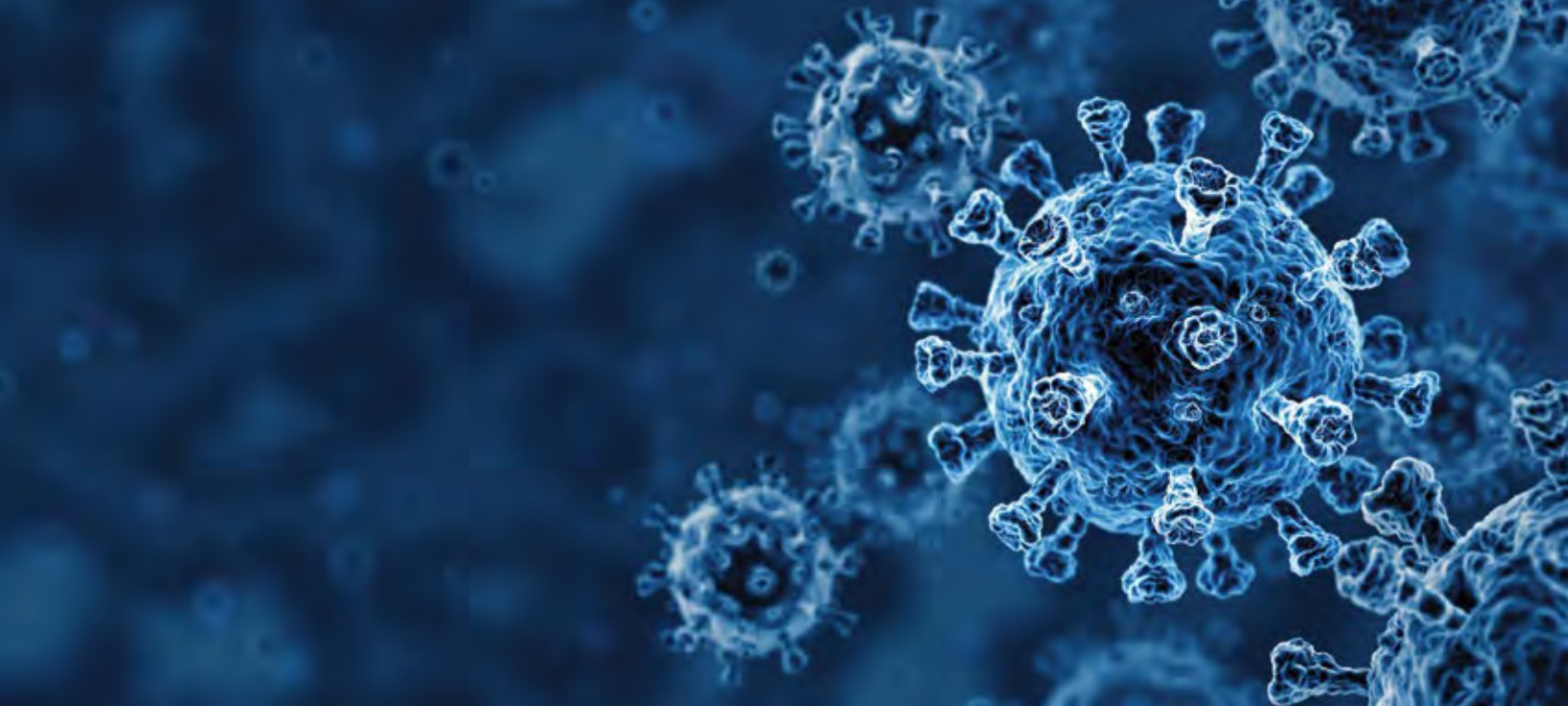
Social Connection

Rubbing Elbows in Virtual Coffee Chats

Shortly after physical distancing protocols went into effect, Emily Koren, a third-year PhD student in social and comparative analysis, found herself hungry for the social contact she was missing with her classmates and faculty.

"I greatly value the informal interactions that I have with people in the school," says Koren. "The interactions that come from just bumping into people in the hallways are an important dimension to the School of Education." In response,

Koren came up with an idea for virtual coffee breaks. Any member of the school community was welcome to drop in and



connect via the Zoom session. Called Chat & Check-Ins, these virtual coffee breaks were held throughout April and followed no formal agenda. People talked about whatever was on their mind—everything from favorite books to how to advance equity and justice during a crisis.

“Just because we’re practicing physical distance doesn’t mean we have to stop socially interacting,” said Koren.



classes four times a day during the work week. The free content is available to anyone through the Pitt calendar website.

“We are passionate about making physical activity accessible for everyone. Even in short stints, physical activity

has been shown to assist with improving mood and may lead to increased alertness and productivity,” says Renee Rogers, an associate professor at the School of Education and programming director at the Healthy Lifestyle Institute.

To make the workout videos, Rogers converted her home basement into a makeshift fitness studio. She works with her staff and graduate student assistants to produce the original content.

“Amidst the crisis, this has been a wonderful opportunity for us to step up in the University and be a leader,” says Rogers.

Protecting Workers through Safe Masks

School of Education alumnus Tyler Quinn (BS '14, MS '15, PhD '20) is working with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the COVID-19 crisis. He works as an exercise physiologist at the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which has a lab in the Pittsburgh suburbs. He supports the agency’s efforts to recommend personal protective equipment for front-



Tyler Quinn

line medical workers and emergency responders. Among other things, NIOSH is responsible for the testing and approval of respirators and other personal protective equipment used in occupational settings.

“You have to strike a balance between equipment that provides protection but won’t strain the body too much during physical activity during work,” says Quinn. He previously published research about personal protective equipment during the 2014 Ebola outbreak. Quinn says that he is motivated in his

work by “the potential for our research to be directly related to end-user quality of life and experience.”



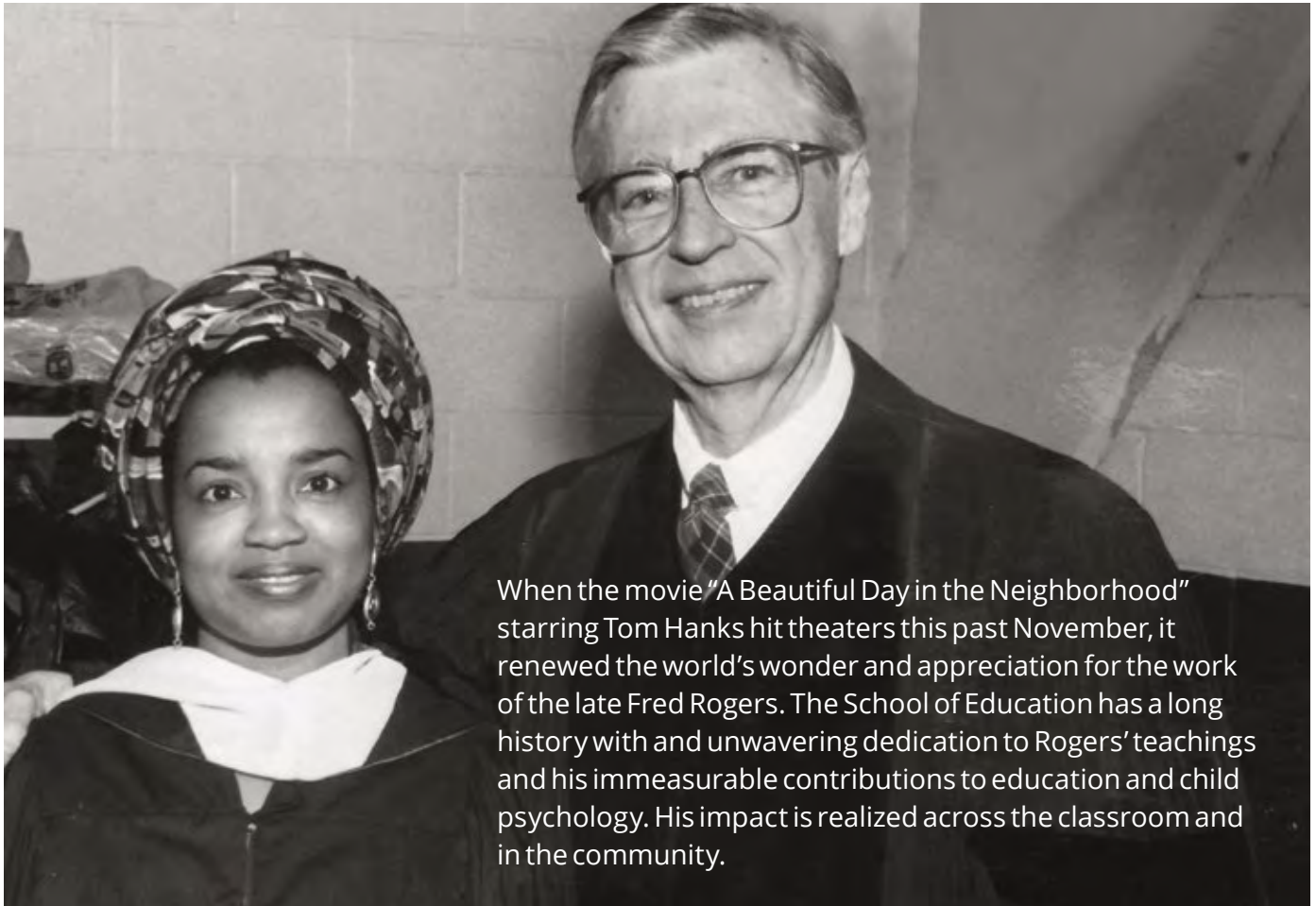
Physical Health

Keeping Pitt on the Move

During a time of physical distancing and working from home, the Be Fit Pitt team at the School of Education’s Healthy Lifestyle Institute began producing content to get people exercising from within the safety of their homes. In addition to posting workout videos to its YouTube channel, the Be Fit Pitt team began live-streaming its fitness

Carrying on Mister Rogers' Legacy

Written by Cassia Crogan



When the movie "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" starring Tom Hanks hit theaters this past November, it renewed the world's wonder and appreciation for the work of the late Fred Rogers. The School of Education has a long history with and unwavering dedication to Rogers' teachings and his immeasurable contributions to education and child psychology. His impact is realized across the classroom and in the community.

