

# USC Rossier

M A G A Z I N E

## Do We Still Need Schools of Education



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## Dear Friends,



This fall, we celebrate the 106th anniversary of USC Rossier School of Education's founding. The genesis of our school came during several major inflection points in our nation's history. In 1918, World War I was coming to an end, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting women the right to vote would soon be adopted, the pandemic caused by Spanish influenza was claiming countless lives, and race riots were occurring in several cities as Black veterans returned home to violence, discrimination and segregation throughout our nation.

It's helpful to remember that the "good old days" were a mixed bag, so it's good to keep in mind that our nation has faced significant challenges as we contemplate those we face now. USC Rossier has always distinguished itself by a relentless commitment to hope and innovation. Our faculty and students consistently work to address systemic issues in education and engage in practice that enhances teaching and learning for all. They understand that this work is fluid and regularly involves the adoption of new technologies and approaches to meet the needs of our students.

Schools of education have been a fundamental part of society for centuries, and many consider them an essential requirement for a healthy and vibrant society. So why, then, has a recent Gallup poll shown that public confidence in institutions of higher education has dropped to a concerning 36%, down from 57% in 2015. Nationally, enrollment is in decline at schools of education, particularly in teacher education programs. As fewer Americans choose careers in education, the future of schools of education is being called into question.

Influential schools like ours must answer these questions directly. Throughout this issue, you will gain an understanding of the challenges confronting schools of education and learn about what USC Rossier is doing to lead by example at this time. In these pages, you will learn about what we are doing to address the rising costs of teacher education through initiatives like our teacher residency program, which covers tuition and provides a living stipend to students while making it possible for them to gain classroom experience. You will also hear about the new degree programs, classes and research initiatives we have created to address the critical issues and challenges of the current period. At USC Rossier, we are committed to providing our students with knowledge that is timely and relevant so that they can succeed after graduation.

Countless studies show that economic growth, public health, civic participation, social solidarity and collective happiness in a society are all enhanced by robust and thriving education systems. For over a century, USC Rossier has been a leader in defining what a school of education can be. This spirit of innovation and the audacity to aim high and reach new milestones continues to animate our work and pushes us to excel. We hope that you will appreciate our pragmatic yet optimistic approach as we work to further the USC Rossier mission for years to come.

Fight On!

Pedro A. Noguera, PhD

Distinguished Professor of Education  
Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean  
USC Rossier School of Education

In August 2023, the Lahaina fire destroyed parts of West Maui and claimed the lives of over 100 people. Amid the devastation, two USC Rossier doctoral graduates opened their hearts and the doors of their school (p. 38).

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## EDITOR'S NOTE



### Do We Still Need Schools of Education?

The first institution dedicated to teacher training is thought to have been established in France in 1685. This early school of education, called an *école normale* or normal school, was set up to provide future educators with the necessary knowledge to teach the “norms” of the day and age to their pupils. In the U.S., many public universities have their roots as normal schools. Suffice it to say that schools of education have been an essential part of our civilization for centuries. However, institutions that are as ubiquitous as schools of education often suffer from a lack of understanding about their importance. We often only understand such institutions’ importance to the health and progress of our society when they’re gone.

In an effort to explore the significance of schools of education *now*, in this issue of *USC Rossier Magazine*, we turn to this very question: Do we still need schools of education? In these pages, you will see the USC Rossier School of Education’s answer to this question in action as we explore and celebrate the work and research of our alumni, students, staff and faculty. You will read about how the USC Rossier community is serving their communities in ways that reach far beyond the halls of schools, helping to shape important educational policy from local school boards to Capitol Hill, and reimagining the design of curriculum and schools based on emerging research.

Kianoosh Hashemzadeh, Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY NATE KITCH

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Newly minted USC Rossier graduates celebrate at Commencement 2024.

### STORY IDEAS? FEEDBACK?

Please write to us at [communications@rossier.usc.edu](mailto:communications@rossier.usc.edu)

PHOTO BY BRIAN MORRI/211 PHOTOGRAPHY



← Barbara and Roger Rossier at an event on the USC University Park Campus in 2009.

## Roger Rossier MA '63, EdD '72, Lifelong Educator Known for His Significant Contributions to Educational Research and Policy, Passed Away at 92

The namesake of the USC Rossier School of Education passed away on Aug. 11, 2024.

By Eric Olsen

ROGER ROSSIER MA '63, EDD '72, a lifelong educator known for his significant contributions to educational research and policy, and the namesake of the USC Rossier School of Education, passed away on Aug. 11, 2024. He was 92.

A two-time alumnus of USC, Rossier had a long career in education and service, including positions as a geography teacher, dean of guidance at Pacifica High School in Garden Grove, a counselor at Cypress Community College, and as a member of the United States Navy.

Although Roger and his wife, Barbara J. Rossier EdD '71, attended USC, they didn't meet until after graduating in the early 1960s with master's degrees in educational guidance.

Before completing his degree at USC, Roger worked as a driver's education instructor and as a geography teacher at Santa Ana Valley High School. In 1964, they formally met while serving as school counselors at Westminster High School. They both later returned to USC for their doctorates; Barbara completed hers in 1971, and Roger completed his in 1972. What followed was a lifelong journey to positively transform education across the nation.

In 1980, Roger and Barbara Rossier purchased a small private school in Orange County dedicated to special-needs students with delays in academic, social and/or emotional development. Under their leadership, it became one of the largest special-education

schools in the state. Roger served as vice president of Rossier Educational Enterprises, overseeing the career counseling, transportation, and travel divisions, building on his expertise in counseling international students at Cypress Community College. Both Roger and Barbara dedicated their lives to pursuing educational equity and strived for a society that offers a strong education to people of all backgrounds.

In September 1998, that work culminated when the couple announced a \$20 million gift to USC's School of Education. At the time, it was believed to be the single largest gift ever made to a school of education in the United States. In recognition of their generosity and commitment to excellence in education, the USC Board of Trustees voted to rename the then 90-year-old school the USC Barbara J. and Roger W. Rossier School of Education.

"Roger Rossier's impact on the field of education will be felt for generations," said USC Rossier Dean Pedro Noguera. "Roger was a person of conviction and integrity who worked to provide opportunity for those without it. His support and leadership transformed our institution into a modern, influential school of education that impacts research and practice worldwide. Our hearts are heavy as we mourn the passing of Roger Rossier, and we are eternally grateful for his positive and lasting influence."

"[Barbara and I] both feel that we have the responsibility to make sure that others have the opportunity that was afforded to us," Roger Rossier said when announcing his historic gift to USC's School of Education.

Rossier remained steadfast in his commitment to USC over the years. In 2016, Roger was inducted into USC's Half Century Trojan Hall of Fame. He also served on USC's Athletics Board of Counselors, chaired the USC Rossier Counseling Advisory Council and chaired the USC Alumni Association Board of Governors Scions Scholarship Committee.

Roger Rossier is survived by two sons, Dan and Steve; grandchildren Jennifer, Seth and Sophia; and daughters-in-law Linda and Anne. Barbara Rossier passed away on Aug. 11, 2013, at the age of 78. —R

PHOTO:USC



## Copur-Gencturk Receives \$6.7M to Improve Math instruction

Largest ever USC Rossier award of federal funds will create content-focused professional development programs.

By Adriana Maestas

BUILDING ON HER PREVIOUS RESEARCH TO improve teacher performance and student achievement with the use of artificial intelligence (AI), USC Rossier Associate Professor Yasemin Copur-Gencturk has been awarded \$6.7 million from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to pursue two research projects that are aimed to improve elementary math instruction. It is the single largest grant a USC Rossier faculty member has secured from NSF.

One of the projects will create a diagnostic tool to measure teachers' content and pedagogical content knowledge of numbers and operations for elementary school teachers. The goal is to develop a diagnostic measure that will provide insights into teachers' mastery of the key elements of content and pedagogical content knowledge needed for teaching. Many existing assessments don't provide adequate insights into these two knowledge areas that teachers need, which hinders professional development efforts to support teachers.

Copur-Gencturk and her team will not only develop the diagnostic assessment tool, but they plan to produce research articles and workshops about the reliability and validity of this assessment and what they learn

about teachers' content and pedagogical content knowledge.

"To provide effective professional development for math teachers, we need to know where teachers are in terms of their understanding of the foundational ideas behind the content they teach, and their pedagogical content knowledge which involves knowing how students think about working through certain concepts and how instructional strategies and representations promote student learning," said Copur-Gencturk. "With this diagnostic tool that we will create, we'll be able to examine the ways in which professional development programs are successful in developing these knowledge bases. We'll also be able to research the role that different components of such knowledge play in instruction and student learning."

The next project is also aimed at enhancing content and pedagogical content knowledge for elementary school math teachers, but it will utilize AI to create a personalized, active learning environment for the teachers. The ultimate goal is to change student outcomes at scale by having an AI-guided tool for teachers that will provide feedback as the instructors work through activities on foundational

concepts about numbers and operations across grade levels as well as how the teachers understand the way that students learn those concepts and how instructional tools and practices can be adapted to help students master math material. The AI tool will be the facilitator that guides the teachers through an interactive professional development process, enabling instructors to receive professional development, anytime and anywhere.

"Because elementary school teachers teach multiple subjects, they have limited opportunities to develop content-specific expertise in teaching mathematics. One way to address this challenge is to create content-focused professional development programs that focus on the key knowledge and skills that matter in quality teaching and student learning. In this project, we will develop an artificial intelligence-based program that integrates research on mathematics teaching and learning as well as artificial intelligence, to enhance teachers' knowledge of how to teach numbers and operations," said Copur-Gencturk.

"We are optimistic that by making this program accessible to teachers anywhere and anytime and by providing instant feedback on their learning, we are addressing the opportunity gaps some of our teachers experience in accessing quality professional support. This will move us one step closer to improving instruction and student learning at scale." —R



### Welcome New Faculty!

**RONALD HALLETT**  
Research Professor, Pullias Center for Higher Education

**Expertise:** Improving college access, increase retention and graduation rates for college students, low-income and first-generation college students, students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, college and university transformation

## ‘My Diagnoses Are My Superpower’

Through a career in educational counseling, master’s student Caraline Rossini aims to be a guiding light for other neurodivergent students.

By Dylan Williams

FROM AS EARLY AS PREKINDERGARTEN, at the age of 5, Caraline Rossini knew she was different from everyone else. Growing up in Bothell, Wash., she frequently grappled with academic tasks that appeared effortless to others, leaving her thinking: “Why is this so hard for me? It’s not fair.”

Activities such as reading aloud in class were particularly daunting for Rossini, often accompanied by anxiety and shame. It was only after her diagnosis that the cause became clear: Dyslexia slowed her reading speed, while a language processing disorder significantly delayed her ability to understand and absorb new information.

For years, Rossini felt uniquely burdened by her educational challenges. It was not until she enrolled at Seattle Pacific University, where she met others with similar learning profiles, that she experienced a deep sense of relief and belonging. She was not alone.

With this empowering realization, Rossini developed learning strategies tailored to her strengths and needs, such as meticulous note-taking, crafting detailed study guides and utilizing alternative format textbooks and study-tool software like Glean. These adjustments helped her flourish. Rossini rode this wave of self-acceptance into a career in educational counseling—a career she initially learned about in a psychology seminar her senior year.

After graduating from Seattle Pacific University with her BA in psychology, Rossini applied to USC Rossier’s Master of Education in Educational Counseling program. At USC Rossier, Rossini’s educational and professional journeys have been intrinsically connected to her personal experiences with dyslexia and language processing disorder. These learning differences have not only shaped her academic and career paths but also fueled her desire to provide the support she once lacked.

Reflecting on her own feelings of isolation and misunderstanding before connecting with peers in college, Rossini recalls “desperately wishing I had someone my age who was going through the same things.” She has now become that guiding star for her community, ensuring no student feels alone by providing encouragement and understanding to those facing challenges like her own.

“My personal experience with academics is why I chose this field,” Rossini says, citing that pivotal moment in her senior year psychology seminar and an internship working



with neurodivergent students that helped reveal her career path. “I was like, ‘Oh, my gosh, this is my purpose.’”

In her professional life, Rossini has become a champion of the students she supports at Long Beach City College’s Career Center, where she interns as a student success coach. In her role, Rossini emphasizes the importance of self-advocacy, encouraging students to clearly articulate their needs and collaborate with educators to craft their path to success.

Rossini’s story culminates in a compelling testament to the power of resilience and self-awareness. She recounts being “told by society and several teachers that my learning disabilities would prevent me from becoming successful,” despite all her best efforts. But “little did they know, them planting that seed was the fuel I needed to light my soul on fire and prove to everyone, including myself, that I can do anything.”

While she misses the lush landscapes of Washington, Rossini admits she has fallen in love with the sunshine and plans to stay in Southern California after graduation. She ultimately aspires to become a community college counselor and teach as an adjunct professor. She remains open to other opportunities in higher education, as long as she can continue her work with students. “That’s what really brings me joy at the end of the day,” Rossini says.

Rossini’s journey underscores a profound narrative: Adversity, when embraced, can become a catalyst for growth and an avenue to inspire others. She now considers her dyslexia and learning processing disorder not as barriers but as empowering distinctions, affirming, “My diagnoses are my superpower.” —R

PHOTO BY RAFAEL HERNANDEZ

## Study Sheds Light On Adolescent Mental Health Crisis In The United States

Results emphasize the interconnectedness of mental health, attendance and school grades.

By Ellen Evaristo

RESEARCHERS WITH USC DORNSIFE COLLEGE of Letters, Arts and Sciences and USC Rossier released a new report titled “A Nation’s Children at Risk: Insights on Children’s Mental Health from the Understanding America Study” that examined the current state of adolescent mental health in the United States.

In a nationally representative sample of U.S. families, this new report examines adolescent mental health through the lens of their school experiences and parental perspectives. The study delved into mental health scores across multiple demographic groups and explored the correlation between scores, school attendance and course grades. Importantly, the study also investigated the availability of mental health resources in schools to support students in need.

Study co-authors Amie Rapaport, Morgan Polikoff, Anna Saavedra and Daniel Silver presented the finding’s implications and offered recommendations in their report.

“Our data supports the interconnected nature of student needs; to improve academic outcomes, schools must prioritize mental health and attendance,” said Rapaport, co-director with the Center for Applied Research in Education (CARE) and research scientist with the Center for Economic and Social Research (CESR), both with USC Dornsife.

The study suggests that when students receive mental health support in school, 75% of parents report that these services are beneficial, with 72% expressing satisfaction. However, disparities in service availability exist, with service availability greater in schools serving more White and higher-income households, despite the fact that lower-income families are more than 5 times as likely as higher-income families to take up the services in schools when offered.

“While there is a growing awareness of the mental health struggles faced by adolescents, our study underscores that different student groups are experiencing different struggles—clearly, a one-size-fits-all solution to this problem will not work,” said Polikoff, USC Rossier professor of education and co-faculty director of the USC EdPolicy Hub.

### Key findings include:

- Teen girls and pre-teen boys exhibit distress differently, with pre-teen boys struggling with externalizing behaviors and hyperactivity, while teen girls are experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- Students who are on track to be chronically absent or who are earning Cs are three or more times as likely to face mental health challenges as those with fewer absences or As and Bs.
- Black and lower-income families report fewer school mental health services but are more likely to utilize them when available.
- Nearly 20% of families without access to mental health services would enroll their children if offered. —R

## District Leaders Tackle Persistent Problems at Breakthrough Leadership Institute

By Katrina Nash

The second annual Breakthrough Leadership Institute took place from July 14 to 17 and proved to be a place designed for impact, where leaders took a deep-dive into their school’s issues and walked away with a personalized engagement plan.

The three-day intensive institute was built around four interrelated pillars that research and practice have shown to bolster the ways in which relationships lead to educational equity: disrupt how a district provides support to a community, innovate ways to personalize teaching and learning, reimagine definitions of how students feel connected in schools, and advocate clear definitions, actions and timelines for student growth.

Shadow Hills Engineering & Design Magnet Academy Principal Krishna Spates EdD ’22 brought 19 teachers to help figure out how to increase the sense of belonging and connection among students, caregivers, teachers and staff. “I believe we can improve our achievement data through some of the neuroscience work that we learned from Professor Immordino-Yang, in order to make every person on our campus and in our community feel welcome,” said Spates.

Every school district came to the institute with a problem of practice that they examined with their facilitator during breakout sessions. This dedicated learning space for in-depth discussion, planning and creation was guided by their facilitator, an experienced superintendent who will continue working with the district into the fall and spring. On the final day, each district presented their problem of practice along with their personalized engagement plan that laid out clear definitions, solutions, actions and timelines to support student belonging.

Dean’s Superintendents Advisory Group member and Sierra Sands Superintendent April Moore EdD ’12 came to the Breakthrough Leadership Institute with teams from two schools and the district office to reimagine their middle school experience. “It was amazing to see the evolution of our thinking over the three days with probing from Dean Noguera and Professor Christina Kishimoto,” said Moore. “They challenged our thinking, and we recast our timeline and approach to ensure our students are at the center of this reimagination.”

➤ Educational Counseling student Caraline Rossini hopes to provide specialized support to students with learning processing disorders.

## ‘Transcendent Thinking’ May Grow Teens’ Brains

CANDLE scientists find that adolescents who grapple with the bigger meaning of social situations experience greater brain growth.

SCIENTISTS AT THE CENTER FOR AFFECTIVE Neuroscience, Development, Learning and Education (CANDLE), have shown for the first time that a type of thinking, that has been described for over a century as a developmental milestone of adolescence, may grow teenagers’ brains over time. This kind of thinking, which the study’s authors call “transcendent,” moves beyond reacting to the concrete specifics of social situations to also consider the broader ethical, systems-level and personal implications at play. Engaging in this type of thinking involves analyzing situations for their deeper meaning, historical contexts, civic significance and/or underlying ideas.

The research team, led by USC Rossier Professor of Education, Psychology and Neuroscience Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, includes Rebecca J.M. Gotlieb, research scientist at UCLA, and Xiao-Fei Yang, assistant research professor at USC Rossier.

The researchers privately interviewed 65, 14-18-year-old high school students about

true stories of other teens from around the world and asked the students to explain how each story made them feel. The students then underwent fMRI brain scans that day and again two years later. The researchers followed up with the participants twice more over the next three years, as they moved into their early twenties.

What the researchers found is that all teens in the experiment talked at least some about the bigger picture—what lessons they took from a particularly poignant story, or how a story may have changed their perspective on something in their own life or the lives and futures of others. However, they found that while all of the participating teens could think transcendentally, some did it far more than others. And that was what made the difference. The more a teen grappled with the bigger picture and tried to learn from the stories, the more that teen increased the coordination between brain networks over the next two years, regardless of their IQ or their

socioeconomic status. This brain growth—not how a teen’s brain compared to other teens’ brains but how a teen’s brain compared to their own brain two years earlier—in turn predicted important developmental milestones, like identity development in the late teen years and life satisfaction in young adulthood, about five years later.

The findings reveal a novel predictor of brain development—transcendent thinking. The researchers believe transcendent thinking may grow the brain because it requires coordinating brain networks involved in effortful, focused thinking, like the executive control network, with those involved in internal reflection and free-form thinking, like the default mode network. These findings “have important implications for the design of middle and high schools, and potentially also for adolescent mental health,” lead researcher Immordino-Yang says. The findings suggest “the importance of attending to adolescents’ needs to engage with complex perspectives and emotions on the social and personal relevance of issues, such as through civically minded educational approaches,” Immordino-Yang explains. Overall, Immordino-Yang underscores “the important role teens play in their own brain development through the meaning they make of the social world.” —R

## In the Media

“If one person can take to Twitter and ultimately inflame a campaign to dismantle DEI in large companies, it means those things were not strong to begin with. Most companies and the people who lead them were not committed to this in the first place.”

—SHAUN HARPER, University Professor, on CNN.com

“Everyone should take the lessons learned from L.A. Unified ... and slow things down. Because there’s no rush. AI is going to develop, and it’s really on the AI edtech companies to prove out that what they’re selling is worth the investment.”

—STEPHEN AGUILAR, Associate Professor, in CalMatters

“Too much of the work on young folks in foster care is sort of around, ‘What explains the failure?’ We need to understand why some students don’t succeed. But there’s also a lot that we can learn from young people who do succeed ... I wanted to do asset-based work and resiliency-based work versus deficit-oriented work.

—ROYEL JOHNSON, Associate Professor, in EdSource on his new book, *From Foster Care to College* (see 52)

“Chaos campaigns [targeting Glendale and other public schools are] an attempt to dismantle trust in public education, and, by extension, dismantle public education.”

—ARTINEH SAMKIAN, Associate Professor, in *The Guardian* on the protests in Glendale, CA, on LGBTQ+ content in schools

“One of the things that we actually focus on is helping students understand that higher education can look like a classroom, can look like a lecture hall, but it could also be a mechanic shop, it could also be learning to be a machinist.”

—BENJAMIN ROBLES, Assistant Program Director, USC Advising Corps, in LAist

## \$1m Grant To Advance Criminal Justice Prevention Research And Practice Awarded To USC Rossier Researchers

With the award, the team will focus on efforts to improve outcomes for marginalized communities within the criminal justice system.

A \$1 MILLION GRANT TO EXPAND USC ROSSIER’S criminal justice prevention research and practice efforts will be led by associate professors Kendrick B. Davis (PI), Royel Johnson (Co-PI) and assistant professor Dwuana Bradley (Co-PI).

This new grant follows a 20-year project at USC that connected 30 researchers from 26 institutions to analyze over 9,000 public policies impacting those within the criminal justice system and at-risk youth. The grant will build on the previous analysis by converting its findings into real-world policy prescriptions and applications for practitioners within this space.

“Our focus is clear: to change systems, inform policy, advance equity and positively impact lives. This initiative allows us to concentrate our research in the communities most harmed by ineffective and underperforming systems, positioning them as the experts of their experiences,” said Kendrick Davis.

This grant will result in an expanded research network that focuses on implementing the reforms necessary to improve outcomes for marginalized communities within the criminal justice system.

“Incarceration impacts lives, families and communities. This new grant will help us turn innovative research into specific policies and practices that can be implemented nationwide,” said Royel Johnson. “Our goal is to meaningfully contribute to criminal justice systems that see improved outcomes for historically marginalized populations.”

“One of the most beautiful elements of this project includes our aim to work with community partners and scholars across the country who have been doing good work in this specific area of practice and scholarship,” said Dwuana Bradley. “The grant will allow us to offer resources and facilitate community among those who already understand the important role of our educators and policymakers in disrupting the devastating impact of the criminal justice system.” Bradley concluded. —R

## Students and faculty discuss research and policy with national leaders in D.C.

This fall, USC Rossier Associate Professor of Research Kendrick Davis, Assistant Professor of Education Dwuana Bradley and students from the USC Rossier Black PhD Collective participated in the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation’s Annual Legislative Convention in Washington, D.C.

During their time at the conference, the cohort participated in numerous professional development workshops and hosted meetings with several think tanks, executive agencies, congressional staff and community advocates to preview their upcoming policy briefs describing priority issues for the upcoming 119th Congress and presidential administration.



The cohort met with the National Space Council in the Vice President’s office at the White House. From left to right: Kendrick Davis, Kirsten Elliott, Shawntae Mitchum, Dwuana Bradley, Taylor McGee, Akunna Uka, Desiree O’Neal, Mya Haynes, Glenda Quejada, Alvin Makori

PHOTO/COURTESY OF KENDRICK DAVIS

## Bridging Equity Gaps Through Vision Care

New study incorporates diversity, equity and inclusion into a clinical trial for age-related macular degeneration.

