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Dear Friends,

We are at a crossroads in American education. The pandemic exposed the deep inequities embedded in our system. For a moment during the crisis, there were calls for change and reform, but as schools reopened and life returned to normal, that sense of urgency faded.

But the crisis has not passed for our students and society. Given the significant gaps in learning opportunities that exist throughout our nation, it’s hardly surprising that test scores show that children in every state have fallen behind. Academic challenges are now compounded by increased concerns about mental health, severe economic hardships and a growing shortage of teachers.

In this special double issue, we’ll examine what’s happening in our schools here in L.A. and across the country and introduce you to some of our faculty, students and alumni who are working to address these troubling trends.

At USC Rossier, we have a proud legacy of conducting research, preparing educators and creating learning opportunities. But to respond effectively to the current challenges facing education, we must commit ourselves to working in new and different ways. In November, we announced the USC Rossier Educational Equity Initiative. This ambitious agenda consists of five projects we believe will enable USC Rossier to respond effectively to many of the challenges facing schools and colleges, locally and throughout the nation:

- **USC Rossier will partner with Los Angeles Unified School District schools in south and east L.A. to bring the best of USC to historically under-resourced neighborhoods. These schools will promote innovative and comprehensive teacher preparation, training in social-emotional learning for both teachers and students, a laboratory space for education researchers, and a focus on the individuality of students.**

- **We will expand our highly successful Teacher Residency Program.** The program provides full scholarships and financial support to students who have committed to working in L.A. public schools after graduation. Our goal is to expand this program to other schools and districts, and to increase the number of teachers trained, particularly in math and science.

- **This spring, we are launching the USC Rossier STEAM Teaching and Research Center.** This will serve as a research and practice hub focused on reimagining, improving and sustaining high-quality STEAM teaching and learning in K–12 classrooms in a way that authentically connects to students, including through the arts. Access to a robust and rigorous education in these areas is critical to expanding opportunities for children and addressing the challenges facing our nation and the world in the 21st century.

- **Next year, we will launch the Los Angeles Education Policy Solutions Hub.** Under USC Rossier’s leadership, the L.A. Hub will bring together researchers, local education leaders, policymakers and elected officials to examine issues and inform decision-making from early childhood through higher education. The L.A. Hub will combine the rigor of university-based research with rapid in-person and web-based briefings, providing policymakers with the evidence they need in a format they can use, when they need it.

- **This fall, the USC Democracy Project began piloting a curriculum that will give teachers the support they urgently need to address controversial topics in the classroom. The goal is to give teachers tools to help students learn about complex issues—the pilot curriculum covers immigration—while simultaneously teaching them how to do independent research and engage in civil discourse.**

In the coming months, we will tell you more about these projects. We hope you will join us in advancing equity for all learners.

Fight On!

Pedro A. Noguera, PhD
Distinguished Professor of Education
Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean
USC Rossier School of Education
EDITOR’S NOTE

Creating solutions to elevate equity across education

USC Rossier revised its mission in 2017 to emphasize equity, not only to better capture the work that our faculty, staff, students and alumni were already doing, but to make a commitment that future scholarship would directly focus on improving outcomes for all students. At USC Rossier, equity is more than a buzzword: It is the underlying framework that informs everything we do.

As a school of education, our faculty is dedicated to conducting research that advances educational equity and access, and to bringing research-based ideas into classrooms, schools and colleges. We are developing, testing and scaling solutions that meaningfully increase equity at every level of education, from transitional kindergarten to graduate school. In this special double issue of USC Rossier Magazine, we will look at how USC Rossier research projects are being put into practice to create equitable learning environments where all students can thrive.

You’ll read about the nationwide problem of learning loss by students during the pandemic and how we can get back on track; the ways in which USC Rossier faculty are helping universities educate and train diverse students who want to pursue graduate studies; how schools can embrace the field of social-emotional learning (SEL); and about our new Professor Chris Emdin, an impassioned advocate of educational equity who incorporates hip-hop music and culture to transform science teaching.

Kianoosh Hashemzadeh and Landon Hall, Editors
Alumna Kim Kircher MAT ’20 Named LAUSD Rookie of the Year

She credits lessons learned at USC Rossier in preparing her for the honor.

By Adriana Maestas

KIM KIRCHER MAT ’20 CREDITS USC ROSSIER for helping her build a foundation for success in the classroom. That preparation led to her being named one of Los Angeles Unified School District’s Rookie of the Year recipients for the 2021-22 school year.

Kircher, who teaches sixth graders at Sun Valley Magnet School in the San Fernando Valley, says USC Rossier’s Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) teacher residency program made her a stronger teacher. The program was established by Professor Emerita Margo Pensavalle and former Dean Karen Symms Gallagher.

Kircher says Associate Professor Debra Danner also was an immense influence in terms of the instruction she received about assessing the needs of students and problem-solving to address those needs. “Dr. Danner highlighted the type of teacher I wanted to be for my students by making them feel the energy and care that she radiates during her classes, and how welcoming she is to other perspectives and conversations,” Kircher said. “I respected her for being the kind of instructor who cares, while encouraging us to examine ourselves and who we are as educators.”

In the MAT program, Kircher learned about teaching for equity, equal access to resources, lesson-plan development, strategies to manage a classroom, fundamentals and who we are as educators.

At Sun Valley, Kircher’s colleagues visited her to observe her classroom management. She was among 17 first-year teachers honored by LAUSD for performance, based on factors that included effectiveness in preparing and delivering instruction, providing a positive classroom climate with strong routines and procedures, adopting a dynamic and engaging teaching style, and level of professionalism.

Kircher says she wants to stay in the classroom while longer but is open to returning to school to complete a doctorate and to help train new teachers. “I want to continue to grow as an educator and not aim to be perfect, but rather further develop and improve upon my practice,” she said. “I believe that I would like to go into the administrative route in the future. I would also be interested in training teachers and possibly becoming a professor so I can teach what has made me successful in the classroom and incorporate that knowledge into the university setting. USC helped me build a foundation for my pedagogy, and I would love to help future educators in the same way.”

How Did Schools Respond to the Pandemic?

PACE study led by Julie Marsh examines how districts dealt with a unfolding health crisis and growing structural racism.

By Nadra Kareem Nittle

A NEW REPORT BY JULIE MARSH, PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION AT USC Rossier and co-director of the USC Center on Education Policy, Equity and Governance, examines how seven California school districts served their communities during a turbulent 14-month period in 2020 and 2021. Massive demonstrations following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May 2020 meant that districts were expected not only to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19 but to address systemic racism as well.

Crisis Response in California School Districts: Leadership, Partnership and Community, published by the Stanford Graduate School of Education’s California Education (PACE), found that partnerships with community, labor and board leaders helped schools serve the complex needs of students and families during this tumultuous time. The researchers began tracking the unnamed districts, which varied in size, location and grade range, via the internet and social media starting in March 2020.

The school systems quickly jumped in-person instruction to protect students and staff. They purchased personal protective equipment and implemented safety measures. Air-filtration systems were later updated. District leaders also ensured that students—and often their family members—had access to school meals. Giving students access to technology, including laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots, was another major priority for the districts early on. As the COVID crisis continued, districts also made efforts to meet the mental health needs of students, personnel and families, providing access to teletherapy and wellness centers.

“People started realizing the real trauma that some families had been facing, and also the kind of exhaustion that the adults in schools were facing, so that became big,” Marsh said.