Years ago, the young daughter of Lugene Calderone, an adjunct professor at the School of Education, inspired her to write a letter to Fred Rogers. To her surprise, she received two letters back: one from Rogers and one from producer Hedda Sharapan, who graduated from the University in 1967 with a major in child development and care. A friendship was born.

For the past 10 years, Calderone has organized a classroom visit for her course Language and Literacy for the Young Child with Sharapan; fellow show producer Margy Whitmer; and Mister Speedy Delivery himself, David Newell.

During the course, the effects of technology on early childhood literacy, such as the medium of television, are researched and discussed. Sharapan and Whitmer explore the impact of Rogers' philosophy on young children and learning.

"My students were enthralled with each and every presentation throughout these years," says Calderone. "Recently, revisiting those experiences has ignited a newfound interest in these young students, who may not have ever seen the series. And the international students are mesmerized by our own private Pittsburgh phenomenon."

One student who took a particular interest in Rogers' work is Madhumita Mahesh, who earned her teacher education minor through the School of Education. As a child, Mahesh watched "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" with her mother, who used the show to practice her English after immigrating to the United States from India. Mahesh's passion for

Aisha White, director of the P.R.I.D.E. Program, with Fred Rogers before introducing him as the speaker at her 1993 Pitt commencement ceremony

his work only grew when she met Sharapan, Whitmer, and Newell in class.

"I was so taken with them and their dedication to the show and the culture it had created," said Mahesh. "It was partially that I was such a big fan and I had spent so much of my childhood feeling that I knew them that when I was able to meet and talk to them, it really felt like a reunion."

As a school and community-based service coordinator in the Prevention Program at Familylinks, Mahesh conducts therapeutic sessions at various Pittsburgh public schools. She works with school counselors to address many topics that Rogers' show focused on: self-esteem, bullying, anger management, grief and loss.

"I am able to think about how Mister Rogers would have handled situations," says Mahesh. "Often-times, educators teach down to the students, but I approach a session as an opportunity to learn from them as much as they can learn from me."

Mahesh also was able to see herself on the silver screen. She was cast as an extra in the new movie when it was filmed in Pittsburgh.

Bringing the Legacy to Life

Aisha White, director of the P.R.I.D.E. (Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education) Program in the School of Education's Office of Child Development, worked for Family Communications, Inc. in the 1990s and 2000s as the director of the Mister Rogers' Neighborhood Childcare Partnership.

"My office was less than 10 feet away from Fred's, so I would see him when he came in to work as well as during meetings," says White. "He was the same person you saw on his program or in any other setting: unassuming, thoughtful, soft spoken, and genuine."

Today, White works as a part-time consultant on "Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood," an animated children's television series based on "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." White supports the development of episodes and provides advice on program scripts.

White's colleague, Shannon Wanless, director of the school's Office of Child Development, also consults for the program.



School of Education faculty and staff wear cardigans in honor of Mister Rogers on World Kindness Day in November.

"Every single project we do at the Office of Child Development, in a way, lives and breathes the Fred Rogers legacy. We honor child development the same way he did in his work," says Wanless. "Just like Fred did, we are constantly checking to make sure we are being true to theory and research about children."

Rogers had a long friendship and professional relationship with the late Pitt child psychologist Margaret McFarland. But first he was a student in McFarland's early childhood development class at Pitt. School of Education Professor emeritus Karen VanderVen was also a student in McFarland's class and recalls impassioned discussions about the extent to which creative play should be structured in early childhood education.

VanderVen and current Pitt Education faculty member Cindy Popovich, who was a graduate student at the time, were present for many of Rogers and McFarland's weekly meetings.

Later, VanderVen started an arts and crafts program at UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital, where she applied what she learned in McFarland's class to her work in the community. Popovich, meanwhile, has incorporated the principles discussed in the class to the applied developmental psychology courses she has taught at the School of Education during the past 18 years.

Today and Tomorrow

From 1968 to 2001, Rogers covered a wide range of topics that always seemed to be addressed just at the right time. Now, almost 20 years after the final episode of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," what would he focus his show on today?

"What Mister Rogers talked about for years in his programs is very similar to what we are talking about now as key to creating equitable schools for all children and for having highly effective teachers in those schools," says Anna Arlotta-Guerrero, program director of the Combined Accelerated Studies in Education (CASE) program. "Many of his shows discussed love, respect, treating everyone kindly, and being a part of your community or neighborhood. We teach these same approaches today to CASE students."

Arlotta-Guerrero believes that the biggest difference in Rogers' show today would be a focus on equity in education and making sure that there was equal representation from Black communities and from other communities of color.

"I believe if he were alive today, he would be a champion of helping his audience realize that many children live in poverty and that racism causes trauma," says Arlotta-Guerrero.

By listening to and applying the values of Rogers, the School of Education is educating the next generation to make "the neighborhood" a little more beautiful and equitable for all. ♦

Wonder Lab:

Tracing the Roots of Maker Education

Written by Laura Roop

Photographs by Aimee Obidzinski/Pitt Visual Services
and Lynnea Lombardi (as noted)

What happens when the University of Pittsburgh School of Education's Fanny Edel Falk Laboratory School establishes a maker education space in a city at the nexus of the emerging maker movement? Falk's Wonder Lab is offering clues for how educators can realize the full potential of maker education.





Many maker education spaces in K-12 schools focus on technology, fabrication, and hands-on tinkering in the areas of science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics. Sometimes there is a designated room with materials and a 3-D printer. The Falk School Wonder Lab has these elements, but its maker space is unusual due to the progressive nature of the school.

“At Falk School, there is an ongoing dialogue that references the deep, foundational things that make the school what it is,” says school director Jeff Suzik. “We couldn’t view making our maker education as an add-on or as an aside, where children could go in their spare time.”

“We couldn’t let the space become a tool zoo,” he adds.

Instead, the Wonder Lab is a connective hub for all K-8 students, their teachers, and the broader Falk community. Students frequently use the lab throughout the school year. Their creations connect back to other academic subjects and build a sense of community.

The Wonder Lab is part of Falk’s unique heritage. Founded in 1931, Falk School has long embraced a progressive, child-centered, constructivist approach to learning and teaching. Its influences include John Dewey’s laboratory school at the University of Chicago, Lucy Sprague Mitchell’s Bank Street School, and Caroline Pratt’s City and Country School in New York City. Within that tradition, there is careful attention to the materials, processes, and fundamental habits of mind being taught. As Suzik says, “Falk’s cultural drivers could be summed up by these three words: wonder, care, and act.”

Building with a Crowdfunding Campaign

The Falk Wonder Lab opened in 2016, after Falk School received a maker education grant from the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh and \$50,000 was raised from generous donors and families through a successful crowdfunding campaign. From the onset, the Wonder Lab has evoked an ethos of

The Wonder Lab honors traditional arts and crafts as well as new technology-enabled making—but what everybody talks about is the ethos of empathy, caring, and connection that is sparked in the process.

empathy, caring, and connection through the students’ creations in the lab.

For example, to improve outdoor play for his classmates, a student envisioned building a ga-ga pit, which is a fenced-in structure used for the Israeli version of dodgeball. The ga-ga pit is a playground favorite and was autographed by students across the school.

Then there was the time that Falk teacher Chelsea Knittle needed a solution for the rabbits who were wandering in and out of her first- and second-grade classroom. Her students created a special gate to keep the bunnies



A “little free library” created in memory of a student

LYNNEA LOWBARDI

enclosed when the classroom door was open. Because they knew that Knittle loved the ocean, they decorated the gate with an underwater design adorned with mermaids.

Faculty and Students as Makers

Eighth-grader Mathew Long’s experiences with the Falk Wonder Lab have evolved over time. “Early on, I made birdhouses while learning about woodworking and wood burning. In sixth grade, we sewed togas for our play, ‘Julius Caesar,’” he says. Last year,



LYNNEA LOWBARDI

“I’ve been seeing the Wonder Lab used as a parallel hub to our library—not just for specific classes. Children are asking where there is a need, and wondering how they can help. They are experiencing the pride and purpose that goes beyond doing for oneself.”

—Jill Sarada, Assistant Director of Elementary Grades Learning



in a project with the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children, Long was paired with a partially sighted buddy named Joey. He learned that Joey loved light, so Long designed him an interactive puzzle with an LED panel at the bottom and puzzle pieces that matched particular colors.