By Kianoosh Hashemzadeh

AS A PART OF A CLINICAL TRIAL FOR A promising eye treatment that could restore vision to those suffering from age-related macular degeneration, USC Rossier Associate Professor of Research Kendrick Davis, in partnership with the USC Race and Equity Center and the USC Ginsburg Institute for Biomedical Therapeutics at Keck School of Medicine of USC, will provide training and strategic advising to the clinical team. Davis will also lead a study on the effectiveness of DEI-informed approaches that will be used in the trial. The work will be funded by a \$300,000 subgrant awarded by the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine. The subgrant is part of a larger \$12.5 million grant to Regenerative Patch Technologies (RPT) for the continued study of RPT's stem cell patch which has shown promise as a potential cure for blindness.

Over the four-year project, professional learning courses will be offered to surgeons and staff working on the trial to equip them with the tools to better engage and communicate with communities of color, the underinsured, not insured and rural communities in years one and two. The team will provide courses on engagement with marginalized communities, biases in clinical trials and

advocating for equity in medicine.

The team, which includes Davis' colleagues at the USC Race and Equity Center, LaNita Gregory Campbell, Wilmon A. Christian III, Brandi Junious and AJ Mada, will also provide strategic advising to the project, including on recruiting diverse participants by using DEI-informed messaging in the early stages of the initiative. They aim to assist the clinical team in understanding the historical trauma communities of color have experienced when participating in medical trials.

According to Davis, "the team will provide advisement on ways to ensure those communities are aware of whether they have the disease, how to participate in the trials, the measures taken to ensure they are safe from physical and psychological harm and how to correct for broken trust between these communities and medical practices that have historically harmed or excluded them. We will ensure diversity, equity and inclusion are at the core of all aspects of these trials."

Davis will investigate the effectiveness of the trial's DEI-informed approaches with a goal of developing best practices for those in the medical field as they engage with diverse communities in the future. —R



## Three New Degree Programs Launched

This year, USC Rossier launched three new degree programs, the Doctor of Education in Mental Health Leadership online (MHL online), the Master's in Marriage and Family Therapy online (MFT online), and the Master of Education in Sports Leadership online (MSL online).

The MHL online program is the first of its kind in the country and prepares students to effectively manage mental health organizations while addressing systemic challenges contributing to practitioner shortages. The program offers a flexible, online doctoral degree option tailored to the needs of busy working professionals. Graduates of the MHL online program emerge as leaders and catalysts for change in mental health care systems.

The MFT online program prepares students to deliver both in-person and online therapy effectively. Program faculty are experienced in navigating complexities and exploring cultural and social cues—body language, facial expressions, and/or community contexts and environments—of clients in online settings. The goal of the program is to give students the abilities and information needed to positively influence their communities. It utilizes a holistic approach to addressing mental health problems and seamlessly blends science and practice.

The MSL online program will launch in Fall 2025 and is dedicated to nurturing leaders for diverse sports roles. With a focus on promoting equity, well-being and social justice in sports settings and emphasizing a human-centered approach to sports leadership, the program is designed for individuals in various sports settings, including youth, college, and professional sports.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION/COURTESY OF ISTOCK



## Huriya Jabbar Awarded Multiple Grants

The funding will support research projects on housing and education policy and youth social capital.

USC ROSSIER ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HURIYA JABBAR has received three grants to continue her research on the links between housing policy and educational opportunities, the effects of blending school and housing policies, and youth social mobility.

### \$442,340 grant from the American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences

The award will support Jabbar's continued work to explore links between housing policy and educational opportunities. The research team will study the implementation of the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (CNI) in the Detroit neighborhood of Corktown and its impact on school diversity and community integration. Funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the CNI was created in 2010 to strengthen community cohesion by creating opportunities for community organizations and agencies to collaborate. The study aims to build on the idea that "housing policy is education policy," by examining how stakeholders collaborate throughout the implementation of the CNI. The team will do this by tapping into their deep connections in Detroit, conducting interviews with key actors and residents, conducting network analyses, examining project implementation

↑ Associate Professor Huriya Jabbar is the recent recipient of several prestigious grants.

documents and observing community meetings. The team will explore CNI implementation with an eye toward building theories and best practices on how federal programs like this "can transform and integrate neighborhoods and schools."

"Fostering true integration in communities and schools requires a radical transformation of systems," said Jabbar. The team will examine what conditions foster authentic relationships across differences and in pursuit of shared goals, where conflicts emerge and how they can learn from the politics and power dynamics in this case to enhance community voice and democratic processes. The 12-month study began in summer 2024 and will conclude in summer 2025.

### \$75,000 Spencer Foundation Vision Grant

This grant will fund Jabbar's research on the effects of blending school and housing policies to bolster housing stability for vulnerable families. This grant will support the execution of an environmental scan to analyze and determine what government entities of all sizes are doing to bridge housing and education policy. Additionally, the grant will support the convening of key stakeholders to understand the challenges and needs to support families facing eviction and design an intervention to bring housing and education policy leaders together to support families at risk of eviction. "Our task through this grant is to develop a larger research proposal to build momentum towards government, housing and education entities working together to reduce inequality," Jabbar said.

### \$150,000 award from the Urban Institute's Student Upward Mobility Initiative

With Wayne State University Associate Professor Sarah Winchell Lenhoff, Jabbar will develop and test a strategy to create a scalable measure of youth social capital. In this study, the two will field student-level surveys focusing on cross-class and cross-race ties in four diverse high schools in metropolitan Detroit. They will then compare these results with similar data acquired through existing administrative data accessible through school districts and state agencies. The primary goal of this research is to determine how accurate the administrative data are compared to the surveys, to potentially develop a more convenient and scalable measure of students' social capital, which can be used by other researchers to explore the causes and consequences of various forms of social capital. "We know how crucial peer networks are to a student's well-being and access to critical information, throughout their experience at school and in the workforce. Our hope is that this research will produce valuable insights into the study of social capital and provide more convenient and replicable methods for examining this subject in future research," Jabbar said. This work is made possible through the support of the Student Upward Mobility Initiative, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors in partnership with the Urban Institute. Initiative funders include the Walton Family Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Joyce Foundation. —R

## Witnessing Violence Harms Teens' Brains—'Transcendent Thinking' May Be An Antidote

New study reveals that teens who think about violence in reflective ways show greater resilience to the effects of violence exposure.

By Kianoosh Hashemzadeh

MARY HELEN IMMORDINO-YANG AND A TEAM of researchers at the USC Center for Affective Neuroscience, Development, Learning and Education (CANDLE) have found that teens who engage in more "transcendent thinking," that is thinking that moves beyond reacting to the specifics of social situations to also consider broader ethical, personal and societal implications, can counteract the negative impacts exposure to violence has on their brain development.

The study built on an earlier one by Immordino-Yang, Fahmy and Donna Attallah Professor of Humanistic Psychology, that showed the disturbing link between adolescents'

exposure to violence in their community and their brain development. In both studies, MRI brain scans of teens who grew up in communities with high levels of violence showed thinner cortex in parts of the brain that are involved in feeling stress and pain as well as motivation, judgment and emotional processing.

This new study confirms these links exist even in older teens, around age 16-18 when they witness violence, but also offers a possible antidote. The 55 participants were all from low socioeconomic status backgrounds and lived in urban settings. The teens were asked about their exposure to community violence and underwent two MRI brain scans, one at the beginning of the study and one two years later. At the time of the initial scans, participants also watched mini-documentaries about teens in compelling situations and discussed their reactions in a recorded interview which was later assessed for transcendent thinking. The final MRI scans showed that the more a teen had engaged in transcendent thinking, the greater the brain growth in various areas across the two years, including those areas most impacted by the violence. The findings suggest that teens' transcendent thinking may be helping them to counteract the effect of exposure to violence on their brain development.

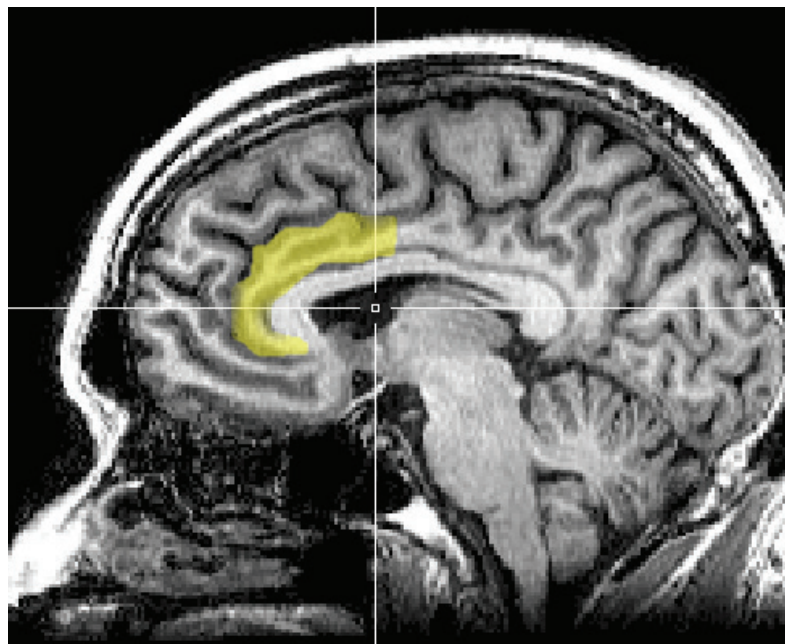
These findings reveal that as adolescents work to contextualize and make sense of the violence they are exposed to, this complex thinking builds resilience and thus grows their brains despite the violence they witness. When the teens were able to reflect on such things as why violence happens and what can be done to get to the root of the problems, they showed a form of neural resilience in their anterior cingulate cortex, among other regions.

"Let me be clear—we found that witnessing community violence and crime, even in older teens, was associated with key regions of their brain losing volume over time. In effect, witnessing violence made regions of their brains shrink a bit, which is a pattern seen in people suffering from PTSD and in soldiers deployed to war. At the same time, the kids were not passively being impacted—when they showed us that they were thinking hard about why these things happen, and what could be done to make the world better for everyone involved, this kind of thinking grew their brain volume in these same brain regions. Violence was bad for them, but transcendent and civically oriented thinking was a kind of antidote, neurologically speaking," said Immordino-Yang.

Published in the *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, the study was authored by Immordino-Yang, Xiao-Fei Yang, Katrina Hillard and Rebecca Gotlieb, at CANDLE.

Immordino-Yang's team's newly published findings underscore the vulnerability of adolescents in communities impacted by high levels of violence while also emphasizing the importance of fostering skills like transcendent thinking in teens. These skills cannot only help teens make sense of the violence they witness but also help them counteract the negative impact of this violence on their developing brains. —R

Image from an MRI scan of the brain with highlighting indicating the location of the anterior cingulate cortex.



## A New Tool for Educators Running on Empty

Identity-based radical self-care practices can provide teachers with the resources to recharge.

By Shanta M. Smith, Associate Professor of Clinical Education

Throughout the nation, a new school year is well underway. As we all get back into the swing of bell schedules, educators are also adjusting to unprecedented (and often unreasonable) demands for accountability as a result of new anti-DEI laws, educational policies and proposals to eliminate the Department of Education. Due to heightened levels of public scrutiny, educators must be poised to respond to the impact of these initiatives in their classrooms.

These mounting pressures have increased the typical work-related stressors that educators experience. Findings from the 2024 State of the American Teacher Survey conducted by RAND reveal that 59% of the teachers surveyed experienced frequent job-related stress.

Despite these high stress levels, educators continue to center the needs of their students and families while delaying the self-care they need to sustain themselves. But there are measures educators can take to address and mitigate the stressors they will encounter this school year, including something I call identity-based radical self-care.

Identity-based radical self-care is when individuals make the proactive decision to care for themselves by centering their social identity needs and engaging in activities that feed their souls. For example, as a Black woman educator who leads, I often encounter intersectional, identity-based discrimination. I have found great benefits in spending time with fellow Black women leaders. Social self-care activities like these can allow individuals to put their own needs before others consistently, reducing the impact of stress and combating stress-related illnesses.

**Here are some ways educators can start:** Periodically conduct a self-care assessment.



Identity-based radical self-care entails more than exercise and eating a balanced diet. There are several types of self-care: physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological, social and professional.

- Take a self-care survey at the beginning and end of the year, and as needed.
- Schedule time to review, analyze and make plans to address the results.

### Select proactive and reactive self-care strategies.

Most comprehensive assessments include strategies for each type of self-care. When considering which strategies to practice, educators should identify proactive strategies that will help them decrease daily stress and reactive strategies to mitigate the intensity of personal or societal stressors.

- Review the assessment results.
- Analyze the assessment to identify self-care areas of strength and areas of growth.
- Identify strategies to address anticipated and unexpected personal and/or work-related stressors.

### Develop a strategic plan to practice identity-based radical self-care.

Educators often have internal and external stressors. To address my stressors, I meditate every morning using a guided meditation app. It helps me resolve internal conflicts and remain calm when I encounter oppression and marginalization stemming from racialized experiences.

- Decide which self-care strategy will most effectively meet your needs.
- Specify times and spaces to implement self-care practice.
- Implement the plan and celebrate the small wins based upon self-designated milestones.

Just as it is important for educators to create a self-care practice, it is also essential for schools and systems to offer their support. Creating policies, systems and structures to provide educators with tools to practice self-care has the potential to yield benefits that will increase workplace well-being, promote a positive school climate and produce culturally relevant supports to retain educators during this period of high turnover and teacher churning. —R

IMAGE BY GEOFF B. HALL/CCO

ILLUSTRATION BY SAWSAN CHALABI



**FACULTY**

**ZOË CORWIN**, research professor, was awarded a distinguished USC Mentoring Award for Faculty Mentoring.

**YASEMIN COPUR-GENCTURK**, Katzman/Ernst Chair for Educational Entrepreneurship, Technology and Innovation, received a \$6.7M grant for her research on professional development programs for math teachers (p. 5), as well as a \$152,814 grant from Knowledgehook for her project, “The Role of Knowledgehook in Improving Teaching and Learning Math.”

**JENIFER CRAWFORD**, professor of clinical education, was awarded a Fulbright fellowship to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion in English language teaching at the Universidad Veracruzana in Xalapa, Veracruz.



Associate Professor **KENDRICK DAVIS**, Assistant Professor **DWUANA BRADLEY** and Associate Professor **ROYEL JOHNSON** received \$1 million for the project, “Critical Policy Research for Criminal Legal System Reform” (p. 9).

**JESSICA DECUIR-GUNBY**, professor of education, became president of the American Psychological Association Division 15, Educational Psychology.

**SHAUN HARPER**, University Professor, received the 2024 American College Personnel Association Contribution to Higher Education Award. He also received \$400,000 for the National DEI Defense Alliance from the Amalgamated Foundation and \$500,000 from the Walton Family Foundation to study young men’s post-pandemic college enrollment decisions. With Associate Professor **ROYEL JOHNSON**, Harper was named a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility Visionary by *The Los Angeles Times*. Harper also received an honorary doctorate from Lincoln University.

**ADRIAN HUERTA**, assistant professor, received \$50,000 from the California Community Foundation to focus on gang-involved children in L.A. K-12 schools, with Daniel Soto. Huerta was the co-winner of the 2024 American Sociological Association — Sociology of Education section Anna Julia Cooper Early Career Award.

**MARY HELEN IMMORDINO-YANG**, Fahmy and Donna Attallah Chair in Humanistic Psychology, was awarded a grant from the Undergraduate Research Associates Program and was elected to the NeuroArts Blueprint Scientific Advisory Board.

**HURIYA JABBAR**, associate professor, received multiple awards, including: a \$75,000 Spencer Foundation Vision Grant for her research examining the effects of blending school and housing policies; a \$50,000 Zumberge Preliminary Studies Research – DEI for the study, “How do Mixed-Income Neighborhood Initiatives Reduce Educational Inequality for Low-Income Black Youth; a \$442,340 grant from the American Institutes for Research for the

study “Moving in Motown: Examining the Promise of Integrated Neighborhoods and Schools Through Detroit’s Choice Neighborhoods Initiative;” and \$150,000 from the Urban Institute, Student Upward Mobility Initiative, to study youth social networks (p. 11). Additionally, Jabbar won the Scholar Award, Research-to-Policy Collaboration Rapid Response Network, Pennsylvania State University.

**JERRY LUCIDO**, scholar in residence at the USC Center for Enrollment Research, Policy and Practice, with **STEVE DESIR**, assistant research professor at the Pullias Center, were awarded a \$50,000 grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for a student-focused law, policy and research-backed technical assistance project.

**ADRIANNA KEZAR**, dean’s professor of leadership, received the 2024 Exemplary Research Award from the American Educational Research Association Division J.

**JULIE MARSH**, professor of education, received a \$50,000 grant from the California Community Foundation for “Renewing the promise of a just, participatory democracy: A collaborative research-to-action project to support school boards.”

**PEDRO A. NOGUERA**, Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean, received an honorary doctorate from Brown University, his alma mater.

**ERIKA PATALL**, professor of education and psychology, was elected a fellow of the American Psychological Association.

**JULIE POSSELT**, professor of education, received \$244,000 from the Urban Institute, with funding by the Mellon Foundation, for a research-practice collaborative about how to equitably enroll and serve students in the new legal landscape.

**GALE SINATRA**, Stephen H. Crocker Professor of Education, was named a Distinguished Professor and elected a fellow of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry. She is also the inaugural recipient of the UMASS College of Natural Science Distinguished Alumni Award.

**BRENDESHA TYNES**, Dean’s Professor of Educational Equity, was selected to participate in the National Institute of Health Entrepreneurship Bootcamp following her historic \$4.6M NIH grant.

**STUDENTS**

**ISABEL CLAY** and **DESIREE O’NEAL**, PhD candidates, were named 2024 Clark Scholars.

**ANDREA MACIAS**, PhD candidate, won a graduate research fellowship from the National Science Foundation.

**GLENDA PALACIOS**, PhD candidate, was awarded the 2024 Wheelhouse Summer Scholars fellowship.

**CHRISTOPHER THOMPSON**, EdD candidate, was named the president-elect of the Part-Time Faculty Council at Kennesaw State University and inducted into USC’s Alpha Gamma Gamma Chapter of Kappa Delta Pi Honor Society in Education.

**AKUNNA UKA**, PhD candidate, was awarded the Lucretia Mott Fellowship and was a Chancellor’s Doctoral Incentive Program Fellow.

**RESEARCH CENTERS**

**USC CENTER FOR AFFECTIVE NEUROSCIENCE, DEVELOPMENT, LEARNING AND EDUCATION (CANDLE)**

**MARY HELEN IMMORDINO-YANG**, Fahmy and Donna Attallah Chair in Humanistic Psychology, received a \$2.1M grant from the Bezos Family Foundation to fund the CANDLE Innovation Lab, which aims to reframe the purpose, process and outcomes of schooling and school systems in the modern era through partnerships with neuroscience and psychology researchers, educators and administrators in schools.

**USC CENTER FOR ENROLLMENT RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE (CERPP)**

**CERPP** received multiple awards to fund its USC College Advising Corps program, including: \$280,000 from the Los Angeles Scholars Investment Fund and Broadening the Dual Enrollment Narrative Initiative; \$213,949 from the ECMC Foundation; \$30,042 from the Los Angeles Dodgers Foundation; a \$725,000 service agreement from the national College Advising Corps and a \$108,000 service agreement from Paramount Unified School District.

**PULLIAS CENTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

The center received the 2024 Special Merit Award from the Association for the Study of Higher Education, which recognized the center as a vital force in advancing research in higher education for over 30 years.



**ADRIANNA KEZAR**, director of the Pullias Center, and the Center received a \$400,000 grant from the ECMC Foundation to support continued research on Shared Equity Leadership. In addition, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation provided a \$80,000 grant to expand Shared Equity Leadership, and the National Science Foundation awarded Kezar and the Center a \$200,000 award for additional data analysis on the Faculty, Academic Careers and Environments project.

**KRISTYN LUE**, postdoctoral scholar, was a semi-finalist for the AERA Division J Dissertation of the Year Award.

**USC RACE AND EQUITY CENTER**



**BRANDI JONES**, chief of staff and chief operating officer for the USC Race and Equity Center, was selected as a 2024 class of leading women in higher education by *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, and was also profiled in the magazine’s February issue.

**BRANDI JUNIOUS, AJ MADA, WILMON CHRISTIAN AND LANITA GREGORY CAMPBELL**, all of the USC Race and Equity Center, with Associate Professor Kendrick Davis, were awarded \$300,000 as a sub-grantee of the Keck School of Medicine of USC and Regenerative Patch Technologies project (p. 10), funded by a \$12.4 million grant from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine.

**USC ROSSIER EDUCATION POLICY HUB**

The EdPolicy Hub was awarded a \$1M grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to create a network of Local Education Agencies across Southern California with a goal to improve educational and workforce outcomes for students.



**Tracy Tambascia embodies what it means to be a woman who leads**

By Kianoosh Hashemzadeh

Professor of Higher Education, Tracy Tambascia, has spent considerable time in various leadership roles throughout her career. And, all the while, she’s challenged traditional notions of what it means to be leader. Rather than adopting the usual leadership traits like assertiveness and pushing hard for what you want—characteristics often described as masculine—Tambascia employs a different approach. She chooses to lead by listening and observing.

In 2023, Tambascia was named the Veronica and David Hagen Chair in Women’s Leadership, a \$3 million endowed position created by Veronica and David Hagen to support a chaired professor dedicated to the study of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions.

Tambascia embodies the goals the Hagen’s have for women’s leadership in education. She was the first woman of color elected to serve as president of the USC Academic Senate and, prior to her appointment at USC Rossier, has held many prestigious positions in higher education.

“Serving as the Veronica and David Hagen Chair in Women’s Leadership has given me an opportunity to focus on research and practices around women’s leadership, offering a platform and a reason to speak more directly to the very issues I have championed my whole career,” Tambascia said.

Over the past year, Tambascia has been named an American Council on Education Fellow and launched the USC Rossier Hagen Women’s Leadership Fellowship, which aims “to strengthen pathways to professional success and attainment for EdD students focused through opportunities to attend or present at professional conferences,” Tambascia said.



# Do We Still Need Schools of Education?

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USC Rossier faculty and a former dean of the school answer the question.

Essays: Guilbert Hentschke, Shaun Harper, Julie Marsh, Kim Hirabayashi and Nasser Cortez  
Illustrations: Nate Kitch



## An Essential Gear in a Complex System

**A former USC Rossier dean sees schools of education as a critical hub for innovation and promoting coordinated, systemwide improvements.**

By **Guilbert Hentschke**, Richard T. Cooper and Mary Catherine Cooper Chair Emeritus and former dean of USC Rossier School of Education and University of Rochester's Warner School of Education

“Do we still need schools of education?” My first reaction to this question was a *reluctant* “Of course, we do.” The “*of course*” reaction was natural and derives from their *necessity*—think of preparing the nation’s teachers and administrators; their collective *impact*—think of all the past, present and future students of all ages; and their widely held *promise* as engines of educational improvement—think of our hopes for education as social benefit. So “of course” we still need ed schools. It’s a loaded question.

The “*reluctant*” part of my initial reaction, however, would not go away, and I finally figured out why.