Just two months after the first pandemic lockdown began, Floyd was killed. The urban and suburban school districts the researchers studied recognized the hurt and outrage that followed. They released statements in support of their African American students and other youth of color, and they organized trainings and committees focused on systemic racism. In rural districts, though, some district officials resisted addressing Floyd’s death.

“We heard folks telling us that there really wasn’t an issue for them to be addressing, that because, in one case, most of the community was White, they didn’t necessarily think they needed to address it,” Marsh said. “There was a sense in the rural districts that individuals were very uncomfortable talking about issues of racism.”

The districts may not have agreed on the best approach to discuss racial injustice, but they all emphasized the importance of relationships in times of crisis. Superintendents got personal with the communities they serve, at times passing over computer devices and meals directly to students and their families.

“For me, it’s not surprising,” Rudolph Crew, a USC Rossier professor of clinical education and former chancellor of New York City Public Schools, said of the superintendents’ behavior. “I’ve always known that was the capability of folks who do this work. I think people just don’t realize the value proposition that they bring to building community and sustaining a quality life through schooling. The pandemic … made people see that, wow, teachers, principals and superintendents do more than most people give them credit for.”

At the same time, COVID-19 challenged relationships between districts and their teacher unions. School personnel experienced burnout amid the pandemic and a polarizing political climate. As the pandemic wore on, districts grew frustrated with what they considered to be inconsistent state guidance: Officials complained that the state left health-related decisions around closing and reopening schools to local leaders instead of taking responsibility and making those calls.

Nearly three years after the first COVID-19 lockdowns began, the challenges school districts face continue. The study authors suggest that a number of policies could help schools during what remains a stressful time. These policies include stabilizing state funding for schools and addressing teacher and staff shortages. The state should also take action to provide robust social welfare to communities, including public and mental health services and food security, broadband access, employment and affordable housing programs, the study found.

The researchers recommend that the state help districts overcome the “stereotypical image of the Teacher of the Year” and “humanizing the fight for Racial Truth-Telling in Schools.”

Find details at Asha.ws/podcasts2022.
Lessons of pandemic are focus of first Melbo Lecture

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges for the nation’s school superintendents, it also created opportunities for change. That was one of the takeaways from the first USC Rossier Melbo Lecture in August.

“It takes courage to embrace change and confidence in one’s ability to navigate forward,” said Professor of Education Maria G. Ott, the Irving R. and Virginia A. Melbo Chair in Education Administration. “If we are honest, we have to admit that there was a need to do things differently before this pandemic, and radical change was made possible by its disruptions.”

Featured speakers for the event, titled “Leading in Times of Radical Change: An Invitation to Lead for a New Future,” were Daniel A. Dome-nech, executive director, American Association of School Administrators (AASA); Ben Drati, superintendent, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District; Paul Gotthold EdD ’72, superintendent, San Diego County Office of Education; and Ruth Perez, deputy superintendent, Riverside County Office of Education. Pedro A. Noguera, the Emery Stoops and Joyce King Riverside County Office of Education. Pedro A. Noguera, the Emery Stoops and Joyce King executive director, American Association of School Administrators (AASA); Ben Drati, superintendent, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District; Paul Gotthold EdD ’72, superintendent, San Diego County Office of Education; and Ruth Perez, deputy superintendent, Riverside County Office of Education. Pedro A. Noguera, the Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean of the USC Rossier School of Edu-cation, and Edgar Zentella EdD ’17, executive director of the Association of California School Administrators, moderated the lecture, which is to become an annual event.

What was learned? How did leadership evolve? What keeps superintendents motivated to persist in their jobs? The guest shared perspectives and offered practical advice:

• Build a coalition and empower teams to take advantage of the opportunity to become a leader
• Invite the community into the conversation
• Stay motivated and remember the impact on students

The lecture series is named for Irving R. Melbo, who was dean of USC Rossier from 1953 to 1973.

Learning From, and Problem Solving With, the Best

USC Rossier alum Wendy Birhanzel named 2023 Colorado Superintendent of the Year.

“I LIKE A TYPICAL TEENAGER, YOU SOMETIMES DON’T WANT TO DO what your parents think you should do,” said Wendy Birhanzel EdD ’07, superintendent of Harrison School District 2 in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Since both of her parents were educators, being a teacher initially was not a career goal. “But I needed to be with people where I can make a bigger difference. ... I just wanted to impact kids and make a difference and impact a larger group of kids not just in the classroom.”

After 20 years in education, serving in capacities from teacher to principal to superintendent, Birhanzel was the 2023 Colorado Superintendent of the Year. “Now, I can impact 13,000 students that we have in our district,” she said.

Birhanzel received her bachelor’s in elementary education and reading from Valley City State University in North Dakota, and a master’s in education administration in diverse school settings from California State University-Dominguez Hills. She pursued her Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership in Urban School Settings at USC Rossier and graduated in 2007. After teaching in South Central Los Angeles, she joined Harrison District 2 as principal in 2009.

“All the professors in the doctorate program in education are the people writing the books,” Birhanzel said. “Not only did I get to learn from the best, but I got to talk to the best and problem solve with the best.”

She applies the skills she learned at USC Rossier regularly, and often relies on her Trojan Family for guidance. At the onset of the pandemic, she said, “I reached out to some of my colleagues who I graduated with from USC, who were in leadership roles across the country, and asked, ‘Hey, what are you guys doing?’” After rebounding from the pandemic, she used her USC resources to establish an Equity Council in her district to research what did and did not work.

Harrison District 2 is one of the most diverse districts in the state, with a 76% minority student population and 73% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. In addition, Birhanzel’s district outperformed others in Colorado, with an 81% graduation rate and a 1.2% dropout rate. She attributes her success to the beliefs that were instilled in her while pursuing her doctorate.

“It’s not just talking the talk, but ‘How do we get this done?’ and we’re really making it happen here,” she said. “A lot of that is due to my education and support from my USC Trojan family.”

By Ellen Evaristo

Master Class Series Launched

Dean Noguera, Professor Immordino-Yang lead sessions to explore education’s global impact and the science of learning.

THE INAUGURAL SEASON OF USC ROSSIER’S MASTER CLASS, co-hosted by USC Rossier Dean Pedro Noguera and Professor Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, explored education’s impact on global issues and the cognitive science of learning.

The fall 2022 Master Class sessions were created to be a catalyst for broader discussions among USC Rossier’s students, faculty and staff that are central to the school’s mission.

Over the five sessions, Noguera and Immordino-Yang examined questions from multiple perspectives, including sociological, historical, developmental and neuroscientific.

“First class is focused on what really is at the core of what we do—teaching and learning,” Noguera said. “What does it mean to teach at this time in the world?”

In that first session, titled “Teaching and Learning to Advance the Needs and Interests of Humanity,” Noguera discussed how education can be used as a resource for addressing the major challenges facing the world. Drawing on the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, author of the landmark 1970 book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, the class explored how teachers can use listening, dialogue and empathy to engage students in an educational process based on collective inquiry and learning.

Immordino-Yang led the second session, “Solving the Frankenstein Problem: Why All Learning is Social, Emotional, Cognitive and Cultural to the Brain,” she outlined new discoveries in how people learn and the possibilities that can be unlocked when teaching.

The third session, “Teaching to Empower and Disrupt,” was led by Noguera, who discussed how impactful teaching can advance our common humanity. Guest speaker Kori Street, interim director of the USC Shoah Foundation, explained how sharing stories can connect teachers and students.

Session four, “Building Meaning Builds Teams’ Brains,” led by Immordino-Yang, was a follow-up to her earlier session. The session focused on the patterns of learning that produce growth of the brain over time.