This year, the projects are self-driven. Long recently began designing a Dungeons and Dragons dice box for a friend. The box has a sliding lid and dividers. It will be decorated using his wood-burning skills.

The Wonder Lab also is inspiring a do-it-yourself ethic in Falk teachers. Jill

Sarada, assistant director of elementary grades learning, taught herself to crochet scarves from YouTube. “I’m rethinking what is valuable with my own children,” she says. “We’re now getting out the paints. We’re making our own Halloween costumes. It’s a wonderful way to come together as a family.”



Ga-ga pit constructed in the Falk Wonder Lab.

LYNNEA LOMBARDI

"It transcends making a box or sewing a pillow," said eighth-grade student Matthew Long. The Falk Wonder Lab teaches him to solve problems, face adversity, and overcome obstacles. "It's a blast, learning while we are having fun," he says.

The Value of Making with Children

Wonder Lab faculty members Timothy Wagner and Derek Werderitch make an extraordinary team. Beyond their proficiency in industrial arts, technology, and design thinking, they also draw upon the principles of applied developmental psychology as they create engaging learning activities for their students.

The key ingredient to successful maker spaces, says Werderitch, who has helped to establish a dozen maker spaces in the region, is "staff, not stuff." 3-D printers, store-bought maker strips, and robotics kits are not best practices, he says. "What is needed are responsive, interactive teachers. Students should articulate their learning goals as they create."

The Wonder Lab is more than a drop-in space; it is built into the yearly rotation for students. "Math, history, social justice, science—we touch on everything," says Wagner. "In the very early grades, we focus on dispositions, language outcomes, tools, processes, and materials. We have bigger ideas than just teaching a skill. We want to teach the child as a whole." In fact, Falk School is now developing a curriculum for Wonder Lab that will tie into every class and level.

Maker education is a different kind of learning that Falk students have embraced.

"It transcends making a box or sewing a pillow," says Long, the eighth-grade student.



Long working on his Dungeons and Dragons dice box



LYNNEA LOWBARDI

The Falk Wonder Lab teaches him to solve problems, face adversity, and overcome obstacles. "It's a blast, learning while we are having fun," he says. ♦

Children’s Books Spark Conversations about Equity

Written by Lynnea Lombardi

Photograph by Mike Drazdzinski/Pitt Visual Services

Refugee experiences, LGBTQ rights, racial and ethnic identity, and religious intolerance are subjects that many adults struggle to discuss with each other, let alone with their children. The Office of Child Development at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education is changing that dynamic through an unlikely source: children’s picture books.

The office holds its annual Books for Change book drives for children’s books on challenging and essential topics in childhood development. The 2019 theme was equity. Throughout the fall term, people donated money and purchased books from a curated list of titles. Since the book drive began in 2018, it has collected over 4,000 books.

“Children know there is inequity in our society. By reading social justice–focused books to young children, adults are telling them that we see these problems too, and it is safe to come to us when they need help in standing up against injustice,” says Shannon Wanless, director of the Office of Child Development and associate professor at the School of Education.

The Office of Child Development team handpicked about 100 titles for the book drive. The books provide an opportunity for children to talk about problems they see with the important adults in their lives. “We reviewed many children’s books focused on social justice and equity and selected the ones that were high quality, developmentally appropriate, and resonated with the injustices that children need more adults to help them understand,” says Wanless.

Each book helps children to understand a small piece of the world. “All Are Welcome” by Alexandra Penfold and Suzanne Kaufman takes place in

a school where everyone comes together to celebrate the Lunar New Year, growing and learning as a community. “The Other Side” by Jacqueline Woodson is about girls living in a racially segregated town that is physically divided by a fence. “The Girl with a Mind for Math: The Story of Raye Montague” tells the true story of a mathematically gifted girl who persisted in the face of sexism.

Individuals who contributed to the book drive followed a link to an Amazon.com wish list, where they made their selection from the eligible titles. The Office of Child Development also partnered with the local bookstores White Whale and City Books to provide the books. The books were then sent to the Office of Child Development and distributed to community organizations across Western Pennsylvania, including the Matilda H. Theiss Child Development Center, Angels’ Place, and the Early Learning Center at Yeshiva. Some donors made financial contributions through the Office of Child Development website, which is still accepting donations.

Books for Change was created in 2018 in response to the mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, where 11 people were killed. The Office of Child Development began collecting and distributing books to help children and their families process their feelings of grief and trauma.

“We are so incredibly thankful to all who donated or spread the word about the importance of getting these books to more adults to share with the children in their lives,” says Wanless. “We have felt a deep commitment to equity from all students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members who donated to the book drive.”

Plans are under way for next year’s book drive. The Office of Child Development also will offer free professional development classes for teachers and early childcare providers who want to learn how to use picture books this summer.

Priceless Stories
154 community organizations received books from Books for Change.



Office of Child Development Director Shannon Wanless (left) with colleague Aisha White

Networked for Change

A new initiative from the University of Pittsburgh seeks to transform the lives—and education—of students in the Dallas Independent School District in Texas. Funded by a \$7.4 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the project is fusing elements of network theory, continuous improvement, improvement science, and equity and justice principles to bolster the capabilities of teachers and boost the learning of minoritized students. If proven effective, the interventions from this project may then be applied in urban schools nationwide.

Written by Greg Latshaw

Photographs courtesy of Jeff Dietz, Dallas Independent School District

Juan Araujo is an eighth grader at the Thomas C. Marsh Preparatory Academy in Dallas, Texas. He plays the violin in his school orchestra and is a cadet in the Army Junior ROTC program.

According to him, his English language arts and reading class became a “lot more fun” this school year. That’s because they started reading more books, like the American classic “To Kill a Mockingbird” by Harper Lee, he says. His class also is incorporating more small group discussions and writing exercises.

Recently, Araujo completed an activity inspired by speed dating. With his teacher keeping a stopwatch set at short intervals, he and his classmates moved around the room for conversations with different partners. Instead of starting these chats with an icebreaker, they were instructed to discuss the relationship among racism, injustice, and poverty. He and his classmates drew on texts they had read in class, as well as their own life experiences.

“It was really entertaining to see the other person’s different opinion. It was like an argument, we kept taking a side,” says Araujo, age 14.

Like most of his classmates, Araujo is Latino. The middle school he attends is part of the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD), which is one of the largest and most diverse districts in the nation. The district has over 155,000 students and 10,000 teachers. They are in 230 schools spread across over 375 square miles of urban terrain—a geographic area over six times the size of Pittsburgh. Of the total student population, 70% are Latinx, 22% are Black, 5% are White, and less than 2% are Asian.

For the past two years, the district and the University of Pittsburgh have teamed up through the Networks for School Improvement program of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Starting with students in the eighth and ninth grades, the effort seeks to increase the reading and writing proficiency of students, the vast majority of whom are Black or Latinx. Most students also are from economically disadvantaged households, and many are English language learners. The goal is to raise the students’ literacy proficiency to the level of being prepared to attend college or enter the workforce.

The initiative began with 14 schools from across the Dallas ISD—seven middle schools and the seven high schools that receive students from these middle schools. The decision to focus on eighth- and ninth-grade students was made because this transitional period is a pivotal time for determining a student’s future readiness for college.

“The biggest challenge we face in our district is overcoming generational poverty,” says Michael Hinojosa, the superintendent of the Dallas ISD. “But we’re very excited about this initiative. We know that if students can write, if they can read, if they can communicate, then that will serve them well for the rest of their lives.”

The changes that Araujo experienced in his English language arts and reading class are direct effects of the new Networks for School Improvement initiative. Teachers have embraced it, and the changes are already producing results.



Where Continuous Improvement Meets Improvement Science

The Dallas/IFL Network for School Improvement is a partnership between the Institute for Learning (IFL), the Learning Research and Development Center (LRDC), and the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. Funded by a five-year, \$7.4 million grant from the Gates Foundation, it is one of 30 instances of Gates-funded Networks for School Improvement that are occurring simultaneously in over 20 states.

“At its heart, this is an equity project. We are seeking to improve the education of the most marginalized students in the school system,” says Rosa Apodaca, executive director of IFL and a cluster lead in the project.

“This is about changing the minds and mindsets of how you work with students,” she says. “Giving them access to high-quality work is a mindset change.”

The initiative is grounded in the principles of continuous improvement and improvement science, which are more common in domains like supply chain management or medical science, says Anthony Petrosky, codirector of IFL and a professor in the School of Education. He is the project lead. He became so immersed in the project that he rented an apartment in Dallas so that he could visit the schools daily rather than having to fly in from Pittsburgh. Apodaca and the IFL fellows who are supporting a group of schools in the project, Denise Collier and Glenn Nolly, also are full-time residents of Dallas. Sara DeMartino, the IFL fellow who oversees the monthly network meetings and professional development in Dallas, makes the trip from Pittsburgh two to three times a month.

“The passion for me is because of the kids. I know these kids. I’m not Black or Latinx, so my experience isn’t equivalent, but I grew up in poverty, and I went to schools where I know what it’s like to be given dummed-down work,” says Petrosky.