The 2,300 schools of education spread across our country are so embedded within the operations and culture of our education systems that it is very difficult for them, *by themselves*, to measurably improve their *promise* as engines of improvement. They can barely *serve* the education system—think, for example, teacher shortages—let alone *improve* it.

What schools of ed are able to achieve is so often shaped by other parts of the system that effectively constrain their options: their university homes; schools; districts; local, state and federal government bodies; professional associations; funding entities; regulatory agencies; infrastructure providers; and, of course, households and other “clients.” Like so many other parts of our education system, ed schools are “market takers” not “market makers”; they respond to the constraints and conditions they face but can do little to change those conditions. I have never met a school of ed professor who feels good about seeing their newly minted teacher education graduates systematically placed into the most challenging schooling environments, but that decision sits outside an ed school’s dominion.

Although functionally connected with the rest of the system, schools of ed are, unfortunately, often singled out and directly implicated in the perceived problems associated with education systems in general—teacher quality, administrator competence, student retention, student success, appropriate curricula, etc.

But this reality of the “embedded” (constrained) school

of education is both a problem and an opportunity that more and more education schools are now realizing. Some of the most promising initiatives coming from ed schools are those that acknowledge system interdependency and reach across to other parts of the education system, redesigning system practices and increasing the odds for *system* success.

Examples include ed schools designing “residency” programs with school districts and unions, creating their own K–12 schools and postsecondary prep programs, providing direct interventions in university operations on behalf of low-achieving students and employees, engaging with large employers to create educational opportunities for employees, and tackling workforce supply issues with employers and universities. I think I see the inklings of system innovations coming from some leading ed schools, like USC Rossier. These initiatives may, over time, improve the entire education system. This is why my response to the question of “Do we still need ed schools?” has become “Now, more than ever.”

## Doctors Without Med Schools, Teachers Without Ed Schools?

**Like medical schools, education schools are high-trust sites for the rigorous preparation of professionals who do lifesaving work.**

By **Shaun Harper**, Clifford and Betty Allen Chair in Urban Leadership

Schools of medicine prepare physicians and specialists. It is hard to imagine how and where else future doctors would learn all that is required to treat patients, save lives and avoid costly medical malpractice lawsuits. There is no serious call to eliminate med schools. Such a proposal would undoubtedly be met with massive resistance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Association of American Medical Colleges. The National Institutes of Health, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are among numerous funders that have invested billions of dollars into expanding equitable access to high-quality health care across the globe—surely, they would step up to protect their financial investments in the wake of an outrageous movement to prepare physicians outside of accredited, highly regulated med schools. Because the work that occurs within doctors’ offices and hospitals is understood to be matters of life or death, most Americans appreciate the need for rigorous professional preparation in medicine.

Most people have been to the doctor at some point in their lives. In the U.S., considerably more citizens—just



about everyone, given the compulsory attendance laws across states—have been to school. They know what occurs there. But it is plausible that some do not understand the full scope of what teachers do. If they did, the elimination of schools of education and scaling of alternative teacher certification programs would be met with greater opposition. Like med schools, ed schools are high-trust sites for the rigorous preparation of professionals who do lifesaving work. Every American doctor, nurse and health care professional attended K–12 schools. Teachers in those settings equipped them with the foundational knowledge, scientific appreciation and inquiry tools they took with them to medical and nursing schools. The overwhelming majority of those teachers were prepared in ed schools.

Licensing and credentialing are just as important in the education profession as they are in medicine. Understandably, teacher shortages in urban and rural contexts necessitate alternative and emergency onramps into K–12 jobs. But the same problems exist in medicine. Specialists are less interested in working in high-stress urban trauma centers and hospitals in low-income and remote communities. The proposed solutions to this problem do not include eliminating med schools. Instead, introducing young Americans in urban and rural communities to medical careers early in their lives, creating more medical-focused internships in those contexts, recruiting students from those places to med schools, and incentivizing new physicians and specialists to

work in those settings are just a few of numerous activities being employed across the nation. Teacher recruitment deserves the same level of resources that is invested into physician recruitment. Just as eliminating med schools is not and never will be a real thing, somehow reducing the role that ed schools play in the preparation of teachers should never be a serious option for our nation.

## Out of the Ivory Tower and Into the Field

**How schools of education are pioneering education reform with research and hands-on service.**

By **Julie Marsh**, Professor of Education Policy

While an essential and very important part of USC Rossier’s mission is to prepare the next generation of education practitioners, leaders and scholars, we do so much more. Unlike many other academic schools or departments, a school of education is also dedicated to applied work that responds to the pressing problems and issues of the times. By design, it engages faculty and students in research, teaching and service to promote the public good by protecting and improving

our education system. This, we believe, is fundamental to our complex, rapidly changing democratic society.

Though not all schools of education exist in a research university, here at USC part of our mandate is to conduct research that seeks to ameliorate problems facing K–12 and higher education. As a professor on the tenure side of the house, I, along with my colleagues, do research with an explicit intent of improving policy, practice and equity. This work is often conducted in partnership with policymakers and leaders so that the insights can guide improvement on the ground. For example, the years of research I conducted with education faculty and students on policies calling for the use of data to inform practice helped advance new methods and frameworks that have pushed the field's thinking about what is meant by data, how to facilitate more reflective responses to data and unintended consequences of data use for equity—notably, ways it can reify deficit perspectives. This scholarship has been used to revise national standards, develop tools to help teachers use data and inform leadership training and supports.

Collaborative research on democratic engagement and school finance reform has produced important frameworks and findings to better understand and improve reforms calling for greater local control and civic participation in educational decision-making and resource allocation, and has demonstrated the ways in which power imbalances, biases and racism often undermine reform goals. Research I conducted with colleagues in and outside of USC on New York City's Schoolwide Performance Bonus Program—and its failure to improve student outcomes—contributed to the formal cancellation of the program and provided evidence that can help leaders in education think carefully about the motivational assumptions that underlie such incentive-based policies. A STEM study conducted with fellow USC Rossier faculty resulted in hands-on, standards-based curriculum and professional development materials that were made freely available to teachers nationally.

Another often-overlooked aspect of what schools of education do is service. Sure, there are the typical academic service activities to the university and field, like serving on university committees and reviewing or editing journals. But in a school of education, our faculty also collaborate with local schools and districts, and often sit on committees providing evidence-based guidance to leaders overseeing education systems at all levels. For instance, I and several other USC Rossier faculty members serve on the L.A. Unified School District Equity Initiative Research Advisory Board, and I am a faculty director of policy analysis for California Education, a nonpartisan research center co-run with Stanford University, UCLA, the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of California, Davis, to help inform state and local policy.

Could other organizations take on this research, training and service? Not likely. As university faculty, we have greater flexibility and incentives to pursue projects large and small,



and to think about the next set of problems coming down the pike. It is part of our mission. Could other schools in a university take up this charge? No way. The blend of faculty with deep experience in education practice and research cannot be found elsewhere. So, do we still need schools of education? Absolutely.

## Hubs for Deep Learning and Collaboration

**Schools of education provide a place for those outside of traditional education contexts to develop the skills necessary to tackle society's most pressing problems.**

By **Kim Hirabayashi**, Professor of Clinical Education

Most people think of schools of education as focused solely on formal K–12 or higher education contexts, but what we do

has an impact beyond formal school settings. Any organization focused on facilitating engagement, fostering learning and ongoing development, or promoting well-being as a strategic focus can benefit from a school of education.

Schools of education are hubs for collaboration and learning that can impact policy and practice for children, adolescents and adults. The majority of courses I teach focus on research in the psychological sciences, particularly educational psychology. Psychological research impacts practices and outcomes for diverse communities, including informing what we know about human development, learning, motivation and well-being. The students in my classes often comment on how helpful this information is to them—as organizational leaders, parents and community members. Yet, their opportunities to learn more about educational psychology and related topics were previously limited. Schools of education can provide deep learning and collaboration in this area.

In our lifespan, we spend our most formative years in educational settings. Practitioners' understanding of how to facilitate learning through effective instructional design to support children, adolescents and young adults is extremely important to achieving set educational and developmental outcomes. These are skills students at schools of education learn. The majority of our adulthood is spent in working environments. Leaders who have the tools to foster continued growth and development of employees help organizations create inclusive and motivating environments to achieve strategic outcomes. These, too, are tools students at schools of education can learn.

Through collaboration with other disciplines, schools of education also contribute to interdisciplinary efforts to address complex social issues. In the same way that students in schools of education benefit from learning about research in educational and developmental psychology, interdisciplinary collaboration can help promote a holistic approach to solving problems that takes into account knowledge from other disciplines and input from community stakeholders. Whether it's tackling climate change, creating inclusive work environments, improving health outcomes or adapting to the age of artificial intelligence, schools of education are integral partners in addressing the most pressing challenges in our society today.

Our continued well-being is dependent on systems and organizations that believe in our potential and have the capacity to facilitate our continued growth and development. I believe that schools of education are uniquely positioned to support individuals as they continue to evolve and grow throughout their lifespan.

## A Brave Space to Interrogate Systems of Power

**As future teachers hone their pedagogical skills at schools of education, they also engage in difficult and necessary discussions to better serve all children.**

By **Nasser Cortez**, Associate Professor of Clinical Education

As I facilitated my first class of the fall term, I held this question—Do we still need schools of education?—top of mind. That first class was more than an introduction to the course, Literacy Development and Instruction in Secondary Education; we took it as an opportunity to engage in discourse around literacy and equity. We investigated the anti-literacy laws that made it illegal in many Southern states for enslaved and freed Black individuals to learn or be taught to read and identified the ripple effects that continue to impact children.

What I take from moments like this is that teacher education programs provide a brave space for future educators to engage in critical discourse around social, political, racial, gender and other important topics. Schools of education provide the space to interrogate systems of power that have historically marginalized specific groups of people, with the hope that future teachers will take this knowledge into their own schools and classrooms to make change.

Educators are also charged with accounting for learner variability, including multilingual and neurodivergent students. Successful schools of education include teacher preparation programs where future teachers are equipped with theoretical knowledge, pedagogical practices and strategies, as well as mentorship to help provide equity and access to a quality education for all children.

Teacher education programs provide the space for future teachers to engage in a gradual release of responsibility approach, where we faculty guide our students through a process in which they slowly ingest, digest and apply the knowledge we impart in our classes. This supports their growth as educators. Through it, they are tasked with reflecting on their practice and making the necessary adjustments to improve their teaching skills and the learning outcomes for their future students.

Coming back to the question: Yes, we need schools of education. Schools of education act as a foundation or a starting point for the changes that need to be made to achieve educational equity for all children. —R

# MAKING MEANING



# OF BELONGING

Through an autobiographical film production program for high school students, CANDLE researchers explore a new kind of developmental science in education.

Story: Katie Walsh  
Photos: Rebecca Aranda

**O**N A SPRING AFTERNOON on the ninth floor of Waite Phillips Hall on the USC campus, a small group of Da Vinci RISE High School students are busy writing scripts, sifting through family photos and going over interviews they've conducted with relatives. Their instructors offer feedback on shaping the stories each student is creating, listening to recordings and talking through narrative choices. In just a few short weeks, they'll be watching the culmination of all this hard work—autobiographical short films—on the big screen in Joyce J. Camilleri Hall, with an audience of peers, loved ones and academics, as a part of the Belonging as Legacy Film Festival.

The film festival is the celebration of the second year of the Belonging as Legacy program, a new endeavor of the USC Center for Affective Neuroscience, Development, Learning and Education (CANDLE), housed at the Brain and Creativity Institute. Developed by

CANDLE director and USC Rossier professor Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, alongside University of Michigan education professor Jamaal Sharif Matthews, who serves as principal investigator, Belonging as Legacy brings high school students from Da Vinci RISE to the USC campus once a week during the spring for an intensive workshop combining storytelling with hands-on lessons in basic video production. Over the course of the semester, each student produces a video project exploring their life stories and family histories.

The program is about diving into deeper emotions and ways of thinking, and provides a comforting space for the students to reflect on and share their stories. Some program participants expressed that they struggled with anxiety but nevertheless leapt at the chance to immerse themselves in a new environment and push themselves outside their comfort zones. Others, like Jaden, a senior at Da Vinci RISE, found solace in the opportunity to tell his story to his peers, and to hear theirs in return.

Jaden says that his grandmother once described him as a “shook-up Coke bottle” with his emotions, and that releasing some of that pressure helps, especially in this environment. “Everybody being open to share [their story] and not being judgmental really helped me out a lot,” he says. “If this person went through that and they’re open to sharing it, then I’m going to be open to sharing, too.”

## ACT I HOW IT STARTED

The seeds for the Belonging as Legacy program started with Matthews, who was interviewing students about the concept of “belonging” as part of his academic research. “The ways in which they were making meaning of belonging didn’t represent ideas or notions that were already out there in the field,” he says. “They were finding a sense of belonging in one’s ancestors.”

Matthews explains that during the interview process, he spoke to a student from a school named after Malcolm X, with a negative reputation in a segregated district. Despite the school’s stigma, the student said the school’s name “meant something to him,” Matthews says. “He found inspiration as a Black child attending a school named after a prominent Black leader within American history. His sense of belonging was in representing that name well, representing the legacy of Malcolm X.” After these interviews, Matthews expanded his research questions to include the idea that individuals can “pick up or become part of a legacy that ancestors have created for [them].”

Without much literature on the subject, Matthews reached out to Immordino-Yang, whose research dovetails with his own, to collaborate on a project to further explore these ideas. Immordino-Yang describes her work as researching “the ways that teenagers and teachers make meaning, and the ways that those meaning-making processes promote development, well-being and deep understanding, and, ultimately, growth.” Matthews’ work is about meaning-making in a specific context, she distinguishes, as he studies how inner-city Black youths in Detroit “make sense of their experiences as sources of identity and belonging: racial, scholarly and civic.”

Once Immordino-Yang came on board as a mentor and adviser, the two received a grant from the National Science Foundation to fund the project and a home for it at USC. A separate grant to Immordino-Yang from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative also supported aspects of the program. Immordino-Yang’s work on social-emotional learning provides the research-based academic underpinning for the philosophy of the program. She has published research that looks at how adolescents grapple with understanding complex social experiences and concepts. Her research team found that when teens make sense of social stories by using

what she calls “t r a n s c e n d e n t thinking”—that is, thinking that transcends the here and now to connect to bigger ideas, values and systems-level implications—this process appears to grow their brains in patterns associated with identity development and life satisfaction in young adulthood (p. 8).

In designing the Belonging as Legacy program, Matthews and Immordino-Yang grounded support for participants’ transcendent thinking in the practical activities of storytelling as a way to back into an understanding of “belonging” and “legacy.” The intent was to give students “an opportunity to think about and define belonging in their own words,” Matthews says. “‘Belonging’ is a higher-level concept that I think everyone feels at a certain point in their life, but it can be difficult to articulate. We’ve flipped the script a little bit. We’ve tried not to use any of those words around ‘belonging’ or ‘legacy’ and have couched the project in the framework of storytelling.”

“Storytelling is a really powerful, practical frame,” Matthews says. In sharing his own story, he adds, “I’m saying something about myself, my own identity, but I’m also putting something out into the atmosphere that other people can think about, find inspiration from, can be excited about or might find humor in.”

Immordino-Yang underlines the importance of storytelling practice for students, explaining that “telling meaningful stories, teaching somebody else something with your story,



**“We’re honoring student voices, giving them opportunities to display their brilliance and their understanding of various and complex issues. Having research and papers and studies to document that could be a game changer in our field and beyond.”**

—Jamaal Sharif Matthews, University of Michigan Associate Professor

↑ University of Michigan Education Professor Jamaal Sharif Matthews, serves as principal investigator for the Belonging as Legacy program.

↘ Doctoral student Esther Govea was brought in to facilitate the classroom discussions for the Belonging as Legacy program.

formulating a story and a narrative, deciding what, why and how you want to show your story—you can get other people to understand something, but you’re also learning to understand it better yourself.” The ultimate goal of the program is to help students “leverage their experiences for good, so that they can both heal themselves and change the world for the better,” she says.

Storytelling through films also had an appeal beyond simply teaching new media skills to high schoolers. Cinematic form has its own specific grammar that students can learn, explore and experiment with. It’s a different kind of storytelling from writing personal essays, for example, and can be an exciting new form of visual expression.

Immordino-Yang and Matthews found an ideal partner in Da Vinci RISE because of the schools’ “explicit, very strategic focus on building community,” says Immordino-Yang. “We chose to work with them specifically because they work on things like social justice, restorative practices, identity, community building, values, beliefs and understanding narratives. All of those things are essentially transcendent ways of thinking about the world.”

Part of the curriculum development was also creating a safe space for students to share their personal lives. “The weekly lessons began with fun communal exercises, playing with the feelings of being together, collaborating, cooperating and noticing each other,” says Immordino-Yang. They were also tasked with interviewing USC students on campus to practice their communication skills, as well as recording video journals to spur the self-reflection process and become comfortable with speaking and sharing in a video format.

While Immordino-Yang and Matthews designed the Belonging as Legacy program, they recruited USC Rossier doctoral student Esther Govea to be the hands-on coordinator week to week, with assistance from Trey Dyson, a USC undergraduate majoring in creative writing with a minor in cinematic arts. Dyson helped with the technical mechanics of teaching video design, including storyboarding and editing. Da Vinci RISE English teacher Jimmy Castaneda also accompanied the students to campus and provided mentorship and support throughout the process.

Govea, who is pursuing a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership at USC Rossier, is also a professor at California State University, Northridge, in child and adolescent development. Brought in to help facilitate classroom conversations, her goal was “to take the conversation from a surface level to a little bit deeper,” she says.



Belonging in the classroom is a concept that aligns with her own research on educational disparities among first-generation students of color and is an issue that she’s experienced in her own academic life. “Having gone through undergrad as a first-generation [student], being in classes as one of the few Latina women, being the only person from California in my master’s program, and as a faculty of color, I’m constantly thinking about belonging and how can I make students in my courses feel like they belong—not necessarily just in my class, but at this institution, in higher education,” Govea says.

“The fact that we’re teaching these students that their voice matters, their story matters and that others can learn from their story,” Govea says, “is very crucial and important.”

**“Telling meaningful stories, teaching somebody else something with your story, formulating a story and a narrative, deciding what, why and how you want to show your story—you can get other people to understand something, but you’re also learning to understand it better yourself.”**

—Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, Fahmy and Donna Attallah Chair in Humanistic Psychology



## ACT II

### A JOURNEY TOWARD BELONGING

The culminating film festival may have been the time to celebrate the experience and share their stories on a grander scale, but the true lasting power of the Belonging as Legacy program is, as the saying goes, in the journey, not the destination. It's the relationships, new experiences and challenging conversations that make for the kind of social growth that has the real capacity to make a difference in these students' futures, as proven in Immordino-Yang's research. This idea was also reflected in the personal reflections of the participants and instructors.

Castaneda, the Da Vinci RISE English teacher, was thrilled that the Belonging as Legacy curriculum lined up with the personal narrative and memoir assignments from his own class, and that the program could be an extension of that work, teaching his students how to "present publicly, analyze, discuss and collaborate," he says. He also watched his students take to the environment, in which everyone, including the instructors, shared their histories and personal stories. Through watching videos about racial and social injustice, as well as exercises such as sharing their "Four H's" (history, heartaches, heroes and hopes), each student was able to open up more and more.

"So many of the students had this conflicted definition of legacy, but as we were talking about it and wrestling with the idea, you could see how the positivity started to manifest," Castaneda says. "They realized that they're the masters of their own fate. Whatever happened in the past happened, but there are still chances for them to create that legacy, whatever it means for them."

## Programs like Belonging as Legacy are experiments in conceiving of a new kind of developmental science in education, which Immordino-Yang calls, "deeply, inherently transdisciplinary and inclusive."

Dyson, the program assistant, believes that the topics covered in the workshop about racial and social justice hit home for everyone in the classroom because "everyone in the class is a person of color." It's been a positive personal experience for Dyson as well. "We've been having some really wonderful conversations," he says. "I'm very grateful for the experience." Over the course of the semester, Dyson says, it was gratifying to see "the camaraderie, getting a better sense of who they are over time. It's not just about the program; it's also getting to know these teenagers, getting to eat with them, talk with them and relax with them."

Each week, the students and instructors met in Waite Phillips Hall and then had lunch on the USC campus, mingling with students or visiting the campus bookstore. So much of the program's success has to do with the logistics, the form that it takes, especially having class weekly on the USC campus, a place known to many of the Da Vinci RISE students who had grown up in the area but where many had never visited.

Belonging as Legacy participant Jade, a senior, lives in the neighborhood and regularly shops at the Target and Trader Joe's at University Village but had never been on campus until the program. "I had never pictured myself stepping foot in the university," Jade says. She used to think, "I don't really belong here, I don't think this is for me." Now, she says she feels "like this is something I could do every day. I've been thinking about [college] a lot more."

Castaneda echoes the positive effect that the campus has had on his students' feeling of belonging in a university setting. "Part of it is how we've let the walls down at USC to feel like they belong here, that they can be here one day," he says. "A lot of them have had those side conversations with me or at school where they say, 'Even though the school's in my backyard, I've never been there. I've never visited.' It was almost like it was a different planet [for them]."

Da Vinci RISE senior Alex was open-minded going into the program and eager to explore the USC campus and interact with new people. "I like when people listen, or you hear somebody else's conversation, you learn a lot about a person," he says. "Opening up to people opens a lot of gates."

## ACT III

### WHAT'S TO COME

As for what the future holds for the Belonging as Legacy program, Matthews hopes to continue the program at USC, as well as replicate it on the Michigan campus. But there are much larger potential positive effects that stretch beyond simply instituting a program like this on campuses, in both curriculum and research.

"This work really does change, or at least complicate, how we think about social-emotional learning, how we think about culturally responsive pedagogy," Matthews says. "We're honoring student voices, giving them opportunities to display their brilliance and their understanding of various and complex issues. Having research and papers and studies to document that could be a game changer in our field and beyond."

Immordino-Yang speaks to this "beyond"—the effects of the program not just on the scholarly field but also on the field of education in general. "We're finding that practices that promote these ways of being, reciprocating, understanding and acquiring complex perspectives and beliefs are actually powerful for the mind and for the brain," she says. Programs like Belonging as Legacy are experiments in conceiving of a new kind of developmental science in education, which she calls "deeply, inherently transdisciplinary and inclusive."

"It's really a way of not just changing education, but also of changing science," Immordino-Yang says. "We're trying to change the way that scientists understand and study the nature of human development."

In this moment, it's clear that the biggest immediate impact on the students is the relationships they've formed with each other and with the instructors. Relief and pride shine on their faces after the film festival screening. Many of the students who were too shy to chat just a few weeks earlier now stand in front of a rapt audience and answer questions with strong and clear voices. Even the students who struggle with social anxiety put aside their fears to speak about their stories and experiences, opening up before the audience and bravely sharing details of their life stories and what matters to them.

It's had an impact on the instructors and architects of Belonging as Legacy as well. Matthews, in town from Michigan for the festival, gives Wolverines T-shirts to some of the student participants before they all head out for one last lunch as a group. Later, Dyson circulates to the group an emotional video tribute of his own, detailing his experience getting to know everyone and how the program impacted him as a USC student assistant.