The fifth and final session, “How to Approach Teaching and Learning in Ways that Generate Insight, Impact and Inspire,” featured both Noguera and Immordino-Yang and was moderated by Professor Alan Arkatov. The session examined how educators are teaching, the science of learning and the possibilities of teaching to advance equity and justice. Videos and slide presentations for the sessions are available at https://bit.ly/USCRossierMasterClass.

By Ellen Evaristo
Global EdD Student Commits to Retelling the Story of the Alamo—the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

As executive director of the Alamo Trust, Kate Rogers is putting her research on contested histories into practice.

“Teachers are on the frontlines of the culture wars in America,” said Rogers, whose work as executive director of the Alamo Trust in San Antonio involves broadening the story of Texas’ beginnings, including reconciling conflicting views of the part slavery played in Texas’ war for independence from Mexico in the 1830s.

“Giving teachers the language and tools to open up a real dialogue with students, versus just getting them to memorize dates and facts, is so important,” Rogers said. “Historic sites and museums can help support teachers at a time when they desperately need it.”

The role of “institutions of informal learning” in professional development has been Rogers’ consuming interest since she entered USC Rossier’s Global Executive Doctor of Education program in 2021. Her dissertation examines the institutional reading that the source claiming “available evidence shows that man and dinosaur coexisted” is an organization dedicated to proving the accuracy of biblical teaching.

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Kate Rogers, executive director of the Alamo Trust and a dedicated educator in USC Rossier’s Global EdD program, stands in front of the iconic Alamo Mission in San Antonio.

Rossier doctoral candidate Kate Rogers was struck by one sight in particular: a small handprint in a brick wall at Thomas Jefferson’s Virginia plantation, Monticello.

The tour guide said the handprint was probably left by a child—one of the more than 400 enslaved people who helped build the grand house. The teachers in Rogers’ group pressed in close to take pictures, which they vowed to share with students when the topic of slavery came up in the curriculum.

“The student pulls out her phone, types in her question and finds a surprising ‘fact’: They did coexist. Gale M. Sinatra, the Stephen H. Crocker Chair and a professor of education and psychology at USC Rossier, explained that this theoretical example demonstrates the harm caused by search engine algorithms that push the most clicked-on examples (not necessarily the most scientifically accurate information) to the top of an online search.

However, with a 2020 Pew Research Center report showing that 22% of Americans profess little to no confidence in scientists, Sinatra is in the fight against science denial. In 2021, she co-authored a book on the subject, Science Denial: Why It Happens and What to Do About It. And now, a $60,000 grant from the National Science Foundation ($185,000 of it going to USC Rossier) will fund the development of new tools to show teachers how to instill sound scientific thinking in their students.

“We are using a system of ‘lateral reading’ developed by colleagues at Stanford to help students source and vet online information, much like a fact-checker,” Sinatra said. Her collaborators include University of Maryland researchers Doug Lombardi (Sinatra’s former doctoral student) and Sarah McGrew, who, along with Sam Wineburg at Stanford, developed the lateral reading technique, in which students open a new search window and look up who is providing the information in the top hits. Students are taught to ask, is it a credible source? Is it trying to sell something or make a political argument?

In the dinosaur example, the student would learn via lateral reading that the source claiming “available evidence shows that man and dinosaur coexisted” is an organization dedicated to proving the accuracy of biblical teaching.

“The likelihood of getting accurate scientific information by googling is not high,” Sinatra said. “What pops to the top is the most virally advertised and, often, least accurate content." Many students get this instruction catch on quickly, Sinatra said.

The researchers will work in tandem with science and social studies teachers. They will also test the teachers’ students on how they are assimilating the fundamental scientific, social and civic phenomena at play in the socioscientific topics they study. The ultimate goal is to sharpen the evaluation skills of middle and high school students to help them develop as citizens in a functional democratic society.

What’s next?

In future work assessing kids’ ability to evaluate online information, Sinatra and her colleagues may explore TikTok and other social media where Generation Z increasingly gets news—and, to a degree, misinformation.

“There is a lot of reliable information you can find on the internet, so we don’t want kids to be so skeptical that they don’t believe anything,” Sinatra said. “I’m not going to measure ice cores in Antarctica, but that doesn’t mean I can’t accept that human factors cause climate change.”

At some point, you have to trust the science, she said: “A better understanding of science helps our health and well-being and increases the probability of creating an environment that we can survive in.”

During a whirlwind summer of Research Trips, USC Rossier doctoral candidate Kate Rogers was struck by one sight in particular: a small handprint in a brick wall at Thomas Jefferson’s Virginia plantation, Monticello.

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Kate Rogers, executive director of the Alamo Trust and a dedicated educator in USC Rossier’s Global EdD program, stands in front of the iconic Alamo Mission in San Antonio.
Pullias Center Partners with LACCD and Researchers from Harvard’s CEPR to Study COVID-19 Recovery

The three-year study, funded by a $2.9 million grant, will examine how technology can remake the student experience.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AFFECTED

why students choose to enroll in the Los Angeles Community College District, how they attend classes, and what they go on to do. Now, the Pullias Center for Higher Education in partnering with Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) and researchers from the Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) at Harvard University to evaluate how the system is using technology to respond to the pandemic’s challenges and reimagine how students access learning.

The three-year study is funded by a $2.9 million grant from the Institute of Education Sciences, the statistics, research and evaluation arm of the U.S. Department of Education. The project is part of the Community College Recovery Network, a novel national program funded by the American Rescue Plan. The network will bring together researchers and community college systems to provide evidence-based recovery activities that address the declines in postsecondary enrollment and academic progress that occurred during the pandemic.

“With the COVID-19 hit, LACCD took decisive action—

the system offered students food support and other emergency aid, provided them with technology support and offered online alternatives to keep people safe,” said Tatiana Melguizo, a co-principal investigator and a professor at USC Rossier. “This project is a recognition by system leaders that recovery doesn’t just mean going back to 2019 but creating a better model that serves students today and tomorrow.”

With nine campuses, LACCD is the largest community college district in the Los Angeles area, serving a diverse range of students who enter the system with a wide array of goals. However, the system’s 2021 enrollment of nearly 92,000 students was down from more than 100,000 before the pandemic.

LACCD offered some online courses prior to the pandemic but had to shift classes fully online for more than a year. As part of its recovery efforts, the system is using technology to engage students in different ways, including creating “hy-flex” courses that allow students to choose whether they want to attend class in person or online on a session-by-session basis. The project will examine the effect of these formats on student learning.

The study will examine students’ enrollment decisions; the effectiveness of in-person, hybrid and online courses; and the potential costs and benefits—in both money and student experience—of scaling hybrid and online course formats.

Researchers will also explore how the increased number of online and hybrid courses has changed the workload for faculty and what supports those instructors need to move classes online.

“We are proud that the Pullias Center will be working with the teams from LACCD and Harvard’s CEPR to explore new ways to support student success and help community colleges increase their enrollment,” said Adrianna Kaarz, director of the Pullias Center.

The Center promotes equity in higher education and advances innovative, scalable solutions to improve college outcomes for underserved students and enhance the performance of postsecondary institutions. — R

About the 2021–22 USC Rossier/PACE Poll:

The 2021-22 academic year was profoundly challenging for California schools. Eight critical issues emerged as serious threats to student learning, the operation of schools, and even the very institution of public education: 1) gun violence; 2) politicization of and support for public education; 3) controversy over what is taught in schools; 4) student learning and well-being; 5) declining enrollment; 6) teacher shortages; 7) college affordability; and 8) long-term funding inadequacy and instability.