Network theory is central to the project’s design, says Jennifer Russell, an associate professor at the School of Education and a research scientist at LRDC. The Pitt team acts as a central hub, and the spokes of the wheel are the 14 individual schools. All are connected



School District Snapshot

The Dallas Independent School District is the second-largest school district in Texas and 14th-largest school district in the United States.

- Serves over 155,000 students in pre-K through 12th grade
- Has 230 schools across a geographic area of 375 square miles
- Employs over 20,000 people, including 10,000 teachers
- 70% of students are Latinx, 22% of students are Black, and 44% of students are emergent multilingual learners

through opportunities to learn and work together. Time is built into the school day for teachers to lesson-plan around the project’s interventions. There also are regular meetings among teachers, assistant principals, and instructional coaches that provide opportunities for idea sharing and professional development. These meetings are facilitated by IFL fellows. In addition, the project leads also meet regularly with senior leadership at the Dallas ISD.

“Practical measures, such as quick, simple reviews of students’ and teachers’ work, are an important part of these structured networks. The goal is to facilitate improvement in ways that will allow us to finally make traction in problems that otherwise seem intractable in education,” says Russell.

Juan Araujo

Identifying the Necessity of Instructional Rigor

Based on the tenets of improvement science, the project consists of five phases: analyze the problem, create a theory of improvement, test changes, measure progress, and scale and share progress. The latter phases happen concurrently as investigators and school officials work together to adapt and make improvements on the fly.

The Pitt team began the project in the 2018-19 school year with a root cause analysis. This identified which solvable problems were blocking student achievement.

The root cause analysis consisted of three primary components. First, the investigators conducted a novel statistical analysis of data sets provided by the Dallas ISD. The data included student attendance, disciplinary actions, enrollment in high-level courses, and scores on standardized tests broken down by race, ethnicity, and gender. Second, educators in Dallas completed hundreds of empathy interviews with students and teachers. These interviews provided firsthand accounts of their experiences

with reading and writing. Third, the investigators performed an “asset walk” to assess existing strengths within the Dallas ISD. Among virtues that were identified were the boundless curiosity of students and the positive relationships between teachers and students.

The root cause analysis came to a clear conclusion. The students’ subpar achievement levels in reading and writing were due, more than anything else, to a lack of rigorous instruction. It wasn’t that students weren’t motivated. It wasn’t that they didn’t care. The truth was that they weren’t being challenged enough. Furthermore, the teachers wanted to support them but didn’t feel prepared or have the tools for high-quality instruction. Teachers also felt a tension in needing to prepare students for the state tests, which narrowed their instructional approach. Making matters worse, many of these teachers were young and inexperienced, which is a problem faced by urban school districts nationwide.

“This is an issue of equity,” says Petrosky. “Both teachers and students were frustrated by the limited instruction they were receiving in writing. Students want to write about the things they care about and not just be focused on the test. Teachers want to teach that way but feel like they don’t know how to balance it with preparing students for the state test.”

To ensure that students and teachers have a voice, the research team includes Dana Thompson Dorsey, an associate professor in the School of Education and associate director for research and development at CUE. She ensures that equity is infused into classroom instruction across every stage of the project. Bolstering the capabilities of teachers involves learning about equity and justice principles, including antibias and antiracist work, as well as culturally responsive education.

Nationwide, students of color are targets for prejudice in the classroom, which is rooted in the racial history of the United States, says Thompson Dorsey. Despite the fact that racial segregation was outlawed in schools over 65 years ago, inner-city schools are becoming increasingly Black and Brown as the families of White students continue to move to more affluent school districts. These inner-city schools are losing funding as the school choice movement directs more money away from public schools. Furthermore, inner-city schools

frequently have the least experienced and most overworked teachers and disproportionately high disciplinary rates for students of color. Thompson Dorsey says that, in this environment, it is hard enough for students to survive, let alone thrive.

“We hope this project will help to address some of the educational inequities and racial biases that are deeply ingrained in the larger society,” says Thompson Dorsey. “It’s easy to blame students and families for why the test scores are low. Those are the same biases that are always part of the education system, to blame them rather than looking at the effects of the larger systems.”

Enacting Tests of Change in the Classroom

During this past school year, the Pitt team and Dallas ISD administrators began implementing tests of change to address problems of practice. If these interventions are successful, they can then be scaled up from the 14 pilot schools to implementation districtwide.

One major effort already paying dividends is the district-wide curriculum redesign for reading and language arts in grades three through 12. The district has shifted its focus to “high-complexity and engaging texts,” with a special emphasis on materials that are culturally relevant, says Pablo Singh, the teaching and learning manager of language, literacy, and social studies in the Dallas ISD. “Previously, our curriculum was very teacher centered. But we’re now focused more on pushing student thinking and making things more student centered,” says Singh.

There also are smaller tests of change that are having a big impact. Student-facing task sheets, developed by the teachers, were introduced in the classroom. The task sheets contain a purpose statement and sequenced, targeted instructions for the lesson.

“The task sheets help teachers to build their pedagogical knowledge by helping them to forecast their lessons.

Small Tests Of Change

Year one of the project was focused on identifying the root causes of the problem. This past year has been focused on tests of change to solve the problems.

- **Task Sheets:** Clear set of instructions developed by the teacher and followed by the student
- **Quick Writes:** Writing exercise that help students to develop an imperfect first draft and organize their thoughts
- **Gallery Walks:** Discussion exercise in which students post thoughts on the wall and then walk the room to read what others have said
- **Pair and Trio Discussions:** Focused small group discussions where each person must share their thoughts

They also make the students own their work,” says Erika Prelow-Stephens, an instructional lead coach who oversees the coaches who train teachers at Dallas ISD.

At Justin F. Kimball High School, ninth-grade teachers Frank Jackson and Jada Weathers both regularly use task sheets to organize their lessons. Jackson, who is part of the Teach For America

program, is originally from the Philadelphia area. He recalls using a task sheet to guide a lesson that included a discussion on the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s increased enforcement activity in communities in Dallas.

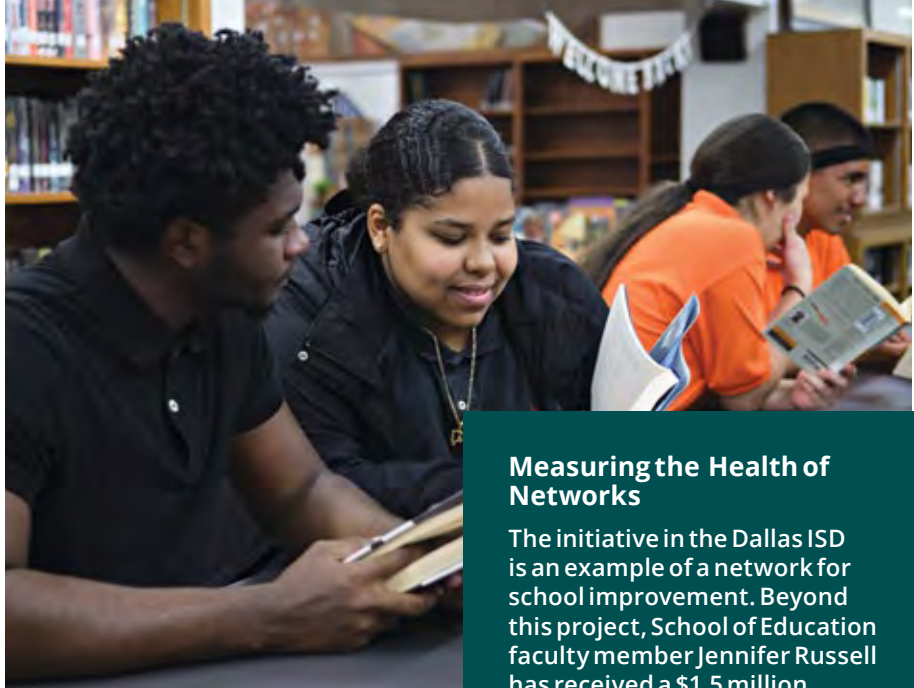
“It was a good discussion that day. That’s how I remember learning—by talking with one another” says Jackson. “This has allowed my students to be

more expressive. My students struggle with sharing their own thoughts and ideas. They are so used to testing and multiple choice.”

The initiative has introduced additional new tools to stimulate students’ engagement with each other around critical thinking and analysis.



Frank Jackson



Measuring the Health of Networks

The initiative in the Dallas ISD is an example of a network for school improvement. Beyond this project, School of Education faculty member Jennifer Russell has received a \$1.5 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to assess the health of other networks for school improvement that are occurring nationwide. “The project seeks to answer how network leaders and the Gates Foundation can support the development and health of these networks,” says Russell.

It exceeds my wildest dreams,” says Durant.

Positive results also are occurring at the Thomas C. Marsh Preparatory Academy, where teachers and students have embraced the changes that are requiring higher-order cognitive thinking, says Brittany Thompson, an assistant principal who oversees the English language arts department. It is her habit to refer to students in the school as “scholars.” She explains that this is because they are increasingly taking ownership of their learning journey.

“This work has made our scholars feel more accountable. We’re not spoon-feeding it to them anymore. They are doing the work,” says Thompson.