This film festival is a remarkable moment to witness, and it's remarkable to consider how when we share ourselves and our stories, we strengthen our bonds with our communities and further develop our social and emotional selves. As Immordino-Yang's research reveals, that growth is occurring on a neurological level, underneath the surface, an investment in the future. But it's also easy to see right in front of us, with the group of young adults who have blossomed in a matter of months and who have found belonging in each other. —R

**"It's really a way of not just changing education, but also of changing science. We're trying to change the way that scientists understand and study the nature of human development."**

—Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, Fahmy and Donna Attallah Chair in Humanistic Psychology



# BEHIND A DISTRICT'S RISE TO SUCCESS

**A**LFONSO JIMÉNEZ EdD '12 BECAME SUPERINTENDENT of Hacienda La Puente Unified School District (HLPUSD) just months after the state ordered schools closed amid the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the global health crisis that ushered in a new normal for education didn't stop him from starting in July 2020 with multiple goals for HLPUSD. One of his ambitions was to gain recognition for the district far beyond the East San Gabriel Valley.

"There wasn't a whole lot of activity on the national scene," says Jiménez, who was previously deputy superintendent of educational services at Santa Ana Unified School District. "When I was hired, the school board said, 'We want you to move our district forward. We want you to make sure that our district is known outside of just this area,' and I believe I have done that with some of the honors that our district has received."

Those honors include National Blue Ribbons—awarded to schools by the U.S. Department of Education for excelling on standardized assessments or in closing achievement gaps between students. HLPUSD has also won the Golden Bell Award for education programs and governance practices designed to better serve students in districts statewide. California Schools to Watch, the Educational Results Partnership and the Civic Learning Award for California Public Schools have all recognized the district, too.

HLPUSD, which serves over 15,000 students at 31 schools, is racially and economically diverse. Hailing from Hacienda Heights, La Puente,

**With a pedagogical framework focused on deep learning and an emphasis on partnerships, Alfonso Jiménez EdD '12 is putting Hacienda La Puente Unified School District on the map.**

Story: Nadra Kareem Nittle  
Photos: Rebecca Aranda





Valinda and City of Industry, the student body is 75.7% Hispanic, 17.1% Asian, 2.5% White and 1.9% Filipino. Three-quarters of students qualify for federal free or reduced lunch, but nearly 93% percent of students graduate from high school, compared with 86% statewide.

Jiménez, in his 28th year in education, attributes HLPUSD's strides largely to an innovative pedagogical framework used only in select schools before he became superintendent and adopted it districtwide.

With the support of the school board, Jiménez has also launched his own initiatives, including partnerships with a local business council to help students land internships, and a youth cinema project that introduces students to career roles in film—from writer or director to boom operator or set designer. He expanded the district's coding initiative and started aviation and speech-and-debate programs as well.

## Four of HLPUSD's schools won National Blue Ribbons this year, more than any district in the country.

A multipronged approach has moved the district forward, one that has involved planning, collaborating and innovating. That four of its schools won National Blue Ribbons this year, more than any district in the country, can be traced to this strategy, Jiménez says.

"That's the highest award a school can get, so obviously that doesn't happen by accident," he says. "These schools have been really working hard on teacher collaboration, teacher planning, teacher professional development—and, also, the administrative leadership that is at the schools really embodies everything that we ask teachers to do."

Teachers who share struggling students discuss intervention methods with each other, while administrators examine districtwide data to improve academic outcomes and get children the appropriate support. That teamwork, particularly around raising the performance of marginalized youth, landed the district on the Educational Results Partnership's prestigious honor roll list for advancing educational equity last year.



### A FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNING

The foundation for all of HLPUSD's efforts, Jiménez says, is the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL) framework that he has implemented in each school. A global initiative of families, teachers, administrators and policymakers, NPDL has partnered with over 1,800 schools in 20 countries to create learning environments in which students develop six main competencies: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking.

"New Pedagogies for Deep Learning talks about having the right content instruction happening in the classroom," Jiménez says. "What is the learning environment? How do we use digital? How do we form partnerships in the community, and how do we use our pedagogical practices in the classroom? If all of those conditions are met, then we're able to really focus on the six C's."

The NPDL framework emphasizes a global perspective on education. HLPUSD has hosted tours of some of its award-winning schools for international educators who also use the framework. The district also collaborates directly with Michael Fullan, a globally recognized researcher on education reform and the co-leader of NPDL, to push the initiative in its schools.

The district plans to hold a virtual international conference on the pedagogies in February and an in-person conference once funding is secured, an idea his assistant superintendent was instrumental in developing, Jiménez says. "We collaborate with people in Uruguay, Australia, Brazil, Hong Kong and Taiwan," Jiménez says. "Learning has become global." The deep learning competencies, he adds, benefit students academically and professionally.

↑ Students at Wilson High School participate in a forensics class.

### PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUCCESS

The district's focus on partnerships, Jiménez says, led to it winning a Golden Bell Award from the California School Board Association this past year. It received the honor for developing an initiative called Project LEAD (Learning Experiences About Democracy) that saw district personnel connect schools with city government officials while instilling in students the self-efficacy needed to hold discussions with them.

**"How do we change instruction so that it is meaningful, authentic for students, and it's real-world? That's been my big push this year."**

—HLPUSD Superintendent Alfonso Jiménez EdD '12

"That program has since expanded," Jiménez says, adding that the district is still exploring ways to innovate. "How do we change instruction so that it is meaningful, authentic for students, and it's real-world? That's been my big push this year. The theme this year is 'transformative learning pathways for student success.'"

Through HLPUSD's partnership with the Industry Business Council, a group of business leaders from the City of Industry, the district is giving students opportunities to develop skills in manufacturing and other sectors. Many of the parents of the roughly 15,800 students in HLPUSD already work in the small industrial city, which is home to over 3,000 businesses and a population of under 300. Altogether, HLPUSD offers 28 career and technical education (CTE) programs, including 13 CTE pathways in 10 industries.

In his previous school districts, including Santa Ana Unified in Orange County—a district triple the size of HLPUSD—Jiménez capitalized on partnerships. That district, which he joined in 2016, entered partnerships with large organizations that allowed staff to connect with school personnel nationwide.

Jiménez has a history of collaborating with universities to help students develop career skills and receive college scholarships if they qualify for admission. With the Youth Cinema Project, which he oversaw in other school districts over a decade ago, he hopes to do the same. In the program, which is affiliated with a foundation by actor Edward James Olmos, students learn from entertainment professionals who also train HLPUSD teachers.

"We launched this program at an elementary school," Jiménez says. "We also have it in a middle school and at a

high school, so all of these schools feed into each other, such that we have a pathway now for film.

"My goal is to build this program in partnership with the best university in the whole wide world, which is the University of Southern California. I would love to partner with the USC film school to be able to do a full elementary-through-university film pathway."

While the arts matter to the superintendent, so do the sciences. Over the past four years, the district has expanded its computer coding program to each school. With the University of California, Davis, as a partner, students advance their understanding of mathematics and robotics through the coding initiative. Since artificial intelligence heavily depends on coding, Jiménez believes the skill is the way of the future. There's also a perk for teachers in the program: If they complete coding training in affiliation with the University of California, Riverside, they get a supplemental authorization credential in computer science, which not only helps students prepare for the future but also could move teachers up the salary scale.

Knowledge experts have told Jiménez that it's important to expose students to a coding language at a young age so they become familiar with it and learn to problem-solve early on.

"There's an initiative from the California Department of Education to ensure that kids are taking a computer science course by the time they graduate high school," he says, "so we're very lucky that we've been able to expand [our program]."

### A SUBTLE AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEADER

Pedro Noguera, the Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean of the USC Rossier School of Education, recently visited a fifth-grade classroom in the district. Although the class was large, with 36 students, Noguera observed that they were all on task. He was also impressed with their responses when he asked how they defined success.

They're successful, they told him, because they're kind and work hard. Their focus on these characteristics rather than on performance alone "says a lot about the culture of the school," Noguera says.

The dean applauds Jiménez for his willingness to discuss professional challenges and successes alike. When Jiménez began as superintendent during the pandemic lockdown, he closed a school because of declining enrollment, a decision that strained his relationship with some community members. Noguera says it's important for Jiménez to share this chapter of his tenure, since the public may not realize "that success isn't easy because you still face issues."

Jiménez started his career as an elementary school teacher for Long Beach Unified, where he grew up, and later transitioned into administrative roles for Bellflower Unified, Fullerton, Anaheim City and Lynwood Unified school dis-

tricts. As his career progressed, Jiménez has responded to challenges—from devising strategies to raise graduation rates to closing student achievement gaps.

He's also been inspired by the adversity his parents overcame. Both emigrated from Mexico, with his father arriving in 1960 at 18 to become a migrant farm worker under the federal Bracero program, which allowed Mexican men to obtain U.S. employment on a contractual basis. Jiménez is one of three brothers, including a fellow educator.

He knew he wanted to be a teacher after volunteering for the Mobile Science Museum as a student at California State University, Long Beach. The museum traveled to local elementary schools to teach students about science, and Jiménez felt called to inspire youth to attend college—especially those who grew up in under-resourced neighborhoods, as he did. His wife, Maria, is also an educator, and they have three children.

When Jiménez began his doctoral program at USC as a school principal in Fullerton, he received preparation for a wide range of situations as an educator, he says. He found Professor Rudy Castruita's superintendent leadership course especially helpful.

"The fact that he shared with us decisions that he had to make as a superintendent was fascinating because we got to see what kind of thinking is involved to solve real, complex problems," Jiménez says. "I always rely on that. I think, 'OK, well, if I were Dr. Castruita, how would I solve this? What would I do?'"

While Jiménez credits deep learning for much of his dis-

trict's success, Manoj Roychowdhury, HLPUSD's associate superintendent of business services, said the superintendent deserves credit as well. Last year, Jiménez was a featured speaker at NPDL's Global Deep Learning Lab. Before that, he was named a 2022 Superintendent to Watch by the National School Public Relations Association.

Roychowdhury also worked with Jiménez at Santa Ana Unified, where many students were economically disadvantaged and had socioemotional challenges, he says. There, they were both motivated to focus on the success of all students and

Classes like culinary arts give students at Wilson High School opportunities to learn real world skills.

**"He's a very subtle leader. At the same time, he is a very transformative leader. He pushes the student outcome in education because he does a lot of reading and research into the leading pedagogies."**

—Manoj Roychowdhury, HLPUSD associate superintendent of business services



Superintendent Jiménez speaks with students in a classroom at Wilson High School.

pathway, about 700 K–12 students are enrolled. Students have traveled to debate tournaments in Kentucky and at Harvard University. Jiménez's objective, he says, is to provide students with opportunities they may not know exist.

To that end, the superintendent is now launching a four-year aviation curriculum for students. The idea came to him after attending an aviation conference with an administrator and two school board members. The district has secured state funding for equipment and has a flight instructor on tap from a junior college that is an existing community partner.

Jiménez notes that the district is about a 30-minute drive from multiple airports—LAX, Long Beach, Ontario, John Wayne. "There

are so many airports here that I said, well, why not have an aviation program where students who want to go into the industry could easily make that transition, either by going to the local community college and finishing their aviation program or getting hired by an airline to go into their flight school," he says.

While high school students will be the focus of the program due to age restrictions, middle schoolers may take part in a program to prepare them for aviation and the drone pilot license test, which they can register for at 16. Jiménez says it's important that the district build pathways rather than standalone programs that lack context from previous grade levels.

This layering of knowledge across subject matter and grade levels has benefited students while giving the district a competitive edge. Over the last two years, nine HLPUSD schools have earned California Civic Learning Awards for making great strides with civic learning. The honors, Jiménez says, resulted from the district's emphasis on the citizenship and character components of the six C's from its deep learning framework.

Additionally, this past school year, three HLPUSD schools were named California Schools to Watch, an honor recognizing high-quality middle-grade instruction.

As Jiménez begins his fifth year as superintendent, he says he has no plans to stop pushing the school district forward. He will work to ensure that all schools receive outside recognition. But what matters most, he says, "is knowing you definitely make a difference for your students." —R

not just a select group of high-performing youth. That mindset, Roychowdhury says, has proven helpful at HLPUSD.

"He's a very subtle leader," Roychowdhury says. "At the same time, he is a very transformative leader. He pushes the student outcome in education because he does a lot of reading and research into the leading pedagogies. He also is practical and pragmatic, so he will subtly influence the principals, assistant principals and even the educational leaders to explore the new pedagogies."

Judy Fancher EdD '05, who was HLPUSD's assistant superintendent of curriculum, assessment and instruction until she retired last year, appreciates that Jiménez isn't afraid of innovation.

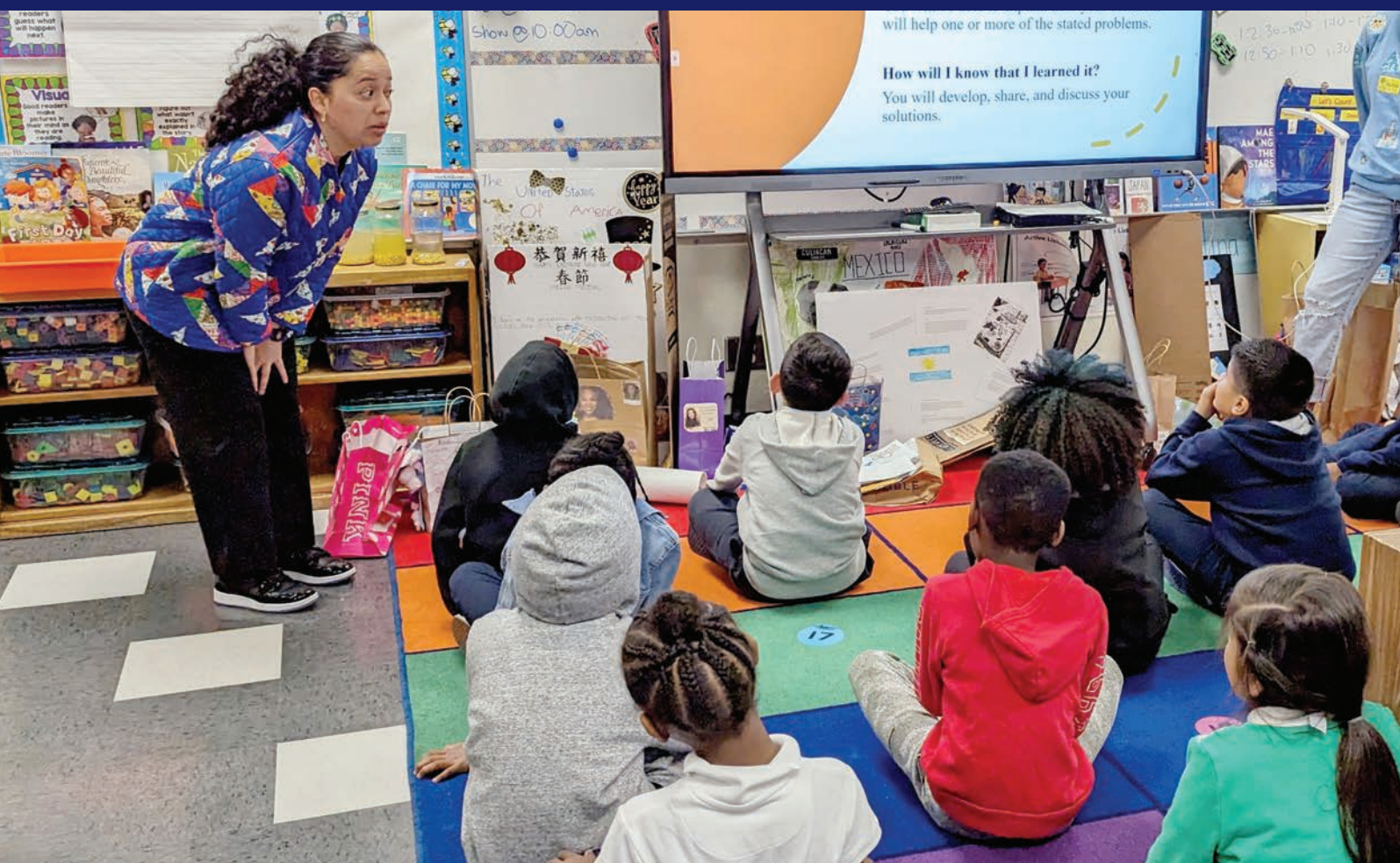
"I once worked with a superintendent who didn't ever want to be first," says Fancher, "whereas Dr. Jiménez says, 'We like to be ahead of the curve. We want to be thinking about what we're doing now but also what we need to be doing in the future.'"

At the same time, Fancher says, Jiménez respects the programs that were implemented before his tenure—if they're effective, that is. He champions and builds on initiatives that best serve students.

"He talks a lot about action, outcomes, vision, but then also accountability," she says.

One of the first programs Jiménez established as superintendent was speech and debate, beginning at a middle school four years ago. The program expanded to high school during the 2023–24 academic year and is available at the elementary school level for the first time this fall. Now that there's a full

# BRIDGING THEORY TO PRACTICE



Story: Adriana Maestas  
Photos: Eugenia Mora-Flores

A new partnership at 54th Street Elementary School is bringing MAT students and faculty into local classrooms.

In many teacher education programs, it's routine for college faculty to review video recordings of their teacher-candidate students delivering lessons at school sites. From these videos, professors can provide feedback to their students. Watching video recordings of teacher candidates has long been a practice at the USC Rossier School of Education, but a new program is changing that.

The USC-LAUSD Partnership School program simultaneously puts USC Rossier Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) students and faculty into local schools. Faculty can observe the teacher candidates in the classroom and have a more complete understanding of the school dynamics and teacher-student interactions than video recordings can provide.

This new partnership builds on USC Rossier's long-standing relationship with the Los Angeles Unified School District. USC Rossier has had a presence in LAUSD schools for many years, providing MAT students with opportunities to obtain hands-on experience in K-12 classrooms close to USC's University Park Campus. In 2022, USC Rossier faculty in the MAT program decided to build on this relationship while also addressing the disconnect between what happens in their classrooms and what teacher education candidates experience in the field.

The USC-LAUSD Partnership School Program was created to facilitate collective conversations and apply the pedagogical and research-backed approaches taught in the MAT program to the school setting. This program not only benefits USC Rossier MAT students, it also provides professional development to LAUSD teachers and school leadership, while giving USC Rossier faculty valuable time in K-12 classrooms. The idea was to build a more reciprocal relationship with the demonstration site campus. The school's experienced teachers and leadership receive enrichment and assistance. At the same time, USC faculty get to know a campus' community, teachers and administration, helping them tailor their professional development workshops to the specific needs of the school.

"We wanted to improve the way that we prepare teachers for the transition of being in teacher education to being a full-time teacher by bridging the gaps that can exist between theory to practice. We did this by taking our MAT students with their faculty members to [partner schools] together to have collective conversations in the same space," says Eugenia Mora-Flores, assistant dean of teacher education.

Mora-Flores, who was instrumental in the creation of the program, also sought to enhance the experience of MAT students, "so they can be better prepared to serve their own future students and communities that they will be teaching in," she says.

## COLLECTIVE CONVERSATIONS AT 54TH STREET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

One of the most successful partnerships of the new program is with 54th Street Elementary School, a K-6 school less than 6 miles from USC that serves South Los Angeles with a majority Black student body and Latino students as the next largest ethnic group. This school has been operating since 1895 and is a Title I school, which means it receives federal funds for students from low-income families. As part of the partnership, the entire multiple-subject MAT cohort visited the school, with approximately 25-30 USC

students in attendance. During a visit, the MAT students would co-teach multiple lessons as their professors observed.

"Being in the classroom as a faculty member with the MAT students and the LAUSD teacher allowed me to see other things that I would have missed just watching our students on camera," Mora-Flores says. "For instance, the 54th Street teachers could tell us when the elementary students who don't speak up in class as much became more animated or interested in the lessons. We could ask the teachers why they thought the students were more engaged. When I was present in the classroom at the demonstration site, I could provide feedback with a level of depth that is much more sophisticated than the kind of feedback I would be giving from watching a recording."

**"Being in the classroom as a faculty member with the MAT students and the LAUSD teacher allowed me to see other things that I would have missed just watching our students on camera."**

—Eugenia Mora-Flores,  
Assistant Dean of Teacher Education

After a teacher-candidate facilitated a lesson, a collective debriefing session would follow that included USC Rossier faculty, MAT students and the elementary school staff. This allowed the student-teachers to receive feedback from different perspectives, including from the more experienced 54th Street School teachers. These educators could provide additional context about how their elementary students were experiencing the lessons since they had been working with the students for a much longer period of time.

USC Rossier faculty had an opportunity to teach lessons at 54th Street as well. This experience helped the MAT teacher-candidates see that their

professors aren't just erudite sages on the stage at USC, but are scholar-practitioners who know how to apply theories and the latest research in an elementary school classroom. Teaching children again gave the USC faculty a chance to stay current and relevant in a K-12 setting and to show, not just tell, their student-teachers what to do.

"Being in an elementary classroom gave a different authenticity to the experience. This was a learning experience for me," says Sandra Kaplan, professor of clinical education, who taught a few lessons at the school. "I can read hundreds of articles a semester and be immersed in scholarship, but to be back in an elementary school classroom and see what goes on was good for us as professors."

Esthefany Salazar MAT '23, now a third grade teacher at City Language Immersion Charter School in Los Angeles, says being in the elementary classroom with her professors was enlightening.

"Observing and learning with the 54th Street Elementary School was helpful because we could debrief after observing master teachers—who have years of experience—deliver a lesson and have conversations about what we saw in the classrooms with our professors. We could directly reference what we saw in the elementary school classrooms with the theories we were learning in the MAT program, reinforcing what we were learning at USC," says Salazar.

Natalie Dean MAT '23, now a teacher at Richland Avenue School in LAUSD, says participating in the 54th Street partnership as a teacher-candidate gave her another place to see how concepts she was learning were being applied, beyond her own student-teaching placement and the videos she would watch of her peers. Being with peers and professors opened her eyes to some observations that she may not have first caught in a new setting.

### REIMAGINING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Part of establishing the reciprocal relationship between USC Rossier and 54th Street Elementary School involved hearing directly from the school's teachers and leaders about areas of focus for professional development.

Usually, a professional development session involves an experienced teacher or professor delivering a lecture at a school or district office, with the school's teachers taking notes while the facilitator hopes they aren't getting bored. In the 54th Street partnership, USC Rossier professors configured the training sessions so they were working closely with teachers in their own classrooms much of the time. The USC faculty would make points that were more significant or



relevant to what the elementary teachers were doing in their respective classrooms, providing feedback on ways to improve their teaching while also praising them for the areas where they excelled.

"This professional development experience was very specific to the classrooms that we were working with," says Kaplan, who delivered the training along with professors Nasser Cortez and Shanta Smith. "It allows for a different level of comprehension because the teachers receiving the professional development can see what we are talking about with real students and receive feedback in real time."

Because the professional development was not delivered in just one day by one expert, relationships between the teachers and USC professors formed.

Smith, an associate professor of clinical education at USC Rossier, provided a glimpse of the training that was offered.

↑ Students participate in a lesson taught by a USC Rossier MAT student.

**"I can read hundreds of articles a semester and be immersed in scholarship, but to be back in an elementary school classroom and see what goes on was good for us as professors."**

—Sandra Kaplan,  
Professor of Clinical Education

"For the first year of the program, we unpacked math story problems and promoted student agency and metacognition," Smith says. "Part of that process is modeling the mathematical practices that the students have to use in the classroom. With the metacognition piece, we talked about having the elementary students thinking out loud and how this can be an approach that is asset-driven and allows the teachers to see how students are thinking about what they are learning."