These issues also present a threat to equity because they disproportionately affect the most marginalized communities, exposing long-standing systemic inequities in education and creating new gaps in opportunity and access. It is against this backdrop that PACE and the University of Southern California (USC) Rossier School of Education fielded our annual poll of California voters in July 2022 on their opinions and priorities for public education.

Our top findings related to major threats facing public schools included the following:

• Gun violence in schools. For the fourth consecutive year, “reducing gun violence in schools” was the top-rated education issue for Californian voters.

• Politicization of and support for public education. More than 68% of voters reported that “public education is under attack in the United States.”

• Controversy over what is taught in schools. In California, 64% of respondents stated that schools should spend more time teaching grade-appropriate lessons about the causes and consequences of racism and inequality.

• Student learning and well-being. California voters reported strong concerns over the pandemic’s impact on students’ emotional and mental health, about students falling behind academically, and about the unique impact of the pandemic on students of different economic and racial/ethnic backgrounds.

• Declining enrollment. The main reason parents cited for switching schools is wanting a different educational experience for their children (58%).

• Teacher shortages. Voters in households earning less than $51,000 were the most likely to report this as a top priority (54%), versus voters in the top income bracket (29%).

• College affordability. Fifty-seven percent of parents were worried about having enough money to pay for their child’s college education.

• Long-term funding inadequacy and instability. “Improving school funding” was among the top concerns for voters overall, with 40% of voters (and 59% of parents) reporting it as a top concern, a 5-point increase from last year.

In the Media

“We’re expecting teachers, who are already burdened by the responsibility of addressing the academic needs of kids, to do something they’re not trained to do, which is to address the mental health needs of kids.” — PEDRO A. NIEVES, dean of the USC Rossier School of Education, in a CNN story about school shootings.

“Teenagers are not just capable of, but are driven to make deep meaning of complex issues and to really be visionary and connected to stuff that is deep, that’s about identity, that’s about reputation, that’s about who I could be. And we cut them off at the knees. It’s overly scheduling kids and it’s telling kids where to sit in class and what to do and when. All these very tight restrictions where everything that counts as achievement is defined by somebody else.” — MARY HELEN IMMORDINO-YANG, professor of education, psychology and neuroscience, in a Newsweek story about the rising levels of teen loneliness and alienation.

“School boards are really the epicenter of the broader culture wars that we’re seeing, and they’re valuable for building political momentum nationally. I recall seeing Steve Bannon say on a podcast, ‘This is the path to save the nation. It’s very simple: it’s going to go through the school boards,’ he says.” — JULIE NARDER, professor of education, to KCBS Radio.

“If you’ve moved to a neighborhood because of the ‘good public schools’ but you’re not satisfied with how public schools are handling COVID — and you can afford to — then you would be more likely to move your kid to a private school.” — MORGAN POLKOFF, associate professor of education and co-author of the annual USC Rossier/PACE Poll, to the website LA School Report.
**Artineh Samkian Conducts Workshops in Research Methodology for Scholars in Armenia**

USC Rossier partners with the USC Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies to offer the Research Methodology Workshop Series.

By Margaret Crane

**ARTINEH SAMKIAN HAS A KINSHIP WITH fellow educators and researchers in Armenia. “I have a connection because it’s sort of my homeland,” she says. “Even though I wasn’t born there, these are my people.”**

Samkian’s family is from Iran but of Armenian descent. Those ties made it an easy choice for her to lead the Research Methodology Workshop Series, in partnership with the USC Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies. Reflecting the institute’s research focus on contemporary Armenian studies, the workshop was presented through the USC Taci Center, an academic facility located outside Yerevan, the capital of the Republic of Armenia.

Samkian, a USC Rossier associate professor of clinical education, called the series an “intro 101 of methodological approaches for humanities and social science researchers, offering qualitative, quantitative and mixed methodologies.”

She conducted six virtual sessions in April and May 2022, then followed up with in-person sessions at the Taci Center in June. In November and December, the USC Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies partnered with Samkian again to provide a second workshop series, diving deeper into methodological concepts not covered in Phase 1.

Distinguished in their fields, the students who participated in the workshops are affiliated with various Armenian institutions of higher education, including Yerevan State University, American University of Armenia, and Slavonic University, along with think tanks and public- and private-sector projects. Most are faculty and researchers at those institutions.

“These are some of the best minds in the Republic of Armenia,” said Shushan Karapetian, director of the USC Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies. The workshop marked the first partnership between the institute and USC Rossier. “What makes this collaboration so special is that not only is it an interdisciplinary and inter-school connection within USC, but also with institutions in Armenia.”

Under the Soviet Union, humanities and social sciences in Armenia were ideologically and politically driven; independent research languished. The 1988 earthquake, Nagorno-Karabakh wars, and economic collapse also delayed substantive research. Now, trailblazers in academia and the nation’s burgeoning tech industry are calling for exploration in these disciplines.

“There’s a gap in knowing how to develop research and engage in sampling and data collection for contemporary issues within Armenia and how to teach these processes,” Samkian said. “We need these approaches and need to frame how questions to ask. What are the tools we need? How do we decide which tools to use?”

In a session on data collection, she presented options for discussing interviews, documents, artifacts or surveys. “We ended up going with interviews, documents and artifacts,” she said, “reflecting this particular group’s focus in the humanities.” In this way, Samkian is adapting the workshop to the needs of her students.

A unique challenge to leading a workshop of established professionals is to teach without appearing to patronize. “Working within Rossier has been perfect training for that very sensitivity,” Samkian said. “My USC students have been, for the most part, educational leaders in their own right. I was already positioned to teach these amazing scholars.”

During her last weekend in Armenia, Samkian observed the Armenian scholars and faculty (her students) teach a group of MA and PhD students. It was exciting to see the methodological concepts be translated into Armenian with examples and case studies relevant to their Armenian students. After observing the workshop series, Samkian provided feedback on her students’ andragogical strategies, suggesting revisions to the workshop structure and encouraging the use of more active learning strategies over lecture.

Samkian says there’s further interest in more workshops.

“There is desire, on both sides, so I hope to go back.”
TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

How Can Schools Better Serve the Needs of Secondary English Learners?

Professor Eugenia Mora-Flores, Professor of Clinical Education and Assistant Dean of Teacher Education

For almost 30 years, I have worked as a teacher or alongside teachers who work closely with students identified as English Learners (ELs). Most recently, I have focused on supporting secondary teachers at the middle and high school levels in meeting the language and content needs of their students. I often get asked about the role of diverse content-area teachers in supporting ELs. There is a misconception that ELs need only strong English language development (ELD) and English language arts (ELA) instruction, and the work of supporting ELs is left to the ELD and ELA teachers. While explicit language instruction is taught in ELD and ELA, and students develop strong language skills from schools that prioritize designated classes in ELD and differentiated instruction in ELA, the work of supporting ELs relies on all teachers.

Recognize the language opportunities in content instruction

Language is a part of all content instruction and directly connected to the thinking skill and content that students will use and learn during a lesson. The subject matter at hand drives the vocabulary they need to make meaning of new content and express what they have learned. Teachers must anticipate how the thinking skill guides what language support ELs might need.

For example, students may be asked to describe or compare systems of the body, or evaluate the efficiency of a system based on diet. The thinking skill needed for each task equates to a language function, or the purpose for using language in a scenario. If students are asked to compare body systems, they will need comparative language. If they are going to evaluate body systems, they will need the language of evaluation. Once we can identify the thinking skill and the content for a lesson, we can identify core language support ELs may need to access the content and express what they’ve learned.