Araujo, the eighth grader at Marsh, is among the students who enjoy the added instructional rigor. As he prepares to enter high school, he says his favorite book is the Holocaust memoir “Night” by Elie Wiesel. The book opened his eyes to worldviews outside the United States.

“In college, I know that everyone has to write a lot of essays. We are practicing a lot for that now,” says Araujo.

His classroom experience is now more enjoyable. It also is preparing him for a brighter future. ♦

Dallas ISD teachers now lead gallery walks in which students post their thoughts on large sheets of paper hung on the wall and then walk the room to read different viewpoints. Teachers also place students into pair or trio discussions in which students have small group discussions guided by a teacher’s prompt.

Quick writes are another innovative instructional tool introduced by the Pitt researchers. Students are told to quickly write down their thoughts in response to a writing prompt. The writing is meant to be a predecessor to a formal outline or first draft. The act helps students to organize their thoughts, which prepares them for when it is time to write the longer assignment.

To show their students how this works, some teachers have put themselves on the spot. One teacher did her own quick write on a subject unfamiliar to her but well known to her students: the lyrics of a song by the Atlanta rapper Lil Baby. The teacher struggled mightily. The students shared a laugh at her expense. But that was okay. The students got the message.

“Modeling vulnerability for children is one of the most important things you can do for a child. It shows that making mistakes isn’t just tolerated, it’s a vital part of the process,” says Darlene Seeley, a ninth-grade English teacher at W.T. White High School.

Preparing Students for Life

There are still several years to go in the project, but early results are promising, according to school officials.

Tracie Washington, executive director of the Dallas ISD, recalls a recent visit to an eighth-grade classroom. The teacher was leading a discussion on the poem “We Wear the Mask” by Paul Laurence Dunbar. At that moment, a Black male who was an athlete—a person who appeared to be very reserved in the back of the room—voluntarily spoke up. He identified the poem as an extended metaphor, which caused the class to erupt into a spirited debate.

“It was like watching a volleyball going back and forth, watching the conversation around the room. It is the epitome of what I want to see happen in the students’ discussion of the text,” says Washington.

Another observation that is important to senior administration at the Dallas ISD

is that schools are starting to demonstrate quantifiable gains in writing. “It’s starting to stick. We’re seeing double-digit gains in every area in the common assessment this year versus last year,” says Washington.

Principals are noticing positive changes in their schools as well.

“The process is not only helping our students to become more proficient writers, it helps the teachers to hone their craft. Both are growing together,” says Jonathan Smith, principal of David W. Carter High School.

Diana Nuñez, principal of W.H. Adamson High School, has been an educator in the Dallas ISD for nearly 20 years. She has been amazed by how involved the students have become in their writing assignments, which she says “is not always the case.” She attributes the success to the buy-in by the teachers and the cultural relevance of the texts.

“Our main goal is to prepare kids for life, not just the test. The more rigor that we infuse, that increases our chance of meeting it,” said Nuñez.

Ivonne Durant, chief academic officer of Dallas ISD, says there is interest in expanding the project’s reach and increasing teachers’ professional development opportunities. She has heard from administrators in the pilot schools who want to expand it to additional grade levels and from administrators outside the project who want to have their schools join the pilot.

“It’s never easy to work with a district as large and diverse as ours. We have the highest poverty levels in the state of Texas. Our English learners population exceeds the state average. I’ve seen the work that our children are now producing, though.

A Dynamic Transformation: Reimagining Our Purpose and Place

Guided by its new mission-vision, which is grounded in equity, justice, engagement, and innovation, the School of Education has embarked on a journey of progress and change. The school adopted new academic structures, invested in new technologies, created new leadership positions, and hired new faculty. The results are energizing the school community and sparking new outlets for teaching and learning.

Written by **Laura Roop**

Photographs by Pitt Visual Services and Courtney Ross (as noted)



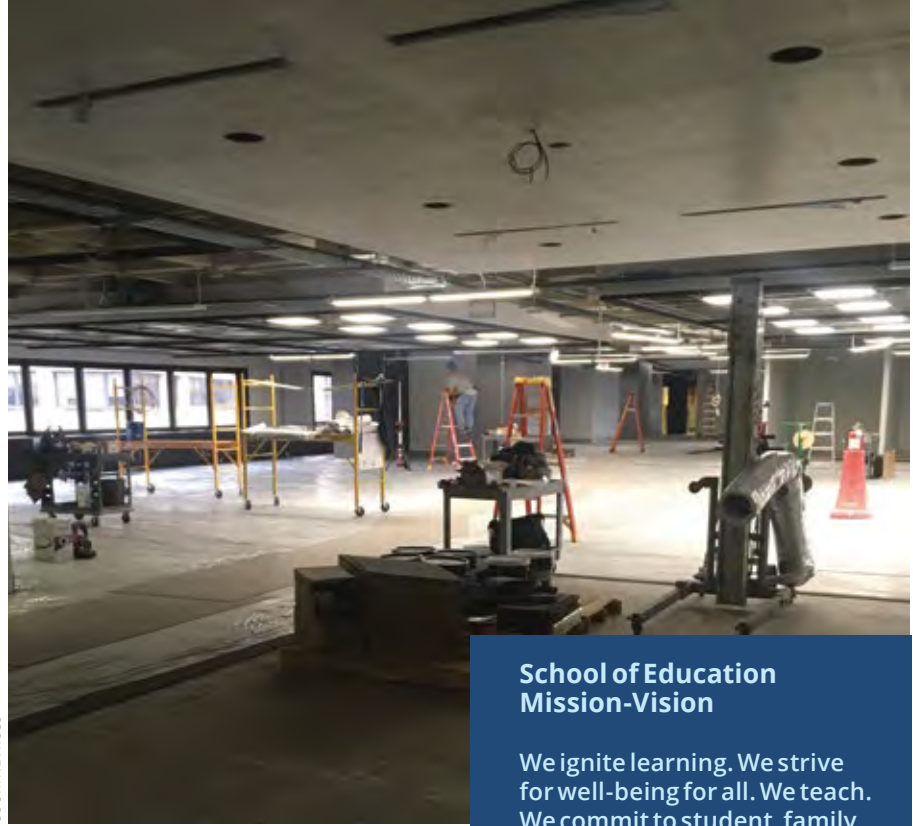
Unprecedented challenges call for dynamic responses. When the leaders of the University of Pittsburgh School of Education navigated wave after wave of changing conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic this past spring term, they let the values expressed in the school's new mission-vision statement guide their words and actions.

For instance, on the first day that the spring semester resumed in a new online learning format following an extended break, Valerie Kinloch, the Renée and Richard Goldman Dean, sent a school-wide communication to students, staff, and faculty. In her message, she balanced the need to share time-sensitive resources, information, and next steps with words of inspiration to unite the school community. She encouraged students, staff, and faculty to transform this time of crisis into an opportunity to help others and embrace the school's new cultural drivers and strategic priorities.

As Kinloch shared: "I ask that we remain mindful of the reality we are all experiencing, which includes increased stress, anxiety, and uncertainty; economic hardship for many as a result of Pennsylvania's new work restrictions; and serious health concerns for many people, including those we might know and love. This makes it all the more important for us to show each other grace and kindness, to embody dignity and integrity, and to recommit to our school's mission-vision."

The mission-vision she referenced has become the guiding force of the dynamic transformation occurring in the School of Education. The school recently embarked on a collective journey aimed at supporting the health and well-being of all learners in any environment where learning occurs. Guiding this journey are the twin pillars of educational equity and justice, which spark continual innovation, engagement, and community support. To advance this new work, the school undertook a comprehensive reorganization of its academic and operational units, created new leadership positions, hired new faculty, invested in innovative technologies, and is pursuing forward-thinking academic programs and research-practice partnerships.

"This transformation that our School of Education is undergoing—this is for all of us," says Kinloch, who became dean of the school on July 1, 2017.



COURTNEYROSS

Renovation of the School of Education offices and student spaces in Wesley W. Posvar Hall

Building a Foundation for the Future

The provocative phrase "We ignite learning" opens the mission-vision statement for the School of Education. The entire 115-word statement provides a direction for how the school should navigate the uncertain terrain of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as offers a road map for larger strategic decisions that need to be made.

The mission-vision is a collective work. It began with a murmur of voices—pairs, small groups, and larger topical discussions—over the first year and a half of Kinloch's deanship. The voices included those of faculty, staff, students, generations of alumni, community partners, and colleagues from across campus and the country. After former Dean Alan Lesgold retired following 16 years of administrative service, paired with more than 45 years of professorial work, faculty and staff in the School began asking new questions. What do we believe? What actions and programs make a difference? What are our strengths? What could be improved? What do we dream of doing? What does the region and nation need from us? What might be keeping us from fully realizing and operationalizing our potential?

After receiving insights and perspectives from various people connected to the School of Education over

School of Education Mission-Vision

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

a 16-month period, Kinloch woke up early one morning and drafted a version of the new mission-vision statement. She shared it with the school community, asking for feedback and suggestions.

"For me, the mission-vision statement is a battle cry and call to action that resonates with my own personal mission of cultivating community uplift and

generational change, especially for people who look like me,” said Daren Ellerbee, director of Pitt’s Community Engagement Center in Homewood.

“I’m proud to be one of many lifting this banner,” says Ellerbee, who also is a student in the school’s Doctor of Education program.