Asset-based teaching practices focus on the students' strengths and building up what they can do before facing new academic challenges. One strategy used to unpack math word problems was "Stop, Think and Act it Out," which allows students to pause and analyze a problem, drawing upon their existing knowledge. These practices are particularly helpful for students from marginalized groups because they can focus on leveraging their assets to learn, whether that draws on their cultural, familial or neighborhood experiences. It's a more student-centered approach to learning.

Deborah Francois, the targeted student programs coordinator at 54th Street Elementary School, says that, through the partnership, teachers were able to meet goals the district had asked them to work on, such as being more student-centered, letting students drive their own learning and engaging in more inquiry-based practices. Faculty offered many approaches for 54th Street teachers to refine these skills by working directly beside them in the classroom.

"The teachers at our school have been very positive and enthusiastic about what the team at USC brought to them," Francois says. "I have had the opportunity to visit classrooms when the teachers were implementing some of these strategies that they learned in professional development, and we are starting to see some real instructional shifts at our school site. We can't attribute this entirely to USC and our partnership, but it's part of it."

Experiential learning, hands-on learning and learning through play were some of the strategies faculty worked on with the school's teachers. For teachers who may have been trained in different strategies and are several years removed from their experience in teacher education, Francois said that being able to interact and learn from the USC Rossier professors provided a fresh perspective and leveled up their pedagogical practices with more current student-centered strategies.

One professional development session showed how students can learn science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) concepts through play and making new things. Smith, a former principal at two magnet STEAM schools, took

the lead in the session at the school's maker space, helping teachers learn how to maximize the learning experience for their students. STEAM activities in a maker space start with design thinking about a problem. Then, with teacher guidance, students work to develop a solution using items in that space, often building models or prototypes. Judith Cawthorne, a kindergarten teacher at 54th Street, developed an activity based on the problem faced by the billy goats in the children's classic *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. Students were provided with materials to build a bridge or create a different way to cross a brook safely.

For several years, 54th Street Elementary School had been a Tier 3 priority school, meaning its academic performance was among the lowest in the district. Within the past year, test scores have improved, and now the school has emerged out of that category. The school is on an upward trajectory, according to Francois, which is gaining notice from LAUSD leadership. Francois credits the USC partnership as being instrumental in student growth and stronger student performance.

"What I have appreciated most about this partnership is that this has been something that leadership in the district has supported, so it goes beyond just this school," Francois says. "We feel supported by LAUSD leadership in working with USC. On the USC side, working with the faculty and Dean Pedro Noguera has been wonderful. The dean has also made connections with district leadership to let them know what we have been doing."

When the program first launched at 54th Street Elementary in the 2022-2023 school year, four teachers from the school participated in partnership. Last year, that number had risen to nine, so now the school is seeing results on a larger scale.

From this initial partnership with USC Rossier, the team at 54th Street Elementary School has also engaged with the USC Viterbi School of Engineering, which is providing after-school engineering classes for the elementary students. In addition, 54th Street may soon become a school for USC Rossier to provide student-teachers beyond the demonstration-site partnership, further strengthening the connections between this neighborhood school and work being done at the University Park Campus. —R

# Amid the Devastation Wrought by the Lahaina Fire, Compassion Endures at Maui Prep

Two USC Rossier doctoral graduates opened their hearts—and the doors of their school—after a deadly wildfire leveled a Hawai'i town and disrupted education for West Maui students.

Story: Kianoosh Hashemzadeh  
Photos: J. Anthony Martinez

On Monday, Aug. 7, 2023, Lisa Zamora EDD '13 and her husband, Miguel Solis EDD '18, were excitedly preparing for Maui Preparatory Academy's first day of school, set for Wednesday, Aug. 9. The nonprofit private school—located in Napili, Hawai'i, a small town on Maui's west side about 10 miles north of Lahaina—serves students from preschool age to 12th grade.

The following day, Miguel, head of school at Maui Prep, and Lisa, academic dean, woke to no power and their cellphones flashing SOS. They heard there was a brush fire on the mountainside of Maui, but they didn't think much of it—brush fires are fairly commonplace in West Maui. "We've had fires out here in the past," Lisa explains. "They always get them contained pretty fast. In a way, we were a little desensitized because of previous years."

The two went about their day, going down to Maui Prep to assess whether the school had sustained any damage due to the high winds and to prepare for a possible opening the next day. But after consulting with board president Jim Bozich, the first day of school was pushed back to Thursday. Miguel and Lisa returned home with a feeling of unease.

Their instincts were correct. Within hours, the wildfires would consume the town of Lahaina and become the deadliest in the U.S. in more than 100 years. In the middle of the tragedy, however, the Maui Prep community would pull together to help Lahaina residents in their greatest time of need.

As the sun set Tuesday evening, Aug. 8, 2023, Lisa and Miguel joined their neighbors and made use of their condo's communal barbecues to cook dinner. The blaze to the south was growing, but with the power out and telecommunications still down, everyone was literally in the dark.

That night, Lisa and Miguel brought their 7-year-old son, Noah, into their room. They worried that the glow of the fire, visible from his window, would keep him up. But with the wind howling and the glow growing, sleep was elusive for everyone. Around 2:30 a.m., Miguel told Lisa he was going to Maui Prep to see if everything was okay. He said he would be at either the school or a small nearby airport attempting to get cell service.

Once at the airport, he was able to get a radio signal at the higher elevation and immediately heard the name of his school on the airwaves. He got in his car and raced down the hill to Maui Prep. He saw another massive glow—this one coming from floodlights that were lighting up the area for buses and throngs of people.

As Miguel drove into the school parking lot, Principal Ryan Kirkham ran to his vehicle, headlamp on his head. Kirkham explained

that the Maui Police Department had knocked on his door earlier in the night, asking him to open the school as an emergency shelter.

The day before, the Red Cross had contacted the school about possibly serving as a shelter. Kirkham, who has worked at the school in various roles since 2005, never imagined it would be necessary. When officers arrived at his door that night, the instructions were brief and direct: The downtown civic center was being evacuated, and the shelter needed to relocate to Maui Prep immediately.

As Miguel made his way through the crowds of evacuees, the smell of smoke was strong—clinging to bodies and clothing. Survivors were coated in soot; their eyes were red, and some were wet from having spent the night in the ocean to escape the fire. Everyone was hungry and very, very tired.

Lisa was anxiously sitting at home when a call came in from Miguel. Unsure how long the phone connection would last, he quickly told her to get their son and dog ready because he was coming to pick them up. Lisa was full of questions but didn't get any answers until after Miguel arrived.

News via the "coconut wireless" was dim. Miguel had heard that the whole town of Lahaina was gone, that many had lost their lives, that everything had burned—homes, historic landmarks, businesses and the 150-year-old banyan tree in the town's center.

Miguel and Lisa quickly realized they were going to need volunteers to help aid the Red Cross' efforts to shelter the evacuees. Miguel shared the news with his neighbors and urged them to come to the school.

Despite the traumatic news, the impromptu relief crew at Maui Prep—now around 200 volunteers—kept working. They opened the school's concession stand and began passing out food and dry Maui Prep T-shirts and hats. They gathered towels from the school's locker rooms and passed those out as well. A teacher's aide who was trained in first aid began assisting those in need of medical attention. Everyone rallied to help.

On a typical school day, Maui Prep holds about 325 students and staff; that night, the school provided shelter for nearly 700 people. By Wednesday, Aug. 9, the school had exhausted its supplies and was having difficulty keeping the bathrooms functioning. By around 6 p.m., the Red Cross had arrived with another set of buses to relocate the school's occupants to a location better equipped to shelter them.

But the school volunteers didn't stop as the buses departed. They quickly morphed the school into a distribution center, with resources including food and diapers, clean clothing and medicine. Miguel "led the charge," Kirkham



“Dr. Solis and Dr. Zamora learned the skills at USC Rossier, however, it is their passion, their caring, and their willingness that shines the brightest light on their actions as leaders.”

—Rudy Castruita, USC Rossier Professor Emeritus

says, “and made people feel welcome” as they sprang into action, sorting supplies and creating a system to hand out the items to whoever needed them. “Who better to do these tasks than educators?” Miguel explains. “We organize things.”

After distributing supplies for about four days, Miguel and Lisa and the rest of the staff shifted gears again. They knew that once power was restored, they would need to put their energy into making Maui Prep a school again. Area children needed a place to go, and they heard kids—including their own son—saying they wanted to return to school. With so many schools in the area shuttered because of the

fire, and one elementary school lost entirely, they decided to open their registration to as many students as possible.

In a normal year, Maui Prep has a student body of about 275. Lisa and Miguel spoke with their leadership team and board to figure out how they could serve more students.

They reopened enrollment, free of charge, and received over 1,000 applications, though they had room for only an additional 110 students. Sorting through the applications was an imperfect process, Lisa and Miguel recall, but they did their best given the circumstances. They prioritized the families of first responders, because “we need them in the community,” Miguel says. Other admissions decisions were made based on a combination of need, the family's relationship to the school and which grades had spots available.

Over a few short weeks, Maui Prep transformed from an emergency shelter to a distribution hub and finally back to a school—one with a 40% enrollment increase. “We pride ourselves on being a small school,” Kirkham says. “That allows us to be nimble as an organization and pull—I'll say—crazy stuff off like that.”

The next crisis they had to tackle was retaining their teachers. After the fire, many left Maui, including some of the new educators they had just hired. It is difficult to recruit and retain teachers in Maui as it is—the cost of living is high, and even before the fire, there was a housing shortage, Miguel explains. Miguel scrambled to secure housing for his teachers, calling up board members and others in the community to ask if his teachers could stay in their unused vacation homes.

“It was another side of him,” Lisa says, remembering all the bartering and maneuvering Miguel did to ensure the school had what it needed to reopen. Miguel leaned on the words and courage of two USC Rossier mentors, Professor Emeritus Rudy Castruita and Professor Alan Green, who pushed their students to use their positions as educators to ask for whatever might be needed for the children they serve. That's exactly what Miguel did—emboldened by the dire circumstances and the need to get kids back in school, back to learning.

The school reopened on Monday, Aug. 21, less than two weeks after the fire destroyed Lahaina and left an ineradicable mark on the community.

**FROM L.A. TO THE VALLEY ISLE**

Before moving to Maui in 2018, Lisa and Miguel lived in Southern California. The two met when they both worked at Our Lady of Loretto, a K-8 Catholic school in Los Angeles. Lisa taught math and science and served as the school's vice principal; Miguel taught social studies. When they met, Lisa was entering the dissertation phase of USC Rossier's Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership program. She was writing about leadership practices of Catholic school principals, a position she aspired to and obtained in 2014, a year after receiving her EdD.

It was around this time that Miguel, encouraged by Lisa, entered USC Rossier's doctoral program. After the two wed on the island of Kauai in 2015, Miguel's love for and



→ Miguel Solis EdD '18 greets students as they arrive for school.

interest in Hawai'i grew. When Professor Green mentioned in class that schools in Hawai'i had difficulties holding on to teachers, Miguel was flabbergasted.

"Paradise—what are you talking about?" Miguel recalls thinking. He couldn't fathom why anyone wouldn't want to live and teach in Hawai'i. But Green explained that Hawai'i schools faced many issues, including obtaining resources and retaining teachers due to the high cost of living.

"People believe it's all wonderful, but the fact is, there's a great need for people to understand the history," says Green. "Hawai'i is a part of the United States, but it was also colonized, and the challenges around that relationship still exist to this day."

Before the Hawaiian Kingdom was invaded by the U.S. in 1893, education was a central and essential part of its culture. It was one of the earliest nations to mandate public education and enjoyed near universal literacy. All of this changed with the Americanization projects that were imposed on schools in the early 20th century—actions that would be labeled war crimes in today's courts. Hawai'i's education system was shattered, and the damage wrought by these cruel projects is still present.

Miguel was determined to learn this history so he could understand the unique challenges of the Hawai'i education system. When he told Lisa about his dissertation idea—organizational change and leadership in Hawai'i schools—she reminded him, quoting professor Castruita and the late professor Pedro Garcia, that whatever topic he chose, he would be "married to it."

Miguel was already running down the aisle. He fondly recalls that when it came time for his cohort to present their dissertation ideas, he was "like a little kid. I couldn't wait until they asked me." The research he conducted for his dissertation has opened doors for him as he sought leadership positions in Hawai'i schools and has uniquely prepared him for the challenges of education on Maui.

"At Rossier, we help our students understand equity and education from a critical perspective, including the idea of settler colonialism," Green says. "We're trying to empower our educational leaders with the proper context and tools to act. And that's something that Miguel has exemplified."

The first position Miguel applied for was principal of Sacred Hearts School in Lahaina. When it came time for his interview, Miguel was well-prepared and felt as if he knew what questions were going to be asked before the committee even asked him. The job seemed meant to be—and it was. But it wasn't just Miguel the school wanted—they also wanted Lisa to come on board as director of curriculum and instruction.

In 2018, the family pulled up their roots in Los Angeles and began to form new ones in Maui. When they arrived at Sacred Hearts, they were teeming with ideas, but they knew they had to proceed with sensitivity. The school opened its doors in 1862 and is the oldest school on the island. For the next two years at Sacred Hearts, both Miguel and Lisa worked to implement changes like a new math curriculum



and grading systems, and to create fun things like a Harry Potter-like house system.

In 2020, Miguel received a call from Maui Prep's board president, Jim Bozich, requesting a meeting. Bozich had read Miguel's dissertation and followed his work at Sacred Hearts. He felt that Miguel's leadership was exactly what was needed at Maui Prep.

Miguel was hired as head of school in 2020, and the board also wanted Lisa for the role of academic dean, counselor and teacher. The two were particularly attracted to the school because of its rigorous academic curriculum and its focus on seeing their graduates continue on to college—something they firmly believe in.

↑ Lisa Zamora EdD '13 speaks with Maui Prep students at lunch.

### SIFTING THROUGH THE ASHES

Maui Prep sits on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean—the sparkling turquoise water, the outline of nearby islands of Moloka'i and Lanai. A view of paradise.

In the early days after the fire, the staff of Maui Prep would gather on the bluff, "look out on the water and see boat after boat coming," Kirkham says. "Just small, recreational boats coming over from Moloka'i." People were bringing supplies and gasoline—at \$8 per gallon—across the Pailolo Channel to Maui. They were filling up people's cars, handing out supplies and then going back for more.

For Kirkham, there are two sides to the Lahaina fires. On one side, the community saw the absolute destruction of a historic town that was once the capital of the Hawaiian Kingdom, and on the other, "we were able to witness the absolute best of humanity."

The Lahaina fires are the deadliest that the U.S. has seen in over a century. As of August 2024, there were 102 confirmed deaths. Over 2,000 buildings were destroyed, including King Kamehameha III Elementary School. While the other three public schools in Lahaina were minimally damaged, all were closed for weeks. Public schools reopened in phases throughout September and October 2023, but many students were forced either to enroll in a new school closer to their emergency housing or to attend classes remotely.

Lisa and Miguel finally made their way to historic Lahaina in early August 2024, just shy of the first anniversary of the fires. It was their first time seeing the fire's destruction in person. Lisa described it as "like a Pompeii excavation site."

A large number of residents are still homeless. For the months immediately after the fire, survivors shuffled from hotel to hotel, awaiting more permanent housing solutions. For many, new housing never materialized, and that meant leaving the island.

There continues to be a dire mental health crisis affecting children and adults due to the trauma they lived through and witnessed. Lisa, who earned her master's in guidance and counseling from Loyola Marymount University, knew there would be a huge need for school counselors to help teachers, students and their families process the trauma they experienced. The week that Maui Prep reopened for the 2023–2024 school year, she and admissions director Liz Turcik made arrangements to have additional counselors on hand as well as comfort dogs to provide emotional support.

Miguel and Lisa know that the school cannot function without its teaching staff, so taking care of them however they can is a top priority. "Our main drive," Miguel says, "is to bring normalcy into people's lives." So, Miguel plays the role of real estate agent, finding off-market housing opportunities for Maui Prep teachers and helping them secure furniture.

And while the 2023–2024 school year started off in tragedy, it ended in celebration. The swim team won the Hawai'i State Championship even though the county pool where the team practiced was no longer available. Lisa and

Miguel, determined as ever, gained permission from their homeowners' association for the students to train in their condo's pool. The team's rallying cry, "No pool, no excuses," inspired them to outswim much-better-resourced schools.

As Maui Prep began the 2024–2025 school year, there was a mix of excitement and loss. Over 100 students left the school as their families lost the impossible battle to find affordable housing. This resulted in a personal loss for Lisa and Miguel's son, Noah, whose close friends moved away. The impact of the fires smolders on and manifests itself in these new types of losses, touching everyone in ways large and small.

But there are also reasons to be excited. The school looks forward to celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, and despite hiring challenges, Miguel is elated that the school has been able to hire a kumu, a Hawaiian cultural teacher. They continue to have a mental health counselor on hand for anyone in the Maui Prep community who might need one.

### BECAUSE OF USC

Through the devastation and countless hardships created by the Lahaina fire, compassion has found ways to shine through: that line of small boats across the Pailolo channel; the efforts of volunteers who cared for the 150-year-old banyan tree until it sprouted new leaves; determined student-athletes who found victory in the pool; and a small private school that opened its doors and heart to uprooted families.

Reflecting on the past year, Miguel and Lisa ask themselves, "How did we get here? Why are we here?"

"It all comes down to USC," Miguel says.

They feel blessed to be in a position to support their school in this time of need, and without USC, they don't feel they would be in Maui or have been prepared to face the challenges of the past year.

Both point to teachings of Professor Castruita who served as a guiding light, helping them navigate their postgraduate careers. Castruita educated students on "how to lead and make thoughtful decisions," Miguel says. In his courses, he taught practical yet essential tools—like how to work with an organization's board and "interact with employees, parents and the local media in the face of disaster," Miguel says.

Castruita was not surprised to hear about Miguel and Lisa's exemplary leadership in the aftermath of the Lahaina fires.

"First, let me say how proud I am of Dr. Miguel Solis and to hear that both he and Dr. Zamora were prepared and ready to take the lead," Castruita says. "Though they attribute their respective readiness to USC and to me, it does not surprise me that their learned and inherent leadership was instrumental during these most challenging times. They learned the skills while at USC's Rossier School of Education; however, it is their passion, their caring and their willingness that shines the brightest light on their actions as leaders." —R

To learn more about how you can support Maui Preparatory Academy, please visit [mauiprep.org/giving](https://mauiprep.org/giving).

Story: Ellen Evaristo  
Illustrations: Chris Gash

Analysis from education policy experts provides a measured look into the high-stakes battles taking place at school board meetings.

# THE FIGHT FOR EDUCATION

**O**n Sept. 7, 2023, the Orange Unified School District (OUSD) held a school board meeting with a number of items on the agenda, but the one that brought legions of community members and parents to contribute public comments was a policy on transgender parental notification. The proposed policy aimed to require the district to inform parents and guardians if their child asked to be called by a different pronoun other than the one assigned at birth.

Throughout the seven-hour meeting, over 120 parents and community members—including individuals who were not directly connected with the district—intensely expressed their opinions on the matter. Those in favor of the parental notification policy cited a parent's right to know, while those opposed to the measure raised concerns about potential conflicts, privacy rights and child safety. Amid the community and parent comments and outbursts from attendees, the school board worked to maintain order and facilitate a productive dialogue. Despite the discord and polarization in the room, the meeting provided a platform for community members to voice their opinions.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the board unanimously passed the parental notification policy in a 4-0 vote. However, the OUSD board president and a fellow board member were recalled by voters in March 2024, and over the summer, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a new law making California the first U.S. state to prohibit school districts from mandating staff to inform parents of their child's gender identification change. When the new legislation takes effect on Jan. 1, 2025, districts like OUSD that have implemented such policies will be prohibited from enforcing them.

The scene in Orange is not unique. Across the nation, school board meetings have become increasingly contentious in recent years, with parents and community members expressing frustration and anger over a variety of issues. From critical race theory (CRT) to book bans, these meetings have become a battleground for differing opinions and ideologies. Amid much debate and division, Temecula Valley Unified passed a resolution that banned CRT in classrooms in 2022, and Murrieta Valley Unified rejected an 11th-grade social studies textbook proposed by teachers in 2023. Tensions run high as stakeholders seek to have their voices heard and influence the decisions being made by the school board. These meetings have become highly

charged events, and the future of a child's education hangs in the balance.

## EDUCATION EXPERTS WEIGH IN

To better understand what's going on—at this meeting in Orange and across the nation—we asked three USC Rossier School of Education faculty experts on educational policy and three former school board superintendents to weigh in and help us make sense of the issues and what's at stake.

These education experts reviewed select clips from the seven-hour board meeting from both sides of the policy argument. The experts shared their impression of the meeting, what strategies school boards may implement to address and de-escalate contentious issues, and what role education policy experts can play in helping school boards adopt and advocate for solutions.

Historically, school board meetings have drawn a smaller number of participants and have been, by all accounts, uneventful. But the events that occurred at the OUSD board meeting have become commonplace. "This kind of meeting became more popular during the early years of the pandemic, when people were worried about closing schools, mandatory vaccination and masking policies," says Julie Marsh, USC Rossier professor of education. Meetings have transformed into what Marsh calls "performative spaces." Streamed online meetings have become an opportunity and forum for individuals to comment on policy and speak to the public.

More and more, signaling, symbolic actions by people and a well-rehearsed script have found a place at school board meetings to advocate for a particular political agenda.

As the former chancellor of the nation's largest school district, New York City Public Schools, Rudy Crew, professor of clinical education at USC Rossier, has experienced his fair share of school board meetings. "There's a line of demarcation between policy and administration, and school boards have a very difficult time staying on their side of that line," says Crew. Whether it is race, gender or politics, the issues get twisted into this "very tight Gordian knot" that is difficult to untie at school board meetings, according to Crew. The relationship between the board and superintendent—with the board able to fire a superintendent at any time—is another point of contention, Crew says.

**"CREATING CONFLICT IN MEETINGS IS A STRATEGY FOR UNDERMINING CONFIDENCE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION."**

—Julie Marsh, Professor of Education



Superintendents in Temecula Valley Unified and Palo Alto Unified have lost their jobs amid such strain.

Morgan Polikoff, co-faculty director of the USC EdPolicy Hub, offers that, while he has reservations about the very concept of school boards, this is how they are supposed to operate. Individuals can say and express what they want “as long as it’s germane to the issue,” Polikoff says. Board members consider the issues at hand and vote, and voters can recall board members they do not agree with. “I disagree with some parents and some board members” at the OUSD meeting, says Polikoff, “but it’s actually a very complicated issue. It’s not surprising to me that it’s difficult to come up with policy.”

These meetings raise important questions: Should individuals with no expertise in education, like board members, make decisions about complex issues they do not understand? While some members may have an education background, individuals interested in serving on a school board in California are not required to have a degree or background in education. “I think [the concept of school boards] is a crazy way to run schools in general, let alone on this very particular and highly politicized issue about which these folks mostly have zero knowledge,” Polikoff says. “But it’s how we do things in the U.S., and this is the predictable outcome.”

After reviewing the clips, former USC Rossier professor and superintendent to Long Beach and San Diego school districts Carl Cohn said, “It isn’t about the kids or the students. It’s about adult beliefs, about the red-blue divide in our country.” So much of this, Cohn says, is a larger, adult performance brought to the local K–12 level.