Recognize the diversity of English Learners

California has a long history of leading efforts in how we educate ELs. With the largest EL population in the nation—35% of the overall K–12 population—myriad guidelines and resources have been developed to support teachers working with ELs. In 2000, the California Department of Education released a research-to-practice guide, “Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students,” which reminds us of the importance of getting to know multilingual learners to best serve their needs. This means getting to know ELs as individuals.

The EL population is a subset of multilingual learners, who enhance the language and cultural diversity of our classrooms. Within the EL group there is great diversity and a variety of experiences that impact students’ needs. For example, a high school-level EL who is new to this country and may have had interrupted schooling in their home country has different needs from an EL who has been in U.S. schools since kindergarten. I have seen an average of eight typologies identified within the EL population, yet all are given a generalized label of “English Learner.” The needs of this group are vast and cannot be limited to a label that only captures the commonality that they are developing two or more languages. When you learn a strategy as a teacher for supporting ELs, you want to ask yourself, which need is it meeting, and is that aligned with the needs of the language learners in my class?

Let them talk!

The beauty of having a diversity of ELs in our classrooms is the opportunity for them to learn language from one another. If there is one thing I want you to leave with, it is to let them talk. Too often I walk through secondary classrooms that are quiet, with students completing independent tasks. Students cannot build fluency in a new language if we do not provide them with opportunities to use the language. If they are going to develop the ability to share what they are learning across all content areas, they need ample opportunities to use language in every class.

To learn more about Professor Mora-Flores’ research on English Learners, check out her new book, co-written with Stephanie Dewing, Teaching and Supporting English Learners: A Guide to Welcoming and Engaging Newcomers, at teachercreatedmaterials.com.
How USC Rossier faculty are leading the way to bring equity-minded change to graduate education.

Interview: Adriana Maestas
Illustration: Sonia Pulido
W HILE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES have improved the diversity of the undergraduate student body—with about 45% of students identifying as people of color, representing a gain of 30% over two decades—much work remains to be done in diversifying graduate degree programs that train future professors and leaders. Approximately one-third of undergraduates go on to pursue graduate studies, while the pipeline narrows for students of color who opt to take the next leap in their studies post-bachelor’s degree.

In the fall of 2020, financial pressure, spending excessive amounts of time in remedial education, and feeling isolated or unsupported are just some of the reasons why undergraduate students of color say they struggle and do not proceed in their studies. Fortunately, USC Rossier faculty are applying research to practice, with the goal of better preparing universities to educate and train diverse students who intend to pursue graduate studies.

One of the first steps toward increasing access to graduate programs is to better prepare upper-division undergraduate students for graduate study. One interdisciplinary training program that prepares underrepresented students, specifically Black and Latinx students, is the Research Institute for Scholars of Equity training program (RISE). Housed at a historically Black college, North Carolina Central University (NCCU), RISE counts USC Rossier Associate Professor Royel Johnson among its principal investigators. According to recent data from the Council of Graduate Schools, about 26% of all first-time graduate-school enrollees who were U.S. citizens or permanent residents were members of underrepresented minority groups in the fall of 2020. Financial pressure, spending excessive amounts of time in remedial education, and feeling isolated or unsupported are just some of the reasons why undergraduate students of color say they struggle and do not proceed in their studies.

The next phase of the program, RISE 2.0, is a partnership between NCCU and USC. Students participate in a rigorous eight-week summer program, with sessions covering GRE preparation, applying to graduate school, and putting together a competitive application. "The program has funding to train about 60 scholars, with cohorts of about a dozen, Johnson added. The first cohort of scholars participated in the summer session on the NCCU campus in 2022. Recruitment for student participants in RISE 2.0 is national in scope.

"The RISE scholars have housing and a meal plan at NCCU for the summer program," said Johnson, who also serves as director of student engagement at the USC Race and Equity Center. "It’s an excellent opportunity to expose students of color who are studying at predominantly White institutions to HBCUs. There’s definitely a cultural legacy embedded in the program."

RISE fellows receive $6,000 stipends, helping them focus on their studies instead of work. In addition, they benefit from an immersive experience focused on research methodologies, American schooling and educational laws, and policies and practices that impact Black and Latinx students. In addition to receiving 12 hours of GRE prep, fellows are also trained on human-subject research and can receive up to $900 for research-related expenses.

RISE 2.0 is a unique opportunity to build a pipeline of scholars of color who are prepared to enter graduate school with research questions they have already started to explore. Its programming extends beyond the summer into the academic year, with monthly check-in sessions and online convenings so that the undergraduates continue to build relationships and community as emerging scholars. While USC and NCCU are partnering institutions in RISE 2.0, collaborating institutions include Houston-Tillotson University, Jarvis Christian College, Paul Quinn College, Temple University, Texas College, the University of New Mexico, the University of North Carolina–Wilmington, Wiley College and Virginia Union University.

Another promising California-based bridge program has the potential to move the needle on representation of scientists from underrepresented groups. The number of Latinx, Black and Native American students receiving STEM PhDs is about 4%, even though these groups make up more than 30% of the U.S. population. In the fields of physics and astronomy, the diversity problem is even more pronounced, with only 6% of PhDs awarded to members of underrepresented minority groups. While RISE focuses on scholars studying inequities in education, Cal-Bridge—a partnership of the University of California and California State University—creates opportunities for underrepresented students to increase their numbers in PhD programs in STEM fields.

STEP 1: DIVERSIFYING THE PIPELINE

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Inequities for Black and Latinx students often begin with lower-quality pre-kindergarten, creating an equity gap that becomes challenging to close. RISE fellows—juniors and seniors who come from the communities impacted by these inequities—have an interest in social equity and conducting research to improve the learning experiences and academic attainment of Black and Latina students from pre-K through the university level. The RISE training program gives these undergraduate fellows an opportunity to conduct mixed-methods education research while receiving mentorship and support to prepare them for graduate study.

The next phase of the program, RISE 2.0, is a partnership between NCCU and USC. Students participate in a rigorous eight-week summer program, with sessions covering GRE preparation, applying to graduate school, and putting together a competitive application, said Johnson, who instructs RISE fellows. Funded with a training grant of $15.5 million, the program provides resources to develop undergraduate researchers to study issues in education, similar to what a McNair program does," he said.

The program has funding to train about 60 scholars, with cohorts of about a dozen, Johnson added. The first cohort of scholars participated in the summer session on the NCCU campus in 2022. Recruitment for student participants in RISE 2.0 is national in scope.

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—USC Rossier Associate Professor Royel Johnson

USC Rossier Associate Professor Julie Posselt is a principal investigator for Cal-Bridge, which is designed for California State University (CSU) students interested in pursuing a STEM-related PhD with the goal of matriculating into a UC doctoral program. Through mentoring and professional development, the National Science Foundation-funded project helps underrepresented minorities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, disabled and first-generation students advance in STEM fields including physics, astronomy, computer science and computer engineering.

Cal-Bridge recruits students entering their junior year at a CSU campus and supports them for three years, through their first year of graduate school. There are four pillars of...
support for Cal-Bridge students: 1) joint mentoring by two faculty, one from their home CSU campus and the other from a nearby UC campus; 2) need-based scholarships of up to $10,000 per year so program participants can cut back on work hours to focus on their studies; 3) professional development workshops that prepare students to apply to PhD programs; and 4) a summer research opportunity.