Leaders at other schools of education around the country have called the School of Education’s new mission-vision statement provocative, poetic and even courageous. Within the school, it is helping to shape big changes in structure, organization, hiring, and even the physical locations where the school does its work. Most importantly, it is energizing the ethos with which the school’s core work is conducted.

Adopting Powerful New Organizing Structures

To support the new mission-vision, the School of Education recently enacted a comprehensive reorganization of its academic units and administrative departments. The changes were authorized by University of Pittsburgh Chancellor Patrick Gallagher on January 1, 2020, and represent the most sweeping changes to the structure of the school in 30 years.

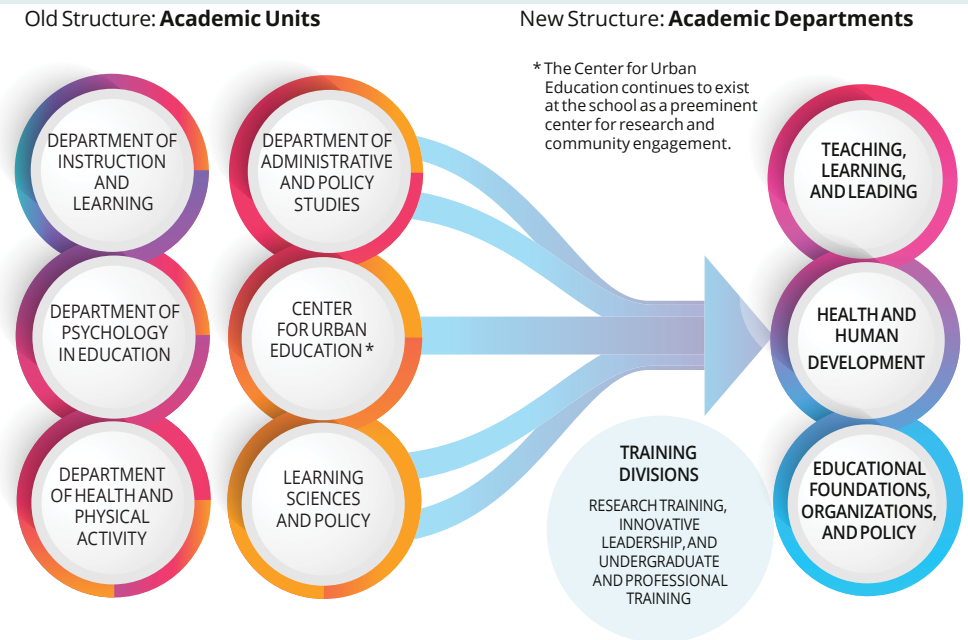
The school shifted from six academic units to three new academic departments: Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy; Health and Human Development; and Teaching, Learning, and Leading. To support the work of the academic departments, the school also created three divisions for cross-departmental training and conversations. The divisions are Research Training, Innovative Leadership, and Undergraduate and Professional Training.

The intention of these structural changes is to open up new possibilities for breaking down silos in order to collaborate across disciplinary boundaries. In addition, the streamlined design enhances student experiences, positions centers and institutes as collaborative sites, and increases efficiencies across the school.

The new chair of Health and Human Development, Tom Farmer, says that this newly formed department merges the strengths of two former departments—Health and Physical Activity and Psychology in Education—which were

Reorganization Overview

The School of Education has completed a comprehensive reorganization of its academic and administrative units. The school moved from six academic units to three academic departments, created new training divisions, and engaged in a staff restructuring.



As future educators, students strive for the well-being of all.

previously organized separately. “This new department will allow us to conduct cutting-edge work that focuses on the whole individual in context and spans the life course from infancy to the twilight years and across generations,” says Farmer.

“Our new department will develop an infrastructure that fosters synergies and identifies ways that we differ,” he says. “This approach will allow us to develop new strengths, possibilities, and innovations that we could not achieve separately.”

Similar care was taken to identify logical ties and possible collaborative work within the other new departments and divisions.

Tackling the “Wicked Problems” in Education

According to Kevin Crowley, associate dean for faculty and research, the School of Education is moving in a direction that will allow it to address the big, almost-impossible-to-solve problems in education. The social sciences call them “wicked problems.”

“We have big aspirations. We’re building on the school’s past, but we need new structures for this century. If we’re focusing on equity and justice, disruption, and innovation, we need to think about ourselves differently as a school of education,” says Crowley.

Crowley heads the new Research Training division. “We’re aiming to become a stronger multidisciplinary scholarly community,” he said. “We want to organize and train, so we are sharing power between the University and the learning ecosystems with which we engage.”

Associate Dean for Academic Programs Lindsay Clare Matsumura has been leading efforts to grow degree and non-degree programs. The school has recently added new programs in urban education and health management while also experimenting with new formats, including stackable credentials through an online program in STEAM Education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics).

Matsumura asks, “What is the role of universities in our society? How can we be part of people’s learning needs over their life spans?” She is especially interested in figuring out how the school



Leigh Patel



Tinukwa Boulder

can connect in communities that are not place-based. “By carefully integrating online learning into our programs, we can become much more responsive to the needs of adult learners,” she said.

She is encouraged that the school is beginning to build on its networks with research-practice partnerships that generate equitable learning opportunities. Partners—including alumni, current students, districts, communities, staff, and faculty—are creating new knowledge that is shared broadly. People can stay in community using both face-to-face and online means. Matsumura envisions a network of changemaking communities, learning together across the boundaries of place and time.

New Positions Lead to Exciting Action

To support the school’s mission-vision, two new leadership positions were recently created: associate dean for equity and justice, and director of innovative technologies and online learning.

The School of Education’s first Associate Dean for Equity and Justice Leigh Patel explains that her role is to help the school, collectively, look carefully at the range of practices, from admissions to hiring to working conditions, that are necessary to foster a more equitable community of learning.



The school approaches learning as intertwined with health, wellness, and human development.

“My goal is to help the school as a whole understand, at every single juncture, that we are creating obstacles and opportunities, likely at the same time,” says Patel. Rather than focusing on “how many of this or that,” she says, “equity asks different questions. Who has access to what? Who is suffering, and who is well? Who wants to get into the room and can’t?” Patel concludes, “We will be able to do a lot as a School of Education, when people come from a place of wellness within.”

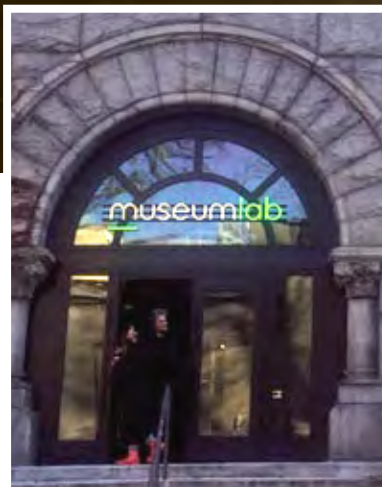
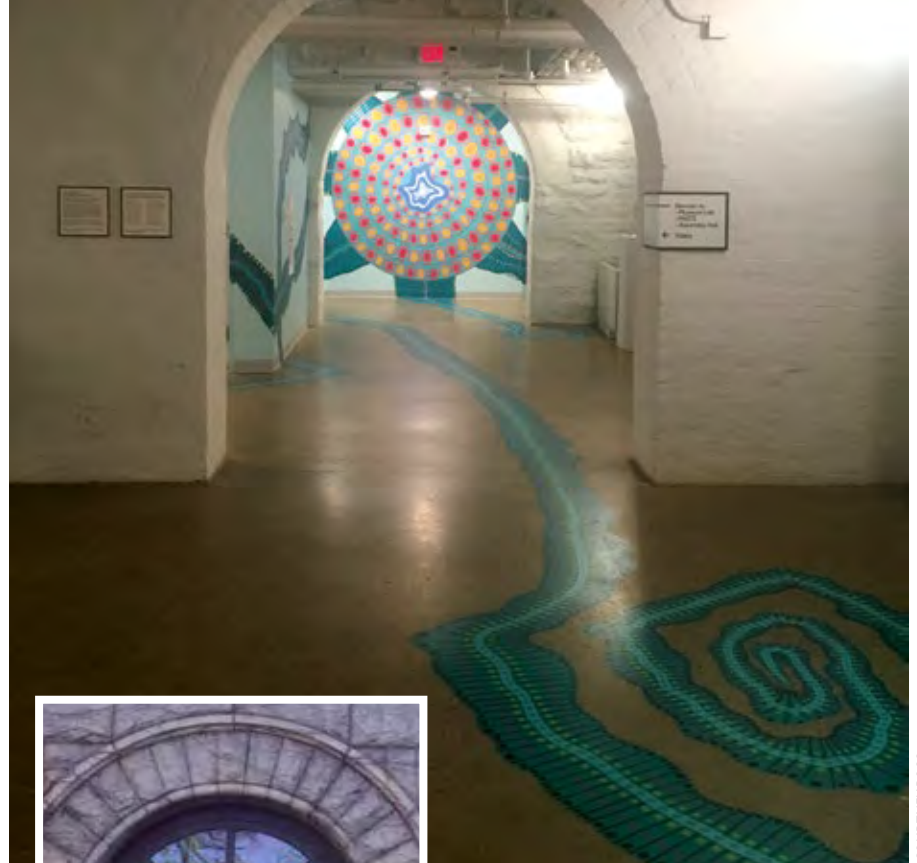
Tinukwa Boulder joined the school this past February as an associate professor and director of innovative technologies and online learning. While the school has designed online courses and learning opportunities for years, the entire University of Pittsburgh is moving from one learning management platform, Blackboard, to another, Canvas, this summer. The change in platforms can open new opportunities for collaboration and learning, she says.