So why are so many adults using school board meetings as a place to air grievances? One reason is that these meetings have been targeted to initiate potential policy changes on a broader scale, according to Marsh. And the strategy has



been successful for some. In 2016, the El Rancho Unified School District school board saw a need for curricula that reflected the diversity of the student body and became first in California to make ethnic studies a graduation requirement. The local policy set a precedent, and in 2021, the California State Legislature passed a bill that mandated ethnic studies as a requirement for all public high school students across the state.

As a former superintendent with Tustin and Los Alamitos school districts, Gregory Franklin, a USC Rossier professor, has observed a strategy for those seeking to advance their political agenda. Individuals can and have built momentum for their cause at the school board level. “While [these politicians] might not be able to win statewide seats,” Franklin says, “they can win local [school board] elections where there might be larger concentrations of like-minded voters and begin to accomplish their agenda in these localities.”

Polarization on these issues can also be seen at a national level. The school board meeting in Orange “is a good example of what I’ve been studying, which is the ways in which school boards become pawns in broader political games,” Marsh says. While there were parents and community members expressing valid concerns, some individuals were not from the district and may have been

brought in. These “traveling activists,” as described by the *Los Angeles Times*, are parents who travel to other districts to garner support for their cause. “Creating conflict in meetings is also a strategy for undermining confidence in public education,” Marsh adds. “This is the kind of politics that we’re seeing trickle down into school boards.”

Decisions made at heated school board meetings have potential long-lasting effects on students. According to Huriya Jabbar, associate professor at USC Rossier, many of these contentious policies are “undermining access and opportunity for different marginalized student groups.” The

policies can limit exposure to a diverse and representative curriculum. For example, from Jabbar’s previous research on teacher turnover in Texas, teachers described feeling under constant threat from parents because of the school board battles around how and what educators taught. “There is a chilling effect from banning books or restricting what and how lessons are taught,” Jabbar says. “Those are the kind of long-term potential ramifications these school board conflicts have on students.”

### NAVIGATING DEBATES CONSTRUCTIVELY

Maneuvering through politically charged school board meetings can be challenging. Emotions can run high and tensions can flare. How can school boards move forward?

According to Franklin, school boards need to remember that, even if superintendents disagree with part of their community, they are still their community’s superintendent. They serve the district and, most importantly, they serve in the best interest of the students.

Because of the controversial nature of some of the topics brought up at school board meetings, individuals avoid discussing them and “oftentimes want to shut down,” Crew says.

“It invokes a culture of quietude and, unfortunately, suspicion,” Crew adds. “What superintendents have to do is ultimately work through and build the kind of culture where people will feel comfortable.”

Education policy experts can help school boards stay focused on the biggest issues: those that come from their own communities. Jabbar recommends that boards call on researchers and experts—such as those with legal and social science expertise—to weigh in. Establishing and collaborating within long-standing, research–practice partnerships may help.

Misinformation is another potential hurdle, and it has significantly affected the public’s understanding of topics like CRT and other educational issues. The transmission of information via social media is at an “exponential power,” according to Cohn, who adds that school districts are not often prepared to immediately respond to wild allegations. As with Temecula Valley’s ban on teaching CRT, board discussions on the issue have created confusion around education policy and shifted focus away from the actual needs of students. A lawsuit filed last year by several district students, teachers and the teachers union alleges the ban has “created an environment of fear and divisiveness on school campuses.”

“I think the best strategy is likely to be to ground [policy decisions] in the best evidence available,” Polikoff says. “Point to evidence and expertise, and ultimately let the chips fall where they may.” Although, this issue is especially thorny, as Polikoff suspects that the evidence on the parental notification policy is not as conclusive as advocates on either side would believe. Those in favor of notification likely believe that children experiencing gender dysphoria

## 5 QUESTIONS BOARD MEMBERS CAN ASK WHEN CONSIDERING CONTENTIOUS POLICIES

When school boards are faced with hot-button policies, it is important to ask critical questions to promote informed and thoughtful decisions that prioritize the best interests of the students and the community. Associate Professor Huriya Jabbar recommends they consider the following questions:

1. Where are these pressures and demands coming from?
2. Which students and families are affected, and how?
3. Could leaders survey parents and teachers in the district to gain more insight?
4. Can researchers help boards prioritize policies?
5. With each policy, consider the ramifications for teachers—how might this impact their work and ability to teach and create safe environments?

may change their minds, Polikoff explained, while those against notification may believe that outing children to their parents could result in worse outcomes for the children. “I’m not sure that evidence can really give us answers as to which policy position is better or not. Ultimately the decision on this issue probably hinges as much on norms and values as evidence per se,” Polikoff said. Evidence, however, can provide some support or leverage for those having to make these difficult decisions.

While school board meetings and the elected officials who preside over them may very well be flawed and a-far-from-perfect way to govern our public school systems, for the time being, they are what we have. So how then can school boards begin to bring back civil decorum into these public forums and keep in sight the most important thing—the students?

To start, effective communication, transparency, parental engagement and considering available research are all crucial elements for school members to incorporate into board meetings. Together, these elements can create an environment where difficult conversations can lead to constructive outcomes, ultimately strengthening the educational system and fostering a sense of shared responsibility among all stakeholders. —R

# California's Top Education Leaders on the Critical Issues Facing Schools of Education

Deans Carole Basile, Kimberly White-Smith EdD '04, Frances Contreras and Tina Christie discuss the state of the field, reducing student costs and shaping the future of teacher preparation.

Interviews: Pedro Noguera and Kianoosh Hashemzadeh

Illustrations: Heather Monahan

## How would you describe the current state of graduate schools of education? Are we addressing the critical issues facing our field?

**CAROLE BASILE:** If we define the field as the health and efficacy of the institutions in which humans formally learn, I think most of what happens in colleges of education is playing out in only small patches of the field. Maybe that patch is educator preparation. Maybe it's equity, inclusion or multilingual education. Maybe it's special education or the economics of education policy. Maybe it's AI and learning technology. But not enough of what happens in our colleges of education—our degree programs and our research—addresses the full field in which all of these patches exist. Our PK–12 school systems treat all learners as identical and therefore assume that they all need the same kind of educator. Even the language we use to describe “special” or “gifted” education assumes a departure from a norm. But there is no such thing as an average learner. Average is a statistical abstraction and a hallucination. Variation is the norm in human life. Until our programs and research agendas are designed to inform and build systems that honor variance—among both learners and educators—we won't be addressing the critical needs facing our field.

**KIMBERLY WHITE-SMITH EdD '04:** We are at a critical juncture right now. There are

a lot of competing demands—teacher shortages, demands for more inclusive education and, in some states, demands for the removal of inclusive elements and diversity from the curriculum. But one thing remains true: All of our students deserve highly qualified teachers. Students deserve teachers equipped to manage the extra stressors we're seeing in schools.

When you look at the data, you see that teachers who go through formal teacher preparation programs tend to last longer in schools. They perform better, have higher student academic outcomes and find their work more enjoyable and meaningful compared with those who go through quick turnstile programs or are placed in classrooms without support, mentoring or training. Those teachers tend to burn out quickly.

The work we do serves students better. The challenge is figuring out how to make it more accessible to people who want to teach in their local communities. Increasing funding to support residency programs is a huge step in the right direction. It allows people to receive the training they need while still earning a salary. This goes a long way, especially in diversifying the teaching workforce.

We're also the place where the research happens. We shed light on areas where our practices need improvement. For instance, we've recently added trauma-informed care in our credentialing process and curriculum. Schools of education have the potential,

through research, to change the traditional approach to teacher preparation.

**FRANCES CONTRERAS:** We have a tremendous opportunity to communicate and convey the critical importance of higher education—not only its relevance in a democratic, thriving society but also its relevance in preparing the next generation of those who will educate our children.

Graduate schools of education are in a dynamic place. We're attempting to inform the need for civil discourse in society against the backdrop of AI and multiple technologies that are fueling this data-centered generation where news and information are available in real time. So, how might schools of education lend their expertise to ensure that accurate information and data infrastructures around education exist? By collecting and sharing accurate, relevant data on students and student outcomes, there's a tremendous opportunity for graduate schools of education to help shape what the field of higher education will look like in the next 10–20 years.

**TINA CHRISTIE:** For persistent problems in education, I do believe we're addressing vexing issues. But for issues that emerge from crisis, we are not very good at pausing and responding to those issues in a way that feels immediately relevant to policy and practice communities.

For example, schools of education have helped to move the needle on educational inequality. We take up these difficult systemic



**CAROLE G. BASILE** is the dean of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. At ASU, her work centers on redesigning the education workforce and changing practices in teacher and leadership preparation. She is currently working with education organizations nationally and internationally to design systems and enable organizational change in these areas.

issues of education, and I have to admit it is sometimes hard to see progress—on societal inequities and injustice—because it takes decades to address and shift these core problems. But, in some areas, over time, we can say, “We've actually done some good!”

I do question whether we are doing a good job of ensuring that those who walk through our doors—those who teach teachers, those who go through our undergraduate and graduate programs—really understand what it means to engage in civil discourse and reasoning and to teach these critical skills to our young people. I believe we are living the impact of our gradual moving away from teaching civic discourse and reasoning, starting at the youngest of ages. We need to go back and ask ourselves: What is the purpose of education? If every school of education in the U.S. seriously addressed this question, we would all be engaged in a very important conversation. Perhaps it would be a turning point for our collective impact.

**Schools of education—and, in some cases, universities themselves—were created to train teachers. Recently, we've seen monumental changes and advancements in the field, from generative AI and social-emotional**

## IN CONVERSATION

### learning to the science of reading and integrating DEI into the classroom and curriculum. How is your institution adapting to the challenge of preparing future teachers?

**CB:** Schools of education—normal schools—were created to prepare teachers to teach the “norms” of society. Today, we need to think about variance—variance among learners and variety in the kinds of lives and activities that learners will experience throughout their lives. Education preparation needs to move beyond lockstep credentialism and embrace a world that requires broader, more diversified education workforce. That workforce will require both specialists and generalists. It will require teams of distributed expertise—including expertise in areas we have not always thought about in education. This includes redefining the roles and responsibilities of educators, providing learners with teams of distributed expertise. At ASU, we are creating a new blueprint for teacher preparation. At its heart is the ability to be flexible, nimble and accessible so our students can choose paths that fit both their interests and the needs of the students they will serve. And, crucially, we are working on the demand side of the labor pipeline, not just the supply side: We're partnering with schools on strategic staffing models that utilize teams of educators rather than the one-teacher, one-classroom model. Educator preparation and strategic school staffing inform each other. We are positioning educator preparation as part of a larger educator workforce design challenge.

**KWS:** This is something I've been working on for most of my career. I'm a former foster youth. I was emancipated and have been living on my own since I was 16. I have a foster brother who was mislabeled as uneducable when we were young. My foster mother modeled for me what it meant to be an advocate. She pulled us out of the public school system, put her pennies together and put us in a private school. My brother graduated with average grades from a Catholic high school. That set the standard for what I strive for in my own career and in my choices regarding how I do the work of teacher prep, teacher education and working with communities to advocate for themselves.

California did not recognize dyslexia until 2018, when legislation was passed. One of the things that I began to do, after arriving at

USD, was to work with my literacy faculty. I wanted to introduce them to dyslexia training in the form of phonemic awareness. It is aligned with standards from the science of reading, but it considers students' cultures and looks holistically while still drilling down on the more prescriptive and important aspects of decoding phonemic awareness and all the things that we know help students learn to read. Even before the legislation was passed, Professor Suzanne Stolz began to train San Diego teachers on how to work with students with disabilities and hone the skills they need to support students with dyslexia.

Niki Elliott at our Center for Embodied Equity and Neurodiversity researches how we use neuroscience and neurobiology to help uncover how to work with neurodivergent students in a variety of ways. At the center, we consider how we can train teachers to move past the behaviors that they see in their students and uncover the distinct learning patterns that need to be supported.



**KIMBERLY A. WHITE-SMITH EdD '04** is dean of the School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES) at the University of San Diego. With over 25 years of urban schooling and educator development experience, White-Smith endeavors to foster academic justice for Black, Indigenous, Queer, Latinx, and neurodivergent students through enhanced learning environments, policies, and practices.

**“I see schools of education as the keepers of hope and equity.”**

—KIMBERLY A. WHITE-SMITH EdD '04

USD now has programs in family therapy, counseling education and leadership. We're not a fly-by-night program that was invented to spit out a bunch of teachers. We exist for the community. USD sees itself as an anchor and a binational institution that also serves our neighbors in Tijuana and Baja, who come across the border every day to come to school.

**FC:** Teacher education programs are often siloed, and one of my priorities has been to integrate the importance of our teacher education programs into the fabric of what we do. Our school started as a program to serve teachers and educators. We have a thriving MAT program that prepares the next generation of teachers and leaders in K–12. We also are home to a thriving CalTeach program that prepares the next generation of undergraduates interested in becoming teachers in a STEM field. Finally, we are home to two bilingual certificate programs. The first prepares teachers to earn their bilingual certificates in Spanish to teach in dual-immersion programs. And this year, with the School of Humanities, we're launching a certificate program in Asian American languages. There's a strong effort to prepare the next generation of teachers and educators for a multilingual, multicultural society in a culturally responsive way.



**FRANCES CONTRERAS** is the dean of the School of Education at UC Irvine. Dean Contreras is the first Chicana/Latina Dean to lead a School of Education in the UC System. Her recognitions include a lifetime achievement award by the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs for her work to address Latino student equity and, on December 17, 2021, the City of San Diego honored her with Dr. Frances Contreras Day for her leadership and service.

The other part of adapting to changes is to reimagine what education can and should represent to our students, educators and broader community. In the past four years, the discourse has largely been on the use of AI and cheating and integrity. We want to move far beyond this conversation to think about AI's use in providing access to information to assist teachers, school stakeholders and educators in higher ed. That's the value that higher education and schools of education can add.

The UCI School of Education has an annual event, the Teaching for Justice Conference, with an emphasis on Asian American teachers and justice. When we sponsor these events, the community takes ownership and partners with the school to say, "This is important to us." We want to be in the space of responding to the needs of teachers. We're trying to become a research institution that can serve as an academic home to all teachers in Orange County, regardless of where teachers received their teaching certificate and degree.

**TC:** UCLA was first a state normal school. The first degrees awarded at UCLA were in education. We are UCLA's origin story. And so, we've always thought about what it means, as an institution, to prepare teachers for what is next for our young people in our schools.

Our universities offer an abundance of expertise from which we can draw upon in our teaching of educators, educational researchers and policy experts. One way to address complex issues is to pull in the expertise on our campuses in these areas to help us design a curriculum to best prepare our students. AI is a perfect example. We can facilitate and accelerate dialogue with those who are advancing AI in computer science and engineering in thinking through its implications for education. Let's create opportunities for educators in our schools to sit down and explore, "What does AI mean for me as a middle school teacher, teaching literature and English?" If we want to have a conversation as to where AI is headed and then understand how it might impact education, then we need to have experts in conversation with educators. Then we can address the question, "How do we best build our expertise in this area? How does it relate to other issues we are committed to?" We have to be much more flexible and responsive in addressing the problems of the moment.

**One of the challenges graduate students at schools of education face is financing their education. This is a critical concern given that the field they are entering isn't particularly lucrative. What should we do to reduce the cost of becoming a teacher?**

**CB:** Part of this is the problem of affording higher education with which we are all quite familiar. There is another part of the affordability equation beyond pricing and scholarships. We need to recognize two things that are true about teacher candidates: First, they are just as much learners as the P–12 students they are teaching; Second, the work they are doing in schools is ... work. Because they are learning, we shouldn't require professional experiences that ask them to do everything we ask experienced teachers to do. Because they are working, we should pay them.

We should make all clinical experiences that are part of teacher-prep programs paid. This means working with schools and districts in deep partnerships. Paid internships. Paid professional experiences, including for para-educators who want to earn certification.

This can also have the added advantage of building new on-ramps into our programs. We have something called ASU Teaching Fellows, which is a way for people currently working as para-educators to keep working in their jobs while taking online courses with us.

However, in addressing the problem of paying teacher candidates, it's easy to create another problem by asking teacher candidates to perform the roles of experienced teachers. They are not experienced teachers. It's not reasonable to expect to retain people that are hired to perform tasks they are not prepared to do.

For their sake—and for the sake of the P–12 students they serve—teacher candidates should be given clearly defined responsibilities that allow them to learn in stages, gain competencies and experience a range of educational roles.

**KWS:** I see schools of ed as incubators for innovation, and we look to our funding community to help us pay for innovation. Our residency program is partially funded by the state, partially by donors and partially by us being creative with making it more affordable and accessible. We're finding ways to work directly with school districts. A lot of districts have internal personnel who have worked there for many years, who come from the community,

who might be multilingual but have never had the opportunity to pursue a formal education beyond high school.

We are looking at new ways to develop a four-year credential undergraduate program and get folks out there fully prepared, whether they are traditional undergrads or folks who are returning to school after having had a career. Leaning into our identity as incubators for innovation is key to solving the accessibility problem with regards to cost to becoming a teacher.

**FC:** Our faculty are deeply committed to funding their graduate students—those students who will go on to research and be the faculty in higher education. We essentially guarantee funding for those students.

As for our practitioner programs, it has been my priority to increase the number of fellowships, scholarships and partnerships that we have with school districts, because our teachers should walk away debt-free. We should be fully subsidizing teacher education. If we say we value education and we know that teachers are not going to have huge salaries, given the cost of living in a state like California, then we need to do our best to do right by them from day one.

As leaders of schools of education, we have a responsibility to push back on rising tuition costs and support teacher candidates. When you're told to raise tuition, you have to be courageous to say no.

The challenges that our teachers are facing in schools are unprecedented around civil discourse and navigating the political climate. We place a great onus on our teachers to provide numerous services beyond what they teach in the classroom. We have sought out donors who are solely interested in funding teacher education. Some incredible donors have stepped up to answer that call.

**TC:** There are three professions—teaching, nursing and social work—in which students should not incur debt. It's a policy issue. California is dabbling in this, but I wish we would hear a candidate on the campaign trail say, "You want to be a teacher, nurse or social worker? Go for it. We need you. Pursue your education, and you won't incur any debt." We would attract a much greater number of people to the profession, and I think it would help retention too.

A policy like this, would demonstrate, "We value you and the role that you play in

making our society strong, healthy, democratic and equitable." You don't have a democracy without access to a free, high-quality public education, and you systematically dismantle that critical institution if you starve it of a high-quality workforce. Our kids spend more time in a classroom with their teachers than they do with us at home. Don't we want the best people caring for and educating our kids? Let's talk about how to invest in ways that recognize teachers' expertise and all they bring to society, one child at a time.

**What would a world without schools of education look like?**

**CB:** Right now, I'm not sure the world would miss us. We already face stiff competition from non-university providers of teacher preparation. Think tanks and other researchers in other university-based colleges will conduct research. We are not the only champions of equity. Unless we move beyond credentialism—whether that's licensure for teachers or publication laurels and citation tonnage for scholars—we won't be missed at all. Optimistically, we could absolutely play a vital and critical role, but we will need to shift our ways of approaching the world to get there.

**KWS:** I see schools of education as the keepers of hope and equity. In a world without schools that attend to education and the health of our communities, I see communities where the equity gap would widen. We have the opportunity and the wherewithal to impact every aspect of our community, culture and businesses. A world without us is a world where innovation ceases.

**FC:** I'm concerned about the discourse around the relevance of higher education, particularly from groups of individuals who we know are sending their children to college. Schools of education play such a critical role in helping to shape not only the next generation of teachers but also the next generation of thought leaders who are examining a dynamic educational landscape.

We play a vital role in helping to provide this level of discourse and expertise to shape not only communities but also economies. It would be a dangerous conversation if we were to divest in schools of education that help to shape, advance and innovate across the P–20 education continuum, while also working to ensure social mobility for the next generation.



**CHRISTINA (TINA) CHRISTIE** is the Wasserman Dean of the School of Education and Information Studies at UCLA. Her work focuses on understanding evaluation as a method for facilitating social betterment. She is the recipient of the 2018 American Educational Research Association, Research on Evaluation Special Interest Group, Distinguished Scholar Award, and the 2019 American Evaluation Association, Research on Evaluation Distinguished Scholar.

**You don't have a democracy without access to a free, high-quality public education, and you systematically dismantle that critical institution if you starve it from a high-quality workforce.**

—TINA CHRISTIE

That's fundamental to who we are, especially in a country that takes pride in the ideal that where you start does not necessarily pre-determine where you end up in life. That's the promise of higher education, and schools of education are at the foundation of ensuring that promise is fulfilled.

**TC:** This would pose a very serious threat to our democracy—our democratic processes, principles and values. It would not be good for anyone.

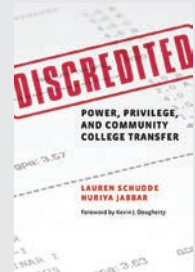
*These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.*

## Faculty publications



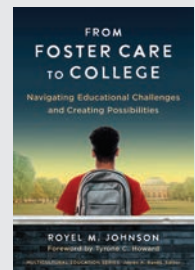
**The Big Lie about Race in America's Schools**  
 Edited by **Shaun Harper**, University Professor, and **Royel Johnson**, associate professor  
 Harvard Education Press (September 2024)

This volume delivers a collective response to the challenge of racially charged misinformation, disinformation and censorship that increasingly permeates and weakens not only U.S. education but also our democracy. Johnson and Harper bring together leading scholars and educators to confront the weaponized distortions that are undermining public education and racial justice. These experts offer strategies to counter dangerous trends and uphold truth in education. The book offers clear, actionable insights for educators, policymakers and advocates who seek solutions that will counter recent trends and transform educational contexts within K-12 and higher education.



**Discredited: Power, Privilege and Community College Transfer**  
 By **Huriya Jabbar**, associate professor, and **Lauren Schudde**  
 Harvard Education Press (September 2024)

*Discredited* illuminates the successes and failures of the systems that support student transfer among postsecondary institutions. Schudde and Jabbar show how the decentralized, bureaucracy-ridden, and often confusing process undermines equity and access. Grounded in hundreds of interviews of students and personnel, data from a six-year longitudinal study, and a synthesis of five decades of research on college transfer, they frame transfer policy as a complex public higher education issue rather than an isolated community college problem. Schudde and Jabbar call for reform and offer insight into how transfer outcomes could be improved through better transparency, centralized policy and government intervention.



**From Foster Care to College: Navigating Educational Challenges and Creating Possibilities**  
 By **Royel Johnson**, associate professor  
 Teachers College Press (October 2024)

This book chronicles the experiences of 49 college students navigating the challenging terrain of the U.S. foster care system. Through in-depth interviews, Johnson provides insight into the harsh realities of how our nation's educational and welfare systems often intertwine in ways that diminish the potential and opportunities for these young people. Yet amidst the adversities, these stories resonate with themes of hope, resistance and possibility. Guided by resilience theory, Johnson sheds light on the protective mechanisms that enable postsecondary access and success, even in the face of towering barriers.