The Cal-Bridge summer program enables the underrepresented students to participate in research projects for eight to 10 weeks in the summer. To ease the financial burden for participants, students are paid a stipend, and housing and travel costs are covered by the program. Possett said Cal-Bridge has been so successful that the California State Legislature has allocated $1 million into the state budget to support the program's expansion. In her capacity as co-PI, Possett has used research findings to inform project strategy via discussions with the project's operational leadership. Possett and her research team are using social network analysis and longitudinal departmental case studies to understand the progression of Cal-Bridge scholars pursuing graduate education in astronomy and physics. Data collection for Cal-Bridge began in summer 2019 and will continue for five years. Social network analysis can broaden the understanding of trust networks and how students who are historically underrepresented benefit from mentoring and exposure to undergraduate research opportunities with their peers.

STEP 2: PREPARING GRADUATE SCHOOLS TO BETTER SUPPORT A DIVERSE STUDENT BODY

Preparing underrepresented students for graduate study is just one piece of the puzzle. Another major challenge is creating equitable access to graduate schools involves changing the broken systems themselves. One big issue is ensuring that programs that seek to improve admissions policies at graduate schools and better prepare them to support increasingly diverse student populations, like USC Rossier, is the Equity in Graduate Education Consortium. Led by Possett, this research initiative initially started as a project to scale holistic graduate admissions practices to six California universities. The consortium works with several universities to design and develop strategies that are equitable and inclusive. The consortium aims to improve the quality of equity research by building a sustainable infrastructure that transforms and reconfigures structures that have excluded students of color and those from other underrepresented backgrounds.

“Equity is more than closing gaps. It’s doing what it takes to keep gaps closed, keep diverse scholars engaged at all levels of education, and re-create the broken systems, structures and cultures that contribute to inequities.”
—USC Rossier Associate Professor Julie Possett

Race and Equity Center. "On a smaller scale, our faculty participate in coaching, mentoring, and sponsoring and working with underrepresented students in hands-on ways to prepare them for the rigors of the professoriate. The other important thing that happens is how USC Rossier faculty demystify the professoriate and explain what they do and what it takes to get into those positions with their research and the projects that they are involved in."

“Reflecting on my own experience,” Christian added, “coming from an HBCU and attending graduate school at a predominantly White institution I’m grateful that I had mentors who broke things down for me and helped me with small things, like how I was crafting my personal statement, how I was refining my research interests and connecting with scholars who were doing the research and work that I was interested in pursuing.”

Taking a systems-and-structure approach to creating that ripple effect in attracting, recruiting and retaining emerging scholars of color is what USC Rossier faculty are pursuing to diversify the professoriate. This involves applying research findings and insights to understand why existing structures have produced a college professoriate that is not as diverse as the growing student population. A systems approach also involves examining the relationships among students, faculty and staff within and outside the college campus and the policies and practices that impact those students. In addition, this approach acknowledges that interactions with systems in a student’s environment can have a profound impact on their success and preparation for post-baccalaureate studies.

“When we think about improving access to graduate education and how we can diversify the faculty, we need to shift from individual responsibility and look more at institutional responsibility,” Possett said.

The programs and research that USC Rossier faculty are involved in to promote diversity in graduate education and prepare underrepresented students to enter the academy as professors is just some of the many factors that influence who becomes a professor.

USC Rossier faculty are noted for taking an equity-minded approach to their research. The professors are also known for informing their graduate students about the processes and structures that their students will encounter as they embark on their academic careers.

“There are a few things that I see USC Rossier faculty working to diversify the professoriate,” said Wilmon A. Christian III, director of workplace equity at the USC Race and Equity Center.

“Reflecting on my own experience, coming from an HBCU and attending graduate school at a predominantly White institution, I’m grateful that I had mentors who broke things down for me and helped me with small things.”
—Wilmon A. Christian III, director of workplace equity at the USC Race and Equity Center
LAST SUMMER, ALLYSON FELIX BS ’08 officially retired from her prolific athletic career as the most decorated U.S. track and field athlete in Olympic history with a total of 11 medals: seven gold, three silver and one bronze. Her athletic achievements have been extraordinary, and so has her activism off the track. For the Los Angeles native and 2008 graduate of the USC Rossier School of Education (she also received an honorary degree from USC in 2022), giving back to her community and advocating for women and youth have always been a focus. After seeing her Nike sponsorship agreement gutted after she became pregnant with her daughter, Felix publicly called out the company, effectively paving the way for better contracts for women athletes. Now that she has put grueling workouts and race preparations behind her, she’s able to fully focus on other projects, like her woman-focused shoe and apparel brand, Saysh, and advocacy efforts, including working with Right to Play, the Power of She Fund, Voice in Sport and the International Olympic Committee’s athletes’ commission. In January, USC announced that the field at its track stadium would be named for her. In this interview, Felix discusses growing up in L.A. with two educator parents, how her time at USC Rossier shaped her, and the causes that are so important to her.

Kianoosh Hashemzadeh: You were born and raised in Los Angeles. What does the city mean to you?

Allyson Felix: I grew up in the heart of L.A., not too far from USC. My grandma would take us on walks through the Rose Garden and the 32nd Street Market. Growing up,
“Growing up, the city exposed me to a lot of greatness. I always saw people doing amazing things, and that made me feel like things weren’t out of reach.”

In 2018, you became pregnant with your daughter, Camryn. You competed early in your pregnancy and continued to train throughout. How did you manage that?

I had a great pregnancy all the way up until days before I delivered. I felt strong. I was running and in the pool. Towards the end, I might be active for three days a week, just listening [to my body] and trying to figure out what was best on that day.

Women come back regularly from pregnancy now, which is amazing and inspiring. Before, people made you feel like, OK, you’re entering this other chapter of life. It goes beyond sports—for so many working women, they feel they can’t let people know what’s going on, [for fear of] getting taken off this or that, or [being] asked not to travel. It’s not fair. It’s not the way that it should be. [But] we have a lot of momentum now and a lot of great examples.

You’ve written beautifully and movingly about the birth of your daughter via emergency C-section. How did that experience change you?

It was a traumatic experience for me, and one that was unexpected. As an athlete, I’ve been healthy my whole life. I know how to take care of my body, and so when I was diagnosed with severe preeclampsia, it was this weird feeling of being really scared and not knowing what was going on, not being fully educated with what preeclampsia is and what it means for me and my baby. The interesting thing about preeclampsia is that, oftentimes, there’s nothing that you can see. I felt so grateful to come out on the other side. [It was also an eye-opening experience of the state of maternal health in the United States. So, it changed me in that I realized] I was much stronger than I thought. I just listening [to my body] and trying to figure out what was best for Camryn.

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You’ve spoken about how Jackie Joyner-Kersee has been an important mentor in your life. What role did she play as you were deciding to publish the op-ed in The New York Times about Nike and their lack of support for pregnant athletes?

She’s been a constant in my life. She’s my coach’s wife, and I met her when I was a teenager. Jackie is amazing—not only is she the greatest female athlete that we’ve seen, but she cares about me as a person. When I was going through that hardship, I leaned on her for support. She always told me to go with what I felt. She wasn’t trying to give me an answer but [encouraged me] to trust myself and to do what I felt I needed to do. She was there for me throughout, and it gave me that encouragement to move forward.

After you left Nike, you created your own footwear and apparel company, Saysh, which has a mission to empower and serve women. On the first episode of your podcast, Mountaintop Conversations, you said that one of the things you wanted to do when you set up Saysh was to ensure that the inner workings of the company were reflective of its mission and public image. How are you doing that?