“People need training and support if technology is really going to support teaching and learning,” says Boulder.

During the initial outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Boulder stepped up to support faculty in the rapid transition to remote learning. She immediately created professional learning opportunities for faculty as they moved face-to-face courses to online learning platforms. In the longer term, Boulder believes that if the school can create a “culture of empowerment,” where faculty can try out new tools and share with one another, then exciting possibilities will emerge. Boulder and Patel are already teaming up to work on accessibility issues within online spaces.

New Ideas Call for Reimagined Spaces

As the School of Education has engaged in rethinking its vision, its structures, and its roles, an extensive renovation was completed on the fifth floor of Wesley W. Posvar Hall. The updated space features well-equipped conference and meeting rooms, remodeled offices with striking views of Oakland, and new student-friendly areas that are conducive to conversation and collaboration. There also is a Dean’s Colloquium Room, which serves as a large meeting room for school events and gatherings.



“This successful renovation represents an important change to the physical space of our school and also reflects key aspects of our strategic plan and new mission-vision, most notably our commitment to innovation, engagement, and change,” says Rochelle Woods, senior assistant dean of administration, operations, and academic programs, who was responsible for overseeing the renovation. “The new space is designed to promote increased collaboration, productivity, creativity, and a more pleasant work environment.”

In addition to its renovations, the school has carved out new physical spaces in the community. Through space it has in the new Pitt Community Engagement Center in Homewood, the school has actively supported educational programs that engage with city residents. For example, students in the school’s Combined Accelerated Studies in Education program have volunteered in PittEnrich, which offers tutoring for elementary students at the center. The Healthy Lifestyle Institute also has hosted

healthy eating and physical activity sessions for families. The Office of Child Development is leveraging the new space for emotional wellness programs, and additional school-based projects are unfolding nearby at Westinghouse Academy.

In addition, the school has secured new learning space in the MuseumLab on the North Side. This will support the school’s emerging research-practice partnership work in that area of the city, especially within the areas of out-of-school learning and teacher education.

School leaders say that the decision to have space in historically disenfranchised communities within Pittsburgh is a signal of things to come.

Kinloch envisions a future where School of Education faculty, staff, students, and community members and agencies are participating in education hubs across the region, state, and globe. In these hubs, they would be able to collaborate, learn, and partner together to address issues and concerns as they emerge. She pictures a school that has “moved beyond silos and territorialism,” that “is not afraid to ask hard questions, roll up shirtsleeves, and act.”

“We have an obligation to stand by and with those who really need us,” says Kinloch. “Lives of kids, young people, and families depend on us getting this work right.” ♦

Student Forum: Spotlight on Justice

What does justice in education look like and want?

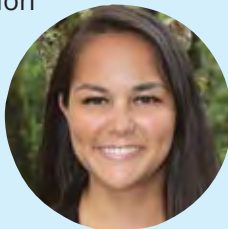
The School of Education's Equity and Justice Scholars Program supports doctoral students who are committed to transforming education through equity and justice-based change. We asked PhD students in the program to answer an important question about justice in education.



Nikki Cristobal

PhD student, Social and Comparative Analysis in Education
Hometown: Kaua'i, Hawaii

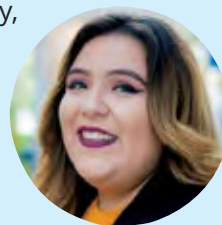
"Justice in education wants to be understood for what it is: an action that continually and critically asks 'What am I doing and for whom?' Justice is an action that shifts the relational dynamics within systems of power that are pervasive in our educational systems and that maintain inequities by placing borders around what education is (it's not synonymous with academia), what intellect is (it's not an individual characteristic), and what schooling is (it's not a perquisite for competence). Justice in education wants educational leaders (those with power) to take actions that change the material realities of those who are deemed (un) educated, (un)intellectual, and (in) competent."



Marialexia Zaragoza

PhD Student, Higher Education Management
Hometown: Riverside, California

"Justice in education wants equitable opportunities and outcomes for those involved, which include teachers, students, and families. It also wants change to current systems that continue to oppress marginalized communities. When I think of what justice in education looks like, I think we have yet to fully reach it. Justice in education would look like dismantling White supremacy, racism, and inequalities across all educational systems."



Jawanza Rand

PhD student, Social and Comparative Analysis in Education
Hometown: Jackson, Mississippi

"Taking seriously the notion that 'justice is what love looks like in public' (Cornel West), I imagine justice in education looking like teachers, principals, and superintendents centering a love ethos in their professional praxis, from policies to curriculum to pedagogy. Public education is fundamentally a humanitarian profession, rooted in care and concern for the healthy development of humans and society. Thus, justice in education wants the resources to pursue and implement the most ethical, equitable, and sustainable ways to educate and cultivate a caring, conscientious, civically engaged, highly literate and cosmopolitan-ready populace—including economic parity for teacher salaries."



School-wide Read Amplifies Alumna's Fight for Justice in the Classroom

The School of Education proudly selected alumna Bettina Love's book, "We Want to Do More than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom," as its 2019-20 School-wide Read. In addition to reading the book, students, faculty, and staff members participated in a book discussion where they talked about important subjects, like how to combat racism in preK-12 education. Now a professor at the University of Georgia's Mary Frances Early College of Education, Love earned her bachelor's in liberal studies (2001) and master's in elementary education (2002) at the University of Pittsburgh.

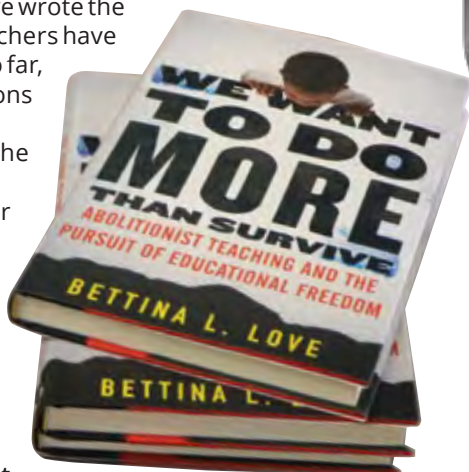
Leigh Patel, the associate dean of equity and justice at Pitt Education, caught up with Love for an interview on the school's PittEd Podcast series. During the wide-ranging interview, they talked about why Love wrote the book, how teachers have reacted to it so far, and what lessons educators can draw from it. The excerpts have been edited for length and clarity.

To listen to the full interview, visit education.pitt.edu/podcast.



"It is important for educators to know how deeply unjust systems affect people and their communities in unique ways, but it is also imperative to understand the intersections of injustice...for educators, this work starts in the classroom, school, and school community."

—Bettina Love from "We Want To Do More Than Survive"



PittEdcast

Patel: What Should Educators Take Away from the Book?

Love: "I wanted to write a book where educators would see the beauty and the joy and the creativity of Black and Brown children. To be about that work of love and joy and humanity is to see us for who we are: the trendsetters, the innovators, the lovers, the people who find joy in some of the most hideous conditions. I just want folks to see us. I want you to read with that lens."

Patel: How Did the Work of Abolitionists Inform and Inspire the Book?

Love: "The idea of freedom-dreaming together is important. That's why abolitionists were so important because they weren't trying to reimagine.

They were trying to destroy and rebuild something bigger and something more robust and something where everybody was included. That's what I want people to take away: Black folks' joy and the love and the idea that we have the intellectual capacity, the spiritual capacity, and the emotional capacity to redo this thing that we call education. It's possible."

Patel: How Can Teachers Be Supported in Abolitionist Teaching?

Love: "How do we start to put teachers' wellness and their racial wellness ahead of everything else? To be an abolitionist is to be well, first and foremost. If we heal teachers, then the work of social justice is so much easier. This process of becoming well parallels the process of justice."



Reed Humphrey (BS '74, PhD '86) was named acting provost at the University of Montana.

Denise Sedlacek (BS '84, MEd '91) was named Plum School District assistant superintendent for 9-12 education and human resources.

Janine Janosky (PhD '86) was named president of Richard J. Daley College in Chicago.

Richard Lucas (BA '87) published a comedic memoir titled "The Dog Log," which chronicles the joys and frustrations of living next to a neighbor with a barking dog. The book is available for purchase at richardlucascomedy.com.

Victoria Bastecki-Perez (MEd '90, EdD '95) was named interim president and provost of Montgomery County Community College in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.



Perez

Jirada Wudthayagorn (PhD '00) received one of Thailand's top research awards, the Outstanding Research Study Beneficial to Society award from the Ratchadapisek Sompoch Endowment Fund of Chulalongkorn University. She was honored for her research paper on culturally responsive entrance exam testing in Thailand.

Ruthie A. Rea (MEd '02, EdD '18), a principal at Pittsburgh Arsenal PreK-5 in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, was recognized with the 2019 New Pittsburgh Courier Women of Excellence Awards in Pittsburgh this past December.