**Blood on the Brain**  
 By **Esinam Bediako**  
 MAT '09  
 Red Hen Press  
 (September 2024)

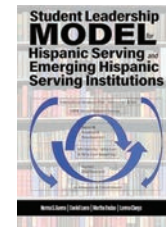


**The Schlemiel Kids Save the Moon**  
 By **Audrey Barbakoff**  
 EDD '21  
 Simon and Schuster  
 (April 2024)

## Alumni publications



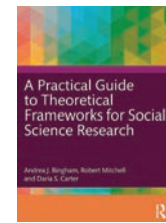
**Frier and Environmentalism: Ecopedagogy**  
 By **Greg William Misiaszek**  
 ME '05  
 Bloomsbury (May 2023)



**Student Leadership Model for Hispanic Serving and Emerging Hispanic Serving Institutions**  
 Co-authored by **Martha Enciso EdD '09**  
 Information Age Publishing  
 (2024)



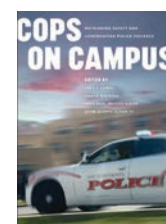
**The Harm Reduction Workbook for Addiction**  
 Kristin Dempsey EdD '18  
 New Harbinger (January 2024)



**A Practical Guide to Theoretical Frameworks for Social Science Research**  
 By **Andrea J. Bingham PhD '15**  
 Routledge (February 2024)



**Black Men and Racial Trauma: Impacts, Disparities, and Interventions**  
 By **Yamonte Cooper EdD '14**  
 Routledge (February 2024)



**Cops on Campus: Rethinking Safety and Confronting Police Violence**  
 Co-edited by **Jude Paul Dizon PhD '22**  
 University of Washington Press  
 (February 2024)



**Bouquet of Love**  
 By **David Powell DDS '68, MS '71** and **Carol Powell**  
 (January 2024)  
 Available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and [BarnesandNoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com)

## The Price to Become a Teacher

Tuition at private universities is putting an excessive financial burden on new educators—and reform is long overdue.

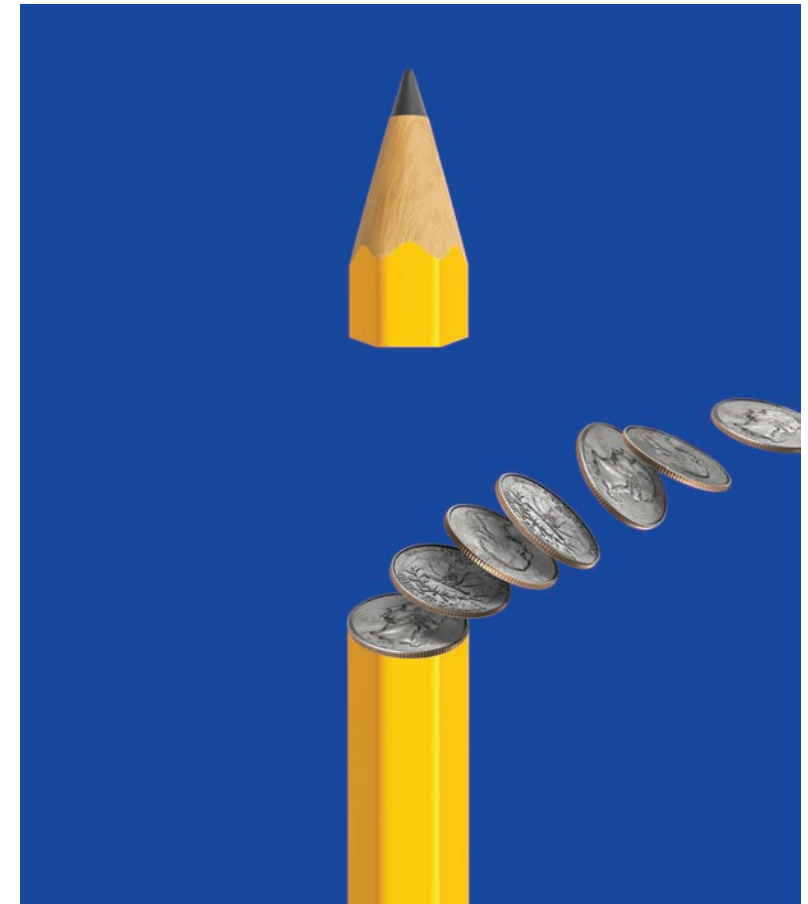
By **Pedro A. Noguera**, The Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean of the USC Rossier School of Education



**SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION** WERE created at American colleges and universities for the purpose of preparing future teachers. Although the mission has expanded over the years to include other activities, such as preparing future leaders, counselors, researchers, etc., training teachers was first and foremost the reason why schools of education were created. In fact, the preparation of teachers was deemed to be so important that at many land-grant universities (including our neighbor and rival UCLA), teacher preparation was at the core of the mission that justified the founding of the university itself.

At many elite universities, especially private universities like USC, the future of teacher education is imperiled by the rising cost of education. Sadly, students who enroll in our Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program pay as much in tuition per year as any other student at USC, even though they will earn considerably less than most students after graduation if they remain in the teaching profession (and we hope they will). As of fall 2024, our MAT students will pay a total of \$62,816 in tuition, \$1,811 in fees and \$1,079 to \$1,648 in additional credential fees for a total of approximately \$66,000. Bear in mind that this does not include the cost of housing, food and transportation, which on average can cost an additional \$3,000 per month. If our MAT graduates choose to teach in the Los Angeles Unified School District, they can expect to earn a starting salary of \$68,965 per year. Although we offer a limited amount of financial aid, many of our students are compelled to take out loans to finance their education. The average student loan payment is \$600 per month. This means that many of our students will be saddled with a debt-to-income ratio of 30–40%. Given the high cost of living in L.A. and California generally, this is an excessive burden for a young person to bear.

In the past few years, we have taken great strides to address this problem by creating a teacher residency program. The residency gets our students working in schools as student teachers as soon as they enroll in our program. The program covers the cost of tuition, and with support from participating districts and the Ednovate charter network,



each student is provided with a living stipend of \$35,000 per year. We are thrilled that with the generous support of our donors, for the past two years we have been able to offer three-fourths of our MAT students this type of support. However, all of our students deserve scholarships like these, and we are concerned that our fundraising efforts will not be adequate or sustainable.

At USC Rossier, we believe that preparing future teachers must remain central to our mission. We ensure that the training they receive is excellent, and we take pride in the fact that many of our graduates—including Barbara Rossier EdD '71 and Roger Rossier MA '63, EdD '72, whose generous gift of \$20 million gave our school its name—go on to lead distinguished careers as educators. We are committed to continuing this work and building on our proud legacy. We know that no one pursues a career in teaching to get rich. Most of our students do so motivated by the noblest of ideals: They seek to ensure that future generations will be equipped with an education that will enable them to support themselves and their families, while simultaneously strengthening our democracy. Many choose to work with vulnerable children in economically marginal communities. Please give generously to support USC Rossier's future teachers. They deserve our support. Our schools and society are better off because they have chosen to work in this noble but undervalued profession. —R

ILLUSTRATION BY EDMON DE HARO

# Who Needs Schools of Education if They Don't Evolve?

As younger generations embrace technology in the learning process, so too must our teaching methods.

By Antonio Reyes, Assistant Director of Digital Strategy



**WHO NEEDS TRADITIONAL** education when everything you need is now online? From massive open online courses to virtual language teachers, the internet offers an array of learning opportunities. This raises a critical question: Do we still need education in the traditional sense?

Some argue that schools were designed to produce workers, not thinkers. While the truth of this claim is debatable, it is undeniable that we now need our students to become more than just doers. They must develop into thinkers capable of solving the challenges created by previous generations. To achieve this, we must provide new ideas and innovative solutions to tackle the evolving problems and technological advancements of our society.

### Changing attitudes toward education

Younger generations prioritize practical, goal-oriented learning and often use technology to bypass processes previous generations valued. For example, my teenage son prefers to quickly Google a word's meaning rather than to search through a dictionary, missing the deeper learning and unexpected discoveries—or what I like to call “happy accidents”—that come with the process. This shift from learning for its own sake to achieving specific outcomes requires a change in how we view teaching. We need to balance efficiency while maintaining the depth of understanding and critical thinking skills that come from a rigorous learning process.

### The role of technology in modern education

Incorporating technology into teaching methods offers significant benefits. Technology provides personalized assignments tailored to each student's pace and level, especially when access to teachers or private tutors is limited.

In many ways, this starts with schools of education. At USC Rossier, all Master of Arts in Teaching students must take a course that teaches them how to design, implement and evaluate technology-rich learning environments for K–12 students. And research like USC Rossier professor Yasemin Copur-Gencturk's shows that artificial intelligence-driven professional development can improve teaching and student performance.

However, challenges remain, particularly around equitable access. Not all students have the necessary devices or inter-



net connectivity, which can exacerbate existing inequalities. Schools and policymakers must ensure technology integration promotes inclusion and equal opportunity. By equipping teachers with better training and resources, and ensuring all students have access to necessary technology, we can foster an environment where critical thinking and creativity thrive.

### Preparing students for the future

Integrating technology into education is essential for preparing students for the ever-changing needs of the future. While we cannot predict exactly which jobs will exist, many current roles were unimaginable just a few decades ago, and advancements in AI and other technologies will create even more opportunities. Technological proficiency will be crucial across all fields. By incorporating lessons on the effective use of emerging technologies, such as AI, within different disciplines, education can empower students to enhance their skills and innovate in their chosen careers. Instead of banning tools like ChatGPT, we should focus on teaching students how to leverage them to their advantage.

As we look to the future, it is clear that schools of education and the classrooms that future educators will teach in will need to evolve or risk becoming obsolete. The changing landscape of the job market and the rapid pace of technological advancements demand a new approach to learning—one that is adaptable, inclusive and forward-thinking. This is not a choice; it's a necessity because technology is not waiting for anyone. —R

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS GASH

# Highlights From Class Notes

Class Notes are compiled by Katrina Nash, USC Rossier's senior director of advancement communications. To view all Class Notes and submit your own update, please visit [rossier.usc.edu/alumni/classnotes](http://rossier.usc.edu/alumni/classnotes).

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### 1960s

**CHERYL TALIAFERRO KYLE '62** is a proud Tanzanian who has worked with Maasai elders and the Tanzanian government to provide education for over 1,500 Maasai girls and boys in remote villages in the Maasai Steppe.

**SONNEE WEEDN '68, MS '73** is an author and a clinical and forensic psychologist. Sonnee is making a documentary of the life, work and impact of former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, the first African American woman to serve in that capacity.

### 1970s

**MEL BARON PhD '71** retired from USC Alfred E. Mann School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in 2022.

**TERRY A. BUSTILLOS '73, MS '74, EdD '89** retired from National University and was awarded professor emeritus status.

**MICHAEL VINCENT MCCABE ME '74** completed two years as mathematics department chair at Park View High School in Sterling, Va.

**LINDA BROUSSARD MEHLINGER '74** is celebrating her 29th year as assistant vice president at Morgan State University in Baltimore.

**JO ANN WADE ME '74** retired in 2007 after 33 years of teaching elementary and middle school.

### 1980s

**BOB HOWE EdD '80** continues as chairman of the board of the West Sacramento Donut Hole Gang, a philosophical discussion group.

**JUDITH L. CARL PhD '83** completed 40 years as a psychologist in an independent private practice. She retired and moved to Oregon to be near her family. She has a 2-acre mini-ranch in Central Point.

**DAVE BARON ME '87** served as chair of the Global Caucus on Mental Health and of the Section on Psychiatry, Medicine and Primary Care for the World Psychiatric Association.

**LYLE ALLISON PhD '89** completed his tenure as a professor of education at Okinawa Christian University.

### 1990s

**KATHERINE M. MILIAS '90** is retiring after 32 years of teaching in the Wiseburn Unified School District

in Hawthorne, Calif. In retirement, Katherine serves on USC's Board of Governors representing Athletics.

**RAJ SINGH PhD '92** was elected by California's 39th Congressional District as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention.

**JANICE FILER EdD '93** presented a research presentation titled “The Importance of School Leadership Practices in Social-Emotional Learning of Elementary and Secondary Schools” during the 2024 Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology Research Symposium in Saint-Légier-La Chiésaz, Switzerland. Additionally, she had an article published in the *International Journal on Studies in Education*, “Policy, Practice, and Perceptions of K-12 Social Emotional Learning.”

**CLARA DEHMER '96, ME '98** serves as a climate and culture specialist administrator in Fontana Unified School District.

**RAQUEL MEJÍA-BAZULTO '96** was the 2023–24 board president for the National League of Young Men's South Coast Chapter, a nonprofit organization for young men in grades 9–12.

**PHILIP SPRADLING MS '98, PhD '02** became licensed as a marriage and family therapist after a number of years working as an educator.

### 2000s

**SUE ELHESSEN EdD '00** was reappointed by L.A. County Supervisor Janice Hahn as commissioner for public social services. She was also appointed by Gov. Gavin Newsom to serve on the Commission for Disability Access and is chair of the Education Outreach Committee. She is serving on the school board for Bellflower Unified School District.

**BRENT TAYLOR PhD '01** was elected president of the Association of Latter-day Saint Counselors and Psychotherapists.

**JENNIFER VEGA LA SERNA PhD '02** is assistant superintendent and vice president, academic services, at College of the Sequoias. She was selected by the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program as one of 40 recipients of the 2024–25 Aspen Rising Presidents Fellowship.

**PAUL SEVILLANO EdD '02** was named superintendent of Rim of the World Unified School District.

**KELSEY KIKUYE IINO EdD '04** was elected by the Los Angeles Community College District Board of Trustees to serve as trustee and vice president.

**YUYING TSONG PhD '04** is associate vice president for student academic support at California State University, Fullerton.

**GREG WILLIAM MISIASZEK ME '05** has become editor of Bloomsbury's "Freire in Focus" book series along with Carlos Alberto Torres (UCLA).

**MARCY (NEWMAN) HESS ME '07** married fellow Trojan Joshua Hess '08 in Agoura Hills, Calif.

**PAOLA ALEXANDRA PAEZ ME '08** started her own tutoring company dedicated to providing affordable education and fair wages worldwide in her home country of Ecuador.

**KILEY ADOLPH MAT '08, EdD '16** is the Democratic nominee for the U.S. House of Representatives in Indiana's 3rd district.

**MARIE DACUMOS EdD '08** started a new position for the Los Angeles County Office of Education as a coordinator for the Center for District Capacity Building in the Accountability, Support and Monitoring Division.

**MARTHA ENCISO EdD '09** was named a 2024 NASPA Pillar of the Profession.

**GREGG MILLWARD ME '09** has joined Whittier Trust as vice president, client adviser.

**MATT TORRES EdD '09** was appointed deputy superintendent of the Walnut Valley Unified School District in L.A. County.

**2010s**

**JASON ANGLE EdD '10** completed his first year as superintendent of the Colton Redlands Yucaipa Regional Occupational Program.

**GUS FRIAS EdD '10** co-authored the new *Safe Schools Toolkit*, published by the California School Boards Association.

**CHEYLINEL GASTON LEWIS MAT '10** finished her 14th year of teaching and her first year at the Alexander Hamilton High School Humanities Magnet in Los Angeles.

**THEODORE RUIZ SAGUN EdD '10** co-authored *Equity Moves to Support Multilingual Learners in Mathematics and Science, Grades K-8*. Theodore is a lecturer in UCLA's Teacher Education Program.

**SUNDAY STEELE EdD '10** was promoted to vice president, curriculum services, at UnboundEd.

**WENLI JEN EdD '11** was elected vice chair of the PBS SoCal Community Advisory Board. Wenji and colleagues published an article in *Issues in Teacher Education*, titled "Creating Professional Learning Spaces Through Collaborative Partnerships to Support Teachers in Teaching Asian American Studies."

**EMILY REYES MAT '11** was elected second vice president of Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO, in August 2023, representing her unions, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) 1021 and United Teachers Los Angeles.

**REGINA ZURBANO EdD '11** was promoted to director of Local Control and Accountability Plan and charter school oversight for the Palmdale School District.

**LAURE S. BURKE EdD '12** is interim dean of business, legal and technology, culinary arts, and hospitality and tourism at Kapi'olani Community College, University of Hawaii System.

**RENE DENIZ ME '12** secured a position as an extended opportunity programs and services educational counselor at Bakersfield College, fulfilling a long-held dream to impact students in his hometown.



**MELISSA MOORE EdD '14** has retired after serving for 10 years as superintendent of El Segundo Unified School District. Melissa collectively completed 42 years in education employed in various capacities. Two milestone moments this past year included opening three newly constructed buildings at three schools and launching the AI Leadership and Literacy Initiative. Melissa's work in artificial intelligence was nationally recognized as one the first emerging technology policies in the nation. After taking some time to enjoy family and travel, she plans to consult in the future. —R



## From Insolvency to Success

How superintendent and recently appointed BOC member Darin Brawley EdD '17 transformed Compton Unified School District through a focus on STEAM and data-driven decision-making.

Story: Margaret Crane

↑ Superintendent Darin Brawley EdD '17 was appointed a new member of USC Rossier's Board of Councilors in 2024. PHOTO COURTESY OF COMPTON UNIFIED

**IN 2012, TWO FINANCIALLY BELEAGUERED SCHOOL** districts in south Los Angeles County were on the brink of entering receivership. As it turned out, one did, and the other didn't. In the Compton Unified School District, newly hired Superintendent Darin Brawley EdD '17 rose to the crisis. "We developed a fiscal stabilization plan and implemented cuts," he recalls. Compton Unified remained independent.

"Our students' futures should not be limited by ZIP code or skin color," says Brawley, the newest member of the USC Rossier Board of Councilors. From the beginning, he set out to close the opportunity gap for Black and Brown students in a district where 100% of enrolled students are from minoritized backgrounds and 92% are economically disadvantaged.

Brawley led the district's dramatic turnaround, achieving financial stability and launching a student-centric, data-informed culture of learning. When he took the lead at Compton Unified, the graduation rate lagged at 58%. Today, it is 93%. Back then, only 14% of students met the requirements for entrance to the University of California and California

State University systems. Now, 68% meet the A-G requirements for admission.

While in the process of transforming his district, Brawley enrolled in USC Rossier School of Education's Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership program, receiving his EdD in 2017. His dissertation explored the significant impact of multinational corporations on STEM learning in Ireland. Drawing on his research, Brawley developed robust multi-level partnerships with corporations such as Verizon and RTX (formerly Raytheon Technologies Corp.). Every high school and middle school in the district is now a Verizon Innovative Learning School, providing technology for the classroom and comprehensive training for teachers. "Opportunities for students are of your wildest imagination," Brawley says.

With careers of the future in mind, Brawley initiated a districtwide focus on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) education. Students learn to code in preschool. "At every grade level, we're offering technology, coding, robotics, drones and computational thinking, preparing our students for the digital economy," he says.

Early in his tenure, he instituted SMART goals—or goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound—that he credits as a key tool for districtwide success. Data gathered for the SMART process reflects State of California indicators such as student performance or absenteeism. Based on these categories, principals develop annual objectives for their schools. Throughout the year, working with the superintendent, they analyze the data to identify areas that require improvement.

Data collected over the past 12 years charts measurable and continual progress in technology, English language arts, math and English learning. "Our English language-learner population are amongst the best in the state in terms of academic achievement," notes Brawley.

He recalls, "There was a time when Black students had a significant achievement gap compared to others. Now, for the last couple of years, they're graduating at the highest percentage rate of all our students." Compton Unified's high-performing Early College High School is rated No. 32 in the state of California, and 273 nationally. This year, 126 students graduated with the equivalent of an associate of arts degree.

Students who were kindergartners when Brawley took charge of the once-failing district are now attending colleges and universities, including USC. In his commencement address, Brawley noted how the Class of 2024 was special to him and assured the graduates that they were prepared for whatever they chose to do next.

The superintendent wants people to know that "students are thriving here. This is not your Compton of 30 years ago. Drop the narratives about gangster rap or professional athletes and start paying attention to student achievement."

Asked if other districts can replicate Compton Unified's success, he replied, "Educators need to understand that students, not the adults, come first. The core mission of why we exist is to deliver outcomes for our students." —R

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# USC Rossier Produces Leaders in Higher Education

**Monique Allard ME '02, EdD '06**, VP for Student Life, USC

**Alen Andriassian EdD '24**, Acting VP for Student Services, Los Angeles City College

**Manuel Baca PhD '98**, Professor Emeritus of Political Science, Rio Hondo College and Director, Foundation for the California Community Colleges

**Zach Barricklow EdD '23**, VP of Rural Innovation & Organizational Change, Wilkes Community College

**Gary Belotzerkovsky EdD candidate**, VP of Student Operations and University Registrar, St. George's University

**Judi Biggs Garbuio PhD '99**, VP for Student Affairs, The Catholic University

**Maria Blandizzi EdD '13**, VP for Student Affairs, University of the Pacific

**Rebekah Blonshine EdD '14**, Acting VP of Student Services, Compton College

**Raymond Carlos EdD '17**, Dean of Student Engagement and Wellness, San Bernardino Valley College

**Bridget Collier EdD '09**, Associate Provost for Equal Opportunity Programs, University of Chicago

**Ryan Cornner EdD '10**, Superintendent/President, Glendale Community College

**Carlos Cortez PhD '06**, Chancellor, San Diego Community College District

**Jackie Cruz EdD '19**, VP of Advancement & Development, Hartnell Community College

**Salvatrice Cummo EdD '24**, VP, Economic and Workforce Development, Pasadena City College

**Maria Dela Cruz PhD '03**, Dean of Counseling, Santa Ana College

**Galvin Deleon Guerrero EdD '19**, President, Northern Marianas College

**Ashley DeMotive EdD '21**, Interim Dean, Visual & Performing Arts, Spokane Falls Community College

**Armineh Dereghishian ME '11, EdD '21**, Dean of Student Services, Los Angeles City College

**Derek DuBose ME '20**, Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment & Director of Admission, University of Denver

**Miguel Dueñas EdD '21**, VP of Student Services, East LA College

**Arwen Duffy, EdD '22**, President, UMass Amherst Foundation

**Traci Fahimi BA from Dornsife '87, EdD '21**, Dean, Social & Behavioral Sciences and Business Sciences, Irvine Valley College

**Kay Faulconer Boger EdD '93**, Chancellor's Liaison for Community Engagement, San Diego Community College District

**Maruth Figueroa EdD '13**, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Student Retention and Success, UC San Diego

**Dyrell Foster EdD '08**, President, Las Positas College

**Jeff Gold EdD '20**, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Student Success Strategic Initiatives, California State University

**Roberto Gonzalez EdD '09**, President, Oxnard College

**Barry Gribbons MS '92, PhD '95**, President, Los Angeles Valley College

**Bryan Gross EdD '22**, VP for Enrollment Management, Hartwick College

**Rakin Hall ME '12**, VP for Enrollment Management, Arcadia University

**Frank Harris III EdD '06**, Interim Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion & Professor, California State University at San Diego

**Jame'l Hodges EdD '11**, VP for Student Success & Engagement, Edward Waters College

**Sarah Holdren ME '07, EdD '13**, Interim Assistant Vice Provost, Academic Advising, USC

**Amber Hroch ME '11**, Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, Planning, and Grants, Cerritos College

**Erica Johnson ME '20**, VP of Enrollment Management, Westminster College

**Joel Keebler EdD candidate**, Dean of Science, American River College

**Kafele Khalfani EdD '19**, VP for Student Experience, California Institute of the Arts

**Samuel Kim ME '05, EdD '09**, Dean of Enrollment Management, Otis College of Art and Design

**Tina King MAT '21**, President, San Diego College of Continuing Education

**Anthony Lee EdD '13**, President and CEO, Westcliff University

**Luke Li EdD '20**, Dean of China Enrollment Management, Duke Kunshan University

**Georgia Lorenz PhD '02**, President, Seminole State College of Florida

**Erica Lovano McCann ME '07, EdD '17**, Assistant Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, USC

**Peter Maharaj EdD '20**, Associate Vice Chancellor, Information Technology Services, San Diego Community College District

**Lindsay Malcom-Piqueux PhD '08**, Assistant VP of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Assessment, Caltech

**Shane Martin PhD '95**, Provost, Seattle University

**Brandon Martin BS '96, ME '02 EdD '05**, Vice Chancellor/Director of Athletics, University of Missouri

**Siria Martinez ME '04**, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Student Equity and Success, California Community Colleges

**Pete Menjares PhD '98**, Interim President, Seattle Pacific University

**K.C. Mmeje EdD '12**, VP for Student Affairs, Southern Methodist University

**Paz Olivérez PhD '06**, VP of Student Affairs, Cal State San Bernardino

**Esthela O'Neill EdD candidate**, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Services & Student Success, Ivy Tech Community College

**Tzoler Oukayan EdD '20**, Dean, Student Affairs, Glendale Community College

**Liz Peisner EdD '11**, Associate VP of Student Affairs: Health and Wellness, California Institute of the Arts

**Soncia Reagins-Lilly EdD '99**, VP for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, The University of Texas at Austin

**Candace Rypisi EdD '15**, Assistant Vice Provost and Director of Student-Faculty Programs, Caltech

**Emily Sandoval ME '04, EdD '18**, Associate Vice Provost for Student Development & Engagement, USC

**Cecilia Santiago-Gonzalez EdD '12**, Assistant VP, Strategic Initiatives for Student Success, Cal Poly Pomona

**Gregory Schulz, EdD '07**, Superintendent/President, Citrus College

**Jacqui Spicer EdD '21**, President, Baker College

**Denzil Suite PhD '02**, VP for Student Life, University of Washington

**Edward Sullivan MS '92, PhD '98**, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Institutional Research and Analyses, California State University

**Shamsiah Tajuddin EdD '14**, Dean, Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah Institute of Education

**Rameen Taleh EdD '07**, Associate Vice Chancellor, Dean of Students, UC Irvine

**Tony Tambascia PhD '05**, Assistant Vice Provost for Student Affairs, Student Engagement Operations, USC

**Scott Thayer EdD '07**, President, Cypress College

**Roger Thompson EdD '98**, President, Saint Mary's College of California

**Raquel Torres-Retana EdD '07**, Dean, Rosemead & Northwest Campuses and Educational Partnerships, Pasadena City College

**Linda Vázquez EdD candidate**, Assistant Vice Chancellor for State and Federal Relations, California Community Colleges

**Kimberly White-Smith EdD '04**, Dean School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego

**Nicole Whitner EdD '18**, Assistant VP and Dean of Students, University of San Diego



## Lifting Others as She Climbs

**Guided by a deep commitment to community and family, PASA graduate Ella Rae Bautista Columbres ME '24 is helping students realize their full potential.**

By: Kianoosh Hashemzadeh

➤ After graduating from the PASA program and obtaining a job with USC as a career services adviser, Ella Rae Bautista Columbres ME '24 helped her parents relocate to L.A.