I feel grateful because there have been a lot of incredible people who have left amazing jobs because they want to come and build this type of company. I talk with everybody before they join, and I ask them, “Why do you want to be here?” And to me, that’s the culture we’re creating. You have to be able to align with that mission. We’re going to be uncompromising with that. That is who we are, and we can’t put that out into the world unless we are that every single day. As a company, we are able to be thoughtful [and] give incredible women a seat at the table. Our maternity return policy [which provides expectant mothers with a free pair of sneakers in their new, postpartum size] was something that our first product engineer came up with. She said it was always something she wanted to do but was never able to at large companies. I love that we’re mission-based and serve a bigger purpose than just making shoes. That’s something I will never waver on.

Now that you have more time to focus on Saysh, what are your goals for the company?

I was traveling not too long ago, and I got on a plane and a woman was wearing a pair of our shoes. It was the first time I saw them in the wild. I probably scared her half to death, because I was so excited and wanted to chat with her. She told me she was thinking about buying a pair because she had. And what I really bring is that I really knew the shoes, she loved that they were made for her foot as a woman—but also that she loved our mission. She wanted to stand with me, with other women. In five years or so years, I would love to see a sea of those shoes, and not just our company will be successful, but because it will have that impact in the world.

Postretirement, you’ve been very busy. You were recently elected to the International Olympic Committee’s athletes commission, which aims to incorporate the voices of athletes into their decision-making processes. What’s your experience been like so far on the committee?

It’s a big role, and I wanted to join because I want to make sure that voice of athletes is reflective of the world we’re in now are athletes’ concerns about Russia and Ukraine, how [the war] affects them and what [supports] are in place. Of course, I have my own agenda. I would love to be supportive of women all over the world in the way they’re facing, such
“I feel grateful because there have been a lot of incredible people who have left amazing jobs because they want to come and build this type of company. . . we’re able to be thoughtful and give incredible women a seat at the table.”

— Aliyyson Felix on Sasy, Felix’s footwear and apparel company

FEATURE

Learning Interrupted

What research-backed methods can educators use to put our nation’s schoolchildren back on track?

Story: Ellen Evaristo
Illustration: Chris Gash

“ as supporting[] or thinking about women [athletes] in the Middle East and how to support [them with] the issues that they’re going through.

Drawing from your experience on being a mother at the Olympics, are there any ways that the Games could better serve women and create a better environment for mothers who are competing? Absolutely. I have a long list of things. I have so much respect for women who [have] navigated that space and found a way to make it work, because what I found is that the systems are not in place to help mothers. Women probably didn’t have a seat at the table when a lot of these things were thought of. I’m excited to bring my own experience—of traveling with an 8-month-old all around the world, going to an Olympics and not being able to bring my child—and the experience of mothers who are currently going through that.

You’re a board member and an athlete ambassador for Right to Play. Why does their mission resonate with you? I joined Right to Play over a decade ago. I wanted to do important work but be hands-on. [Right to Play] is [an] incredible organization. Their mission resonated with me after I saw their programs in action. They use play to help children in refugee camps and [other] stricken areas [to] help them through their circumstances—whether that is using games to teach [children] about malaria and how to protect themselves or programs that are helping girls stay in school and continue their education. I got in the field, and I started to understand how these programs worked. Play is [a] universal language. I was able to see that right away, and see these kids light up. Then I met with families and saw not only how these programs impact their children, but the impact [on] the family life. It was incredible, and I was truly moved. I continued my work and joined the board. I always say when I go in the field, I think that I’m going to help, and I always feel like I come back as the one who’s been changed by the experience.

You’ve also been working with your sponsor Athleta’s Power of She Fund and the Women’s Sports Foundation to provide child care grants to women athletes. How did you go about setting this program up, and why is this cause so important to you? We started with the Power of She Fund to [support] women [with children] who are still pursuing sport and break down that barrier of child care for them, especially [when] traveling. When I went through it, it was expensive. I felt grateful that I had the resources to bring a partner [or] bring a parent to help me. I thought about women who don’t have those resources, so that barrier of child care for them, especially [when] traveling. I thought about women who don’t have those resources, so that barrier of child care for them, especially [when] traveling.

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You are also a board member and an owner of a mentorship program, Voice in Sport. How does the program work? Mentorship is so important, especially for young women who are athletes. Voice in Sport is a platform for young girls focused on mentorship. Girls can sign up for a session with a professional athlete, a nutritionist [or] a college athlete and talk about different things. I did a session yesterday on self-belonging and self-worth. [The girls] have these real-life examples of people who have been there, and they can ask [us] anything. We also talk about our own journeys and experiences. I think it will help girls stay in sport [and] help [their] mental health, having these experts on hand at this very crucial age.

What are some of the pressing challenges that young female athletes today are facing? It’s a lot around mental health and nutrition. One of the girls yesterday asked me about anxiety, which I felt was amazing at [her] age. She was probably [about] 13. She has horrible anxiety and fear of competing, and she doesn’t know how to handle it. [With] my generation, that’s not even something we would feel comfortable saying, and so she, at this age, is able to say that and talk to people who can help her through that.

After retirement, a lot of athletes, deservedly so, want to focus on enjoying life without the demands of training and competing. What has made you decide to chart a different path, one that is driven by advocating for causes that are so important to you? I think it was going through the experiences the last two to three years that really changed my life. Whether it was leaving Nike, the fight for maternal protections, [my] birth experience—I feel like there’s so much to do on those fronts. I want to be involved and try to make a difference. [Leaving] Nike showed me that it was possible. Before, sometimes change felt out of reach, seeing it happen made me feel, “No, we can do this.” It’s a special time. There’s a lot of momentum, and I don’t want to lose that. —R
R

EMEMBER WHEN THE SUMMER SETBACK or slide among kids was a major concern for educators? Teachers would see a decrease of at least one month’s worth of school-year learning after a three-month summer break. Now imagine that decline after a dramatic shift to online learning and over 14 months of quarantine. Resources are now available to safely bring students back to school, but do you make up for this much of a disruption in education? When the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released test results in the summer of 2022, the data confirmed what many educators had feared: Math and reading scores of 9-year-olds had dropped to levels that hadn’t been seen in two decades. While the decline in performance was noted across the board, the drop has been greater for Black and Brown students, especially those who lacked access to virtual learning or were enrolled in districts that delayed a return to in-person learning.

“This once-in-a-generation virus upended our country in so many ways—and our students cannot be the ones who sacrifice most now or in the long run,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona in comments about the NAEP results. “We must treat the task of catching our children up in education and in our society at large?”

However, many schools stayed closed for more than a year. It was a herculean challenge, but surprisingly most schools managed to pull it off relatively well. That’s the good news. The length of time schools were closed was determined by various factors, among them geographic location (rural vs. urban); whether or not schools were open to public or private charter school (public schools generally stayed closed longer); the school board’s political leanings; and student demographics. Parents and caregivers found themselves in the precarious situation of responding to the challenges brought on by the pandemic in addition to simultaneously supporting their children academically. The intervention also saw a loss that extended past the academics.

“We learned pretty quickly that remote learning during the pandemic was not as effective as in-person learning,” said Morgan Polikoff, a USC Rossier associate professor of education. “Student achievement fell off in that first year. Then a lot of schools were still intermittently open, open and closed, or some were really closed through the duration of the 2022 school year.” Polikoff co-authored a report from the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) in August 2022 which found that learning delays correlated with the amount of time students were out of the classroom or were in a virtual learning environment.

The recently released NAEP results from October 2022 showed that reading and math achievement declined significantly. Reading scores were steady or only slightly improved, whereas math scores dropped significantly in Grades 3 and 8. Reading scores for Grade 3 dropped 2.8 points to the lowest level since 2005, and math scores for Grade 8 dropped 3.9 points to the lowest level since 2003. The drop in scores was found to be more significant for Black and Brown students. Math scores declined for White students, 13 points for Black students and eight points for Hispanic students.