J.P. Matychak (MEd '05, EdD '19), associate dean for student experience and services at Boston University's Questrom School of Business, has

launched a new podcast, Growing Higher Ed Leaders, to support leaders in higher education.

Ryann Barr (MAT '07), an English teacher at New Kensington's Valley High School, was named to The Incline's Who's Next 2019: Education list, which honors educators under the age of 40 making an impact in Western Pennsylvania.



Barr

Mary Goldberg (BS in A&S '05, MEd '07, PhD '13) was promoted to associate professor at the University of Pittsburgh. She has appointments in Pitt's Human Engineering Research Laboratories, Department of Rehabilitation Science and Technology, Clinical and Translational Science Institute, and Institute for Clinical Research Education.



Goldberg

Timothy Wagner (MS '09, EdD '13) was named principal of Upper Saint Clair High School in Upper Saint Clair, Pennsylvania.



Wagner

Angela Welch (MEd '09), education manager and assistant principal of City Charter High School in Pittsburgh, was named to The Incline's "Who's Next in Education," which honors educators under the age of 40 making an impact in Western Pennsylvania.

Shaun Tomaszewski (B. Phil in A&S '09, MEd '10) was named principal of Baldwin High School in Baldwin, Pennsylvania. He is a candidate in the School of Education PhD program.

Research by alumni **Erik Willis** (BS '10, MS '11) and **Seth Creasy** (MS '13, PhD '16) on how morning exercise may offer the most weight-loss benefits was featured in The New York Times.

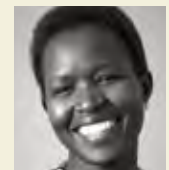


Willis



Creasy

Kakenya Ntaiya (PhD '11), founder and president of Kakenya's Dream, an organization that seeks to empower girls and transform communities in rural Kenya through education, was recognized as an Emerging Leader by the Obama Foundation.



Ntaiya

Safiyah Scott (MEd '15) received a 2019 Fulbright Scholarship from the U.S. Department of State to pursue a research project in Saudi Arabia. She will examine the experiences of Saudi female students with study abroad programs in the United States.

Mary Catherine Reljac (EdD '16) has been named superintendent of the Fox Chapel School District.

Erich G. May (EdD '18) was named superintendent of the Brookville Area School District in Brookville, Pennsylvania.



May

Melissa Friez (EdD '20) was named assistant superintendent of North Allegheny School District.

Have something to share?

We want to hear from you!

Email us: soenews@pitt.edu.

Every attempt is made to have accurate information. Please contact us if you have an update that was incorrect or not listed.

Featured Alumnus

Recognized for Helping the Blind and Visually Impaired in Africa



Oonyu, center, at the building site of the Silver Memorial Inclusive Learning Center that he founded.

Silver Francis Oonyu (MEd '12), a native of Uganda, lost his sight as a young boy after contracting measles. Growing up, he lacked access to special education services and was picked on in school because of his disability. But his life changed for the better when he had the opportunity to enroll in a school for blind children. Wanting to provide the same opportunity to others, he enrolled in the Pitt School of Education to study vision studies and learn how to provide an education to the blind and visually impaired. After graduating, he returned home to found the Silver Memorial Inclusive Learning Center or SMILE School. Serving about 200 children, the school provides an education they are unlikely to find anywhere else in the region and includes instruction on how to use adaptive tools, including braille, mobility equipment, and assistive information technology. While raising enough money to keep the school open has been a challenge, Oonyu has received support from the Pittsburgh-based organization Vulnerable Children and Youth Action. In recognition of his positive impact on the world, this past October, Oonyu received the 2019 Sheth International Young Alumni Achievement Award from the University of Pittsburgh Center for International Studies.



MARANIERA

To learn more or make a donation, visit vcaya.org

In Memoriam

Audrey B. Champagne (PhD '70), a pioneer in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education at the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center, died this past August. She specialized in instructional software for physics and elementary mathematics.

Rosemarie Cibik (BS '45, MEd '48, EdD '57), former superintendent of the Baldwin-Whitehall School District and a recipient of the Pittsburgh Woman of the Year in Education Award, died this past February.

Carlana Kohn-Davis, an instructor in the English department at South Carolina State University and a third-year EdD student, died this past August.

Ogle Duff, professor emeritus, died this past December. She was a celebrated professor of English education and also served as director of the University of Pittsburgh's former Race Desegregation Assistance Center.

Jere Gallagher, former associate dean, died this past August. She was the creator of the Kinder Kinetics Program for kids ages 3–12 in the school's former health and physical activity department. In her honor, it was subsequently renamed Pitt's Kids: Honoring the Vision of Dr. Jere Gallagher.

Olivia King Holt (BUN '48), who earned a bachelor's degree and Master of Social Work, was a former teacher in the Baltimore public schools and the assistant director of Camp James Weldon Johnson in Beaver County. She died this past December.

Eugene Lincoln, professor emeritus, who used his law degree to specialize in the area of special education law, died this past December.

Morris Shratter (BS '50, MEd '56), a World War II veteran of the U.S. Air Force, died in July of 2019.

Pam Solvay (PhD '88), a long-serving member of the School of Education Alumni Society Executive Committee and former president, died in April.

Why I Give

Matching Gift Supports Teachers of Writing

Written by Greg Latshaw

During the 2020 Pitt Day of Giving this past February, Vivian Mihalakis and husband, Anthony Petrosky, made their annual gift to the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. They specified that their donation be used to support the school's Western Pennsylvania Writing Project. Their \$10,000 donation was multiplied into a \$40,000 gift because Mihalakis works at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has a three-to-one employer match on philanthropic gifts.

"We wanted to do something to build writing in the local community," says Mihalakis, a senior program officer at the Gates Foundation. She is a 2010 graduate of the School of Education's PhD program in Instruction and Learning.

Both Mihalakis and Petrosky believe that writing is integral to learning, fostering inquiry, and developing empathy. Dismayed at the continual decline of writing instruction in K-12 classrooms nationwide, they began making annual matching gifts to the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project. Founded in 1984, the organization provides spaces for English and language arts teachers to develop their writing lives and grow as writers through summer writing institutes, conferences, and workshops; professional development in schools; and focused book studies. It is part of a national network of writing projects across the country.

"Research shows that the best writing teachers are writers themselves. If teachers learn to write, they will be better teachers of writing," says Petrosky.

Petrosky would know. In addition to being codirector of Pitt's Institute for Learning and holding joint appointments as a professor in the School of Education and the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts & Science's Department of English, he has published several volumes of original poetry. He received the Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets and a Notable Book Award from the American Library Association.



Vivian Mihalakis and her husband, Anthony Petrosky

Laura Roop, director of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project and an assistant professor in the School of Education, says that the organization has functioned well at a time of federal funding cuts thanks to the continued support of Mihalakis and Petrosky. This allows the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project to support K-12 schools across five counties and to partner with educational nonprofits on efforts like an ongoing project with the Carnegie Museum of Art focused on equity and justice in art.

"Our mission is to open up a space where teachers across all levels of discipline can experience the power of the written word so they can share it with learners. When you understand that words can change lives, that words can cause action in the world, then you will be focused more deeply on engaging with the learner," says Roop.

Michelle King, now codirector of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project, experienced that power firsthand in 2010, when she completed the project's Summer Institute for Teachers. The experience opened her eyes to teaching approaches that made space where each person felt like they belonged. "I was deeply moved by the space that was created for teachers to be fully human: beautiful, complex, intellectual, and compassionate beings. I am forever indebted to the writing project for awakening in me the power to cocreate equitable, loving futures," says King.

Michael Haas, director of development at the School of Education, says that many companies offer matching gift programs for employees, although sometimes people are unaware of them because the programs are not well advertised. He encourages alumni to check with their employers'

human resources departments about the availability of matching gift options.

"Matching gifts are a great way to maximize the impact of your philanthropic gift. Many times a matching gift can double or triple your contribution. By using a matching gift, you can impact more students and more programs," says Haas.

For Mihalakis and Petrosky, their support of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project allows them to plant seeds for educational change through enhanced writing instruction. "The writing project develops teachers around writing so they are better teachers of writing," says Mihalakis. ♦

Make a Philanthropic Gift

Philanthropic gifts, including matching gifts, can be made to benefit any area of the School of Education. Donors can designate where they would like to make their impact.

To see if your employer has a matching gift program, contact your human resources department. If your employer does participate, complete your employer's matching gift form and send the completed form, along with your donation, to the School of Education development office.

If you are interested in making a philanthropic gift, please contact Michael Haas, director of development at the School of Education, at mbh26@pitt.edu or 412-648-1789.

School of Education Mission-Vision Statement

We ignite learning

We strive for well-being for all. We teach.

We commit to student, family, and community success. We commit to educational equity. We advocate. **We work for justice.**

We cultivate relationships. We forge engaged partnerships.

We collaborate. We learn with and from communities.

We innovate and agitate. We pursue and produce knowledge.

We research. We disrupt and transform inequitable educational structures. We approach learning as intertwined with health, wellness, and human development. We address how national, global, social, and technological change impacts learning. We shape practice and policy. We teach with and for dignity. We think.

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



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