PHOTO BY REBECCA ARANDA

school to teach students in the community where she grew up.

Columbres completed her early years of schooling at a private school in the Philippines. Some of her friends in public school “didn’t have the resources to have a notebook” and were juggling the responsibilities of taking care of siblings in multigenerational households, Columbres says. This was one of her first exposures to the deep, systemic inequities in education.

When her family relocated to Hawai’i in 2012, Columbres enrolled in public school for the first time. The differences were stark. For one, rather than teachers rotating so students could stay together in a cohort, students moved to different classrooms. It was also her first exposure to diversity, and she was “scared to socialize.” Academics, however, came easy. “Lessons that were taught in the sixth grade [in Hawai’i] were taught in fourth grade in the Philippines,” Columbres says. But when she became a USC Bovard Scholar her senior year, she was exposed to many resources not available in her community. She was shocked to discover that public schools in the U.S. could have such drastic differences in funding, resources and outcomes for students. She was determined to do something about it.

While finishing her studies at UH Mānoa, Columbres fulfilled her student-teaching requirement at her former high school, teaching 10th and 12th grade. “A lot of [the students] wanted to pursue engineering, but come senior year, they didn’t meet certain requirements,” Columbres says. As a result, many had no choice but to go straight into the workforce. It was these kinds of experiences that led Columbres to USC Rossier’s PASA program.

Columbres graduated in spring 2024, but USC remains a significant part of her story. In October 2023, she secured a full-time position as a career adviser at the USC Career Center, where she had previously interned. While she intends to work in career services for several years, she eventually hopes to earn her PhD.

Just as she has focused on giving back to her community, she feels the same commitment to lifting up her family. This past September, she helped her parents move from Hawai’i to Los Angeles. It’s her turn, she believes, to take care of them. Her mother retired as a preschool teacher’s aide, and her father left his job at 7-Eleven. “They will retire, and I will be the main provider,” she says.

The responsibilities she’s taken on weigh heavily at times, but USC has given Columbres a sense of belonging and community. The university has helped her find the courage to make this permanent move, with her family, to L.A. Columbres points to the support she’s received from Assistant Professor Cory Buckner. “He believes in us wholeheartedly,” she says. “If Dr. B can believe in us 100%, why shouldn’t I believe in myself this way?”

She’s grown used to this positive mindset and knows many people are rooting for her success. And when times get tough, she says, “I can hear Dr. B in my head: ‘You can do it. You know you can. You just have to show up.’” —R



**MARCEDES BUTLER EdD '24** delivered a TEDxUNLV talk, “Degree Completion: How Finishing College Changes Lives,” earlier this year. Her insightful talk explores the transformative impact of completing a college degree and offers valuable strategies for academic success and beyond. Her dedication to educational equity is evident in her roles as a research associate and part-time faculty member at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. —**R**

**RYAN HUBBARD EdD '12** completed his first year as associate professor of kinesiology at Concordia University, St. Paul.

**MATTHEW JELICK MAT '12** works in partnership with the U.S. Embassy in Beijing as well as the U.S. Consulates in Shenyang, Guangzhou and Wuhan, delivering teacher development workshops.

**MONTEIGNE LONG ME '12** was appointed director of veteran and military services for the Texas A&M University System.

**HEATHER REICHMUTH MAT '12** published an article in the *International Journal of Bilingualism*, titled “Family Language Policy in Tension: Conflicting Language Ideologies and Translanguaging Practices in Multilingual Families.”

**JACOB VOOGD MS '12** and Delaney Voogd welcomed their second son, Archie Taj Voogd.

**LETITIA T. BRADLEY EdD '13** was hired as the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for the Goleta Union Elementary School District.

**REBECCA CEPEDA ME '13** graduated with her PhD in higher education and student affairs from Ohio State University in May 2023 and is

a tenure-track faculty member at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi.

**MICHAEL TANIZAKI KURLAND EdD '13** became the student success and advising strategist for California State University, Los Angeles.

**OSCAR MACIAS EdD '14** is the director of secondary education and diversity, equity and inclusion at Burbank Unified School District.

**AARON V. MARTINI EdD '14** is principal of Forest Park Elementary in Portland, Ore.

**ANN ROBINSON MAT '14** was recognized as the 2023–2024 Teacher of the Year at Chaparral Hills Elementary School in Moreno Valley, Calif.

**SHEILA L. SCHNEIDER MAT '14** is a special education English teacher for inclusion and resource classes at Leilehua High School in Wahiawa, Hawai'i.

**GEOFF ZAMARRIPA EdD '14** is the new assistant superintendent of educational services for Monrovia Unified School District.

**RUSSELL G. BRODIE EdD '15** is associate vice president of academic affairs at Red Rocks Community College in Colorado.

**STEVEN LORICK EdD '15** has joined the Golf Fitness Association of America as president.

**MICHAEL LOZANO EdD '15** was appointed assistant principal of Los Gatos High School.

**ERIC CANNY EdD '16** was appointed to the USC Rossier faculty, where he teaches in the Organizational Change and Leadership doctoral program.

**AIRIES DAVIS EdD '16** is director of workforce development at Dominican University, a Hispanic-serving institution in Chicago.

**COURTNEY (SHALVIS) DELGADO MAT '16** launched a career technical pathway in child development at Truckee High School in Truckee, Calif.

**DONOVAN GOLICH MAT '16** was promoted to director of accountability within the student affairs division at the University of Virginia.

**LENA ALOUMARI MAT '17** was selected as a member of a 32-person cohort of the Teacher Innovator Institute, sponsored by the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum.

**ERIKA D. GARCIA EdD '17** joined the University of San Diego as an assistant professor in early childhood biliteracy education.

**CARLOS NAVARRO ME '17** was appointed the new director of student engagement and leadership at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

**LT. COL. KRISTINE POBLETE EdD '17** was appointed professor of aerospace studies and took command of Air Force ROTC Detachment 485 at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.

**EVA HINOJOZA VALENCIA EdD '17** and husband Manny welcomed their second son, Julian. Julian joins older brother Dylan, 3.

**MARY ABOUDI-BROOKS MAT '18** and husband Royce welcomed a baby boy, Clayton.

**EDWARD RICE EdD '18** is associate dean of humanities at El Camino College in Torrance, Calif.

**ANDRE J. STRIDIRON III EdD '18** is the U.S. Indo-Pacific Multi-Domain Training and Experimentation Capability program manager at the U.S. Department of Defense.

**JOSIE SUMMERS EdD '18** and her husband welcomed a healthy baby girl in June 2023.

**DIANA ALBANEZ EdD '19** accepted a promotion at the Los Angeles Unified School District as a regional elementary math professional development coordinator.

**DIANE ELISA GOLDING EdD '19** was promoted to associate professor of instruction in the College of Education at the University of Texas at El Paso.

**BETHANY HERNANDEZ PARKS EdD '19** was appointed to the Expert Review Board for *Parents* magazine and sits on the board for the Child Development Consortium of Los Angeles.

**LAUREN LEAHY EdD '19** was promoted to executive director of student services for the Solana Beach School District in San Diego County.

**ARTENA MOON EdD '19** serves as an emergency communication coordinator for the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, supporting Arizona, California and Nevada.

**PATRICK PATTERSON EdD '19** was appointed assistant director of Cedars-Sinai Cancer Center for Training and Education.

**2020s**

**VALERIA BARRAGAN ME '20** was promoted to assistant director of academic services at Texas A&M Athletics, where she had been a learning specialist.

**LEONARD BECKERMAN MAT '20** became the lead teacher of the Sports Medicine Academy at Venice High School.

**AILEEN DINKJIAN EdD '20** was featured on PBS’ “Roadtrip Nation.”

**LISA GAETJE EdD '20** was hired as president of instruction for Fresno City College.

**JOSEPH KOTARSKI EdD '20** was appointed associate director of the Commission on International Education at the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

**EVANGELINE KWON MAT '20** was selected as one of the Association of California School Administrators Teachers of the Year for 2023–2024.

**CLAUDIA MONTOYA-ANDREWS ME '20** accepted a position with the California State University Chancellor’s Office in Long Beach as senior manager of learning and development.



**MICHELLE HOOKS MAT '18** is an education project manager and payload developer supporting NASA’s Office of STEM Engagement. She is the principal investigator for a payload of educational supplies launching to the International Space Station aboard Northrop Grumman’s Cygnus Spacecraft. The educational payload will be used by astronauts on the orbiting laboratory to film a STEM demonstration, or STEM demo, connecting K–12 students to the research occurring on the station. Students around the country will get to join online and perform the experiment in their classrooms with astronauts on board the space station. —**R**

**RICH MOORE EdD '20** was named principal at Gahr High School in the ABC Unified School District.

**JOSEPHINE OCHOA MAT '20** accepted a promotion to director of Los Angeles programs, leading the L.A. office of Bridge to Enter Advanced Mathematics.

**KRISTY SHERROD EdD '20** was selected as one of three assistant principals at South Side High School in Jackson, Tenn.

**JANENE BATTEN EdD '21** published an article, “Achieving the educational mission: Are Connecticut school nurses valued?,” based on her dissertation, in *Psychology in the Schools*.

**LAURA CARDINAL EdD '21** became director of mental health services for Bellingham Public Schools in Washington state in fall 2023.

**LINDA DE LA TORRE EdD '21** became the first female superintendent of the San Marino Unified School District.

**JONATHAN ELDRIDGE EdD '21** was appointed College of Marin’s superintendent/president.

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**DAWN WHITAKER EdD '22** developed and launched WellEquined, a mental health and wellness program for former athletes. The program addresses the specific challenges faced by athletes transitioning out of their sports careers through a combination of alternative therapies, mindfulness and wellness practices.

Although equine-assisted therapy is not new and has been successfully used to help veterans and other groups with depression, PTSD and anxiety, Dawn's vision to apply its use to former athletes is unique. This approach fills a crucial gap, providing essential support for a population that often struggles with significant mental health issues after their

sports careers end, coupled with a documented reluctance to seek support due to the stigma surrounding mental health, particularly among athletes.

In June, Dawn hosted the inaugural WellEquined retreat, where participants engaged in equine-assisted therapy, mindfulness practices and reflective activities. The experience fostered deep connections among the former athletes in attendance, allowing them to confront and work through their emotional challenges in a supportive environment among peers.

Dawn and her team plan to offer additional retreats, workshops and special events to continue supporting former athletes. Dawn's commitment to this cause is grounded in her dissertation research at USC Rossier, which utilized social cognitive theory as the framework to understand the barriers to transition preparedness and the factors impacting athletes' quality of transition. —**R**

**THOMAS EMICK MAT '21** and his wife welcomed son Elliott in 2022. Elliott fought bravely through two open-heart surgeries before he turned 2. Since recovering, Elliott has grown almost 3 feet tall and loves to read.

**EYASU (JOSH) GEZAHEGN EdD '21** is the new president and CEO of the Volunteer Center.

**NATALIE HART EdD '21** is starting a new role at the Washington State Capitol as the inaugural equity strategic adviser for the Washington State Senate Democratic Caucus.

**SCOTT PETERS EdD '21** was named academic director of English language and international custom programs at the University of California, Riverside.

**LESLYE SALINAS EdD '21** was awarded seed money to start a nonprofit, La Casa de Jenny, a center for newcomer families in the Bay Area.

**SHANÉA THOMAS EdD '21** joined the board of directors for the National AIDS Memorial organization and is the new executive director of accreditation at the Council on Social Work Education.

**ROSANNA VILLALOBOS ME '21** was a recipient of the 2023 Outstanding Educator Award for the

49th Assembly District for her work in the special education department at San Marino High School.

**BIBOL ALIPBAY EdD '22** proudly welcomed his daughter in summer 2023.

**CRISTINA LUNA EdD '22** was named president of the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations.

**HEATHER R. MANLEY EdD '22** was promoted to chief operating officer at Tang+Company in April.

**REAGAN PENWELL MAT '22** accepted a new position with the San Francisco Unified School District, teaching sixth grade ELA.

**VALENCIA BELLE EdD '23** was chosen as one of nine startup founders to pitch at VillageX Demo Day 2024.

**KENDRICK MICHAEL JONES ME '23** is a school counselor for Barack Obama Charter Elementary School in South Los Angeles.

**CYDNEY JUNIUS EdD '23** was named assistant head of Lower School at The Walker School in Marietta, Ga.

**ERICA C. LOPEZ EdD '23** accepted a position with Los Angeles Unified School District-Positive Behavior Counselors/Dean.

**ERIC ARMANDO MEJIA EdD '23** married Pilar Almeida on June 24, 2023. He is vice president of admission and enrollment at Verbum Dei Jesuit High School.

**ARISTOTLE MOSIER EdD '23** began teaching as a faculty associate this fall at Arizona State University.

**FRANCESCA MUNDA EdD '23** was appointed dean of the newly established School of Education and Humanities at Anahuac University in Mexico City.

**MATT SEKIJIMA EdD '23** teaches middle school social science in Los Angeles Unified School District and has joined the LAUSD History-Social Science Leadership Team. He accepted a lecturer position at the University of California, Irvine, in the master of arts in teaching program.

**MEGHA SHAH EdD '23** moved to California from Texas when she was welcomed as director of the advanced science and engineering program at Fairmont Preparatory in Anaheim last year.

**KELLI SHAXTED MAT '23** gave birth to her second baby, another boy, and taught her first year in Downey Unified School District as a fifth grade teacher

**AUSTIN SMITH MAT '23**, an educator and football coach, married Gabriela Rodriguez, a 2021 alumna of USC Gould School of Law, in May.

**ZACH SNOW MAT '24** accepted a position teaching English at St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Dover, N.H.

**JULIANA TREADWAY ME '23** was promoted to director of business and financial operations at Santa Margarita Catholic High School in Orange County, Calif.

**CORNELL VERDEJA-WOODSON EdD '23** was named head of DEI at Pixar Animation Studios.

**KELLY AMADOR MAT '24** is a 10th grade English teacher at Contreras School of Social Justice High School in Los Angeles.

**ASHLY CHAVEZ ME '24** began working at California State University, Fullerton, as an academic adviser.

**DAVID TODD HARMON EdD '24** was named the Young Alumnus of the Year at his undergraduate alma mater, Abilene Christian University.

**MORGAN HAWKINS EdD '24** accepted a position with the Keck School of Medicine at USC as co-director of the Health Justice and Systems of Care Curriculum.

**ANGEL KANEB MAT '24** will start his teaching journey as an education specialist teacher at Prescott School of Enriched Sciences in L.A.

**MARIAH LORA MAT '24** began her first year teaching English 11 and AP language and composition at Ednovate: USC Hybrid High College Prep in fall 2023.

**KIMBERLY MORALES ME '24** accepted a position as an adviser at her undergraduate alma mater, UCLA.

**JESSICA MURDOCK MAT '24** landed a first grade teaching position at 54th Street Elementary School in Los Angeles.

**ISAAC KEOUA VIGILLA EdD '24** accepted a position at his alma mater, Kamehameha Schools Hawai'i, as dean of studies.

## IN MEMORIAM

**RUBEN L. INGRAM EdD '72** died on June 25, 2024 at the age of 89. Ruben was an amazing friend and mentor, and during his 64 years in public education, he did so much for so many students and fellow educators. Ruben's life's work was in the field of public education. He received his bachelor's degree from LBSU, followed by master's and doctoral degrees from USC. He began his professional career teaching in Long Beach USD in 1955. In 1980, he moved to Fountain Valley School District, serving as assistant superintendent and superintendent until he retired in 1994. He is survived by his wife, daughter and son, five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

**TATIANA MELGUIZO, USC ROSSIER PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION**, died on Jan 10, 2024 at the age of 55. Born in Bogotá, Columbia in 1968, Melguizo's parents instilled in her the importance of treating every person with kindness and respect. Melguizo's commitments to protecting human rights and justice were reflected in her scholarship and the way she treated and supported her students. Melguizo received her BS and MA in Economics from Los Andes University in Bogotá in 1992 and 1993. After graduating from The London School of Economics in 1995 with an MSc in Economics, she earned her PhD in Economics of Education from Stanford University in 2003. Melguizo then joined the USC Rossier faculty in 2003. Melguizo was the mother of three

children—Mateo, Amalia and Juliette—and partner to Pierre-Oliver Weill. Tatiana is also survived by her brother and sister.

**ROGER ROSSIER MA '63, EdD '72**, namesake of the USC Rossier School of Education and lifelong educator known for his significant contributions to educational research and policy, died on Aug. 11, 2024, at the age of 92. (p. 4)

**JOHN BROOKS SLAUGHTER, USC PROFESSOR EMERITUS**, died on Dec. 6, 2023, at the age of 89. A distinguished leader in the fields of engineering, education, and leadership, he served as a University Professor Emeritus of Education and Electrical and Computer Engineering with a joint appointment at USC Rossier and the USC Viterbi School of Engineering. Born in 1934 in segregated Topeka, Kansas, Slaughter's journey to become an engineer was marked by determination and resilience. As the first Black director of the National Science Foundation, the first Black president of Occidental College and the first Black chancellor of the University of Maryland, John's life was a testament to the resilience and relentless commitment required to break down barriers. In September 2023, the USC Viterbi School of Engineering's Center for Engineering Diversity was renamed the John Brooks Slaughter Center for Engineering Diversity. John is survived by his wife, son and daughter.

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## Three Families, One Mission

With a passion for USC and a shared commitment to education, these families are ensuring future teachers feel the Trojan spirit.

By Katrina Nash

**DUDLEY POON AND PATTI POON '65**, James Yee MS '66, PhD '74 and Candy Yee '68, MS '69, and Genaro Carapia MS '84 and Lai Tan Carapia are bonded by their Trojan pride, from football to giving back, with education being the cornerstone. All three families have supported student scholarships annually for over 40 years, each giving their first gift in 1983. To cement their legacies and continue supporting USC Rossier students for generations to come, each family has also established an endowed scholarship.

Sisters Candy and Patti always knew they wanted to attend USC. Candy began her career as an elementary school and special education teacher in Los Angeles Unified School District and ABC Unified School District in Cerritos, Calif. She went on to become a home teacher

for 27 years at the Berenece Carlson Home Hospital School, where she taught everything from preschool to roth grade. Candy recalls her time at Carlson fondly: "The most rewarding moments from my career were when my students recovered from surgeries or cancer and were well enough to attend school again." James saw Candy and Patti, a fellow teacher, continuously instilling values into their students, which inspired his family to set up its scholarship. "Teachers are necessary for shaping our kids' values and instilling character among students, showing what's right and wrong. That's why it's so important for us to support teachers today," James says.

Patti spent over 40 years teaching prekindergarten to third grade at schools throughout LAUSD. Specializing in math and science, she

also taught workshops for the state kindergarten, math and science associations. Patti also taught elementary science and math classes at California State University, Northridge, for seven years. Patti feels grateful for the education and preparation she received at USC Rossier. "On my first day of teaching," she says, "I was the most prepared teacher in the school, all thanks to USC Rossier."

Patti met Genaro and Lai Tan at a Trojan Club event X years ago, and all three families have been inseparable ever since. Genaro spent time as a teacher in urban schools across various economic levels before becoming a principal. One of Genaro's fondest memories is from his time as principal of Sheridan Street Elementary School in Los Angeles. "President [C. L. Max] Nikias visited our school," he says. "It brought hope to the students that college was in their future."

The stark lack of equity Genaro witnessed between communities has impacted why he gives back today. "USC Rossier's commitment to addressing issues facing struggling economic and isolated urban schools means a lot to me," he says. Lai Tan emphasizes the importance of supporting scholarships so that teachers realize "there are caring people who do care about your well-being and welfare."

Candy, Patti and Genaro share the experience of feeling personally supported while completing their degrees at USC Rossier. They were never treated as numbers. Faculty knew their names and provided them with the guidance and support to complete the program. Even after they graduated, their professors stayed in touch and checked up on the new teachers to provide support. It's this sense of community that drives the three families to give back, ensuring that future teachers have the same experience they did. —R

To learn more about giving to USC Rossier, please visit [rossier.usc.edu/giving](https://rossier.usc.edu/giving) or contact Rachel Beal, associate dean for advancement, at [bealr@rossier.usc.edu](mailto:bealr@rossier.usc.edu).

"The USC Rossier Teacher Preparation Residency has helped make my dream career in education and my aspiration to make a positive generational change possible."

— Mariah Lora MAT '24, 2024 Master's Commencement Speaker



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Dean Pedro A. Noguera poses for a photo with graduates of the Master of Education for Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs program Kristen Salazar ME '24 (left) and Vita Wilson ME '24 (right), at Commencement 2024.

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