Polikoff saw that low-income students, Black and Brown students, and White students who were out of school for more time seem to have borne the brunt of the learning loss. Polikoff pointed out Curriculum Associates’ research from 2020. After over two years since those first school closures, the declines are still there. He added: “I think there’s some evidence that we’re starting to close some of those gaps, but we’re certainly still pretty far away, especially in mathematics.”

Patricia Boren-Sanco, ED ’16, is director of equity, access and instructional services at Lynnwood Unified School District, located south of Los Angeles. Her district and the community it serves were severely impacted by the pandemic. With 76,000 residents and a demographic of 42% Latino and 43% African American, one out of every four residents died of COVID-19.

“We had a four-month slide made up of essential workers. Our parents had to go to work,” said Boren-Sanco. “Our students suffered not only a grief and possible loss of parents or caregivers, but also the social, psychological and emotional challenges that many students faced not being able to access school. A McKinsey analysis found that an alarming 49% of Black and 38% of Hispanic K–12 students received no online instruction when schools were closed during the pandemic, compared with 20% of White students. Preliminary data indicated that the negative effects of the pandemic fell unevenly with regards to socio-economic conditions and achievement.

The sobering reports have become a call to action for educators, shedding light on how students of color have experienced a decline in academic achievement. The pandemic compounded and widened structural inequalities. “In other words, students who were struggling in school due to complications of poverty, structural racism, language difference and/or learning difference, among other factors, fell further behind during and after the pandemic,” said Patricia Burch, a USC Rossier professor of education.

For many low-income families, surviving the pandemic with their health and financial well-being intact became more important than how well their children were performing academically. Considering the hardships endured by those who were required to report to work in person, it’s hardly surprising that there is no sense of urgency among many families to address the backward slide in achievement. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, many employees—mainly Black and Brown—worked in person, citing that only 16.6% of Hispanic and 19.7% of Black workers could work remotely. And that was before the pandemic. Polikoff says the burden for addressing the problem should not rest on parents or caregivers. “I would say that the system needs to identify students who need the support and provide the support,” he added.

HELPFUL (OR HOPEFUL) SOLUTIONS: RESEARCH AND DATA OFFER LEARNING LOSS REMEDIES

Brent-Sanco says that in the Lynwood Unified School District, “the pandemic illuminated what we already knew. We know that there is to be different levels of engagement strategies for those students who face struggles outside of school [and have environmental factors that they have to deal with when they are outside of our walls].” To address those concerns, Lynwood opened a food bank, distributed computers, and created a mental health collaborative with a hotline for parents. Other offerings include small group instructions during the school day, direct instruction and guided and independent practice. In addition, a leadership academy at the elementary and middle schools instructs students on leadership lessons.

Several studies have offered evidence-based methods—many overlapping—to mitigate learning loss. Curricular and professional development survey with more than 300 schools whose below-level students exceeded expectations. Researchers interviewed those who were required to report to work in person, it’s hardly surprising that there is no sense of urgency among many families to address the backward slide in achievement.

A Learning Policy Institute report, co-authored by USC Rossier Dean Pedro A. Noguera, from May 2021 integrated research on learning and offered six guidelines for educators to address whole-child learning. The research addressed the need for “learning environments that center strong teacher-student relationships, address students’ social and emotional learning, and provide students with opportunities to construct knowledge that builds upon their experiences and social contexts in ways that deepen their academic skills.”

“Biggest mistakes schools could make now is to focus narrowly and exclusively on academic achievement,” Noguera said. “They must acknowledge the tremendous social, psychological and emotional challenges that many
“The biggest mistake schools could make now is to focus narrowly and exclusively on academic achievement. They must acknowledge the tremendous social, psychological and emotional challenges that many students and staff experienced, and they must devise strategies to address all of these.”

—USC Rossier Dean Pedro A. Noguera

Tutoring is something that middle- and higher-income families purchase for their children. It needs to be available to all students in public schools.”

—USC Rossier Professor Patricia Burch

Students across the country have been affected by COVID-19-related learning loss. Here are steps teachers, schools and school systems can take to address the disruption:

- Offer high-dosage tutoring, or intensive learning in small groups, to supplement student learning experiences. According to the National Student Support Accelerator, this method “leads to substantial learning gains for students.”
- Foster engagement not only with the students but with their families and guardians as well. Monitor student progress and provide feedback to keep all informed and involved in the learning process.
- Design high-quality curriculum materials to meet a student’s unique abilities and interests to reinforce teaching effects in the classroom. Suggestions from CRPE include offering all children access to quality core curriculum materials, personalizing the curriculum and supporting teacher supplemental content.
- Provide and encourage professional development for educators, who often managed multiple roles during the pandemic. Helpful recommendations from the National Math and Science Initiative includes digital training as well as training for educators to care for their social and emotional needs.
- Make mental health a priority, implementing strategies for social-emotional learning will help if students build the skills they need to regulate their emotions and behavior.

Learning Loss Remedies

The research and data reveal the needs that must be addressed. Federal funds have been earmarked to assist schools, and now the question is: How do educators and administrative leaders implement a strategy to address and respond to COVID-19 learning loss? Perhaps the pandemic created a unique opportunity to reimagine how students are taught. Some schools have explored possible options including extending the school day or academic year, summer school and grade retention. The latter, while well-intended, may carry negative consequences. Other options include tutoring, revisiting curriculum, and teacher professional development.

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The learning challenges created by the pandemic have provided the opportunity for educators and administrators to reimagine the classroom and revitalize current educational strategies. Buddin said: “We’re all working a lot harder, and we’re doing a lot of individual instruction right now, because we need to give the kids what they need, and that is what teachers do!”
How do you combine hip-hop music and science teaching?

**Professor Chris Emdin**

Chris Emdin joined USC Rossier in January 2022 as the Robert A. Naslund Endowed Chair in Curriculum Theory and a professor of education. His research focuses on democratizing science and transforming urban education. A scholar, best-selling author and impassioned advocate of educational equity, Emdin brings a unique approach to schooling, incorporating hip-hop music and culture to transform science teaching. He discusses the importance of student engagement, STEAM, and the art and legacy of teaching.

You’re a science educator first. You earned your PhD in urban education, your BS in natural sciences and your BS in physical anthropology, biology and chemistry. How do your studies shape your approach to education?

As a person who has expertise in the sciences, I learned to think in a very particular way. I initially approached science education as a scientist. Everything was about the data, the numbers, and the inputs and outputs. It was about getting young people to memorize content. I wanted to be a good teacher, but I was trained to look at the world in a particular way. I have since discovered how incomplete that approach is. The desire to be effective was not enough if I relied solely on delivering my content without understanding context. It required a radical departure from my training to delve deeply into understanding human beings.

Today, I would call myself equal parts scientist, social critic and artist. Equal parts interested in the cognitive dimensions of teaching and learning, as well as the effective and emotional dimensions. I found myself as a scholar when I learned to resolve the tensions that always existed between my scientific training and my more humanistic experiences as a teacher.

How do you use hip-hop music and culture to transform science teaching, and why is this important?

Hip-hop is not just a musical artform. It’s a culture, a way of knowing and being, and a tool for transformation. Folks use it as a way to orchestrate their existence. Once you recognize that it’s not just some random artifact but a culture, then you have to engage with it as such. Once I recognized the power that hip-hop has on the lives of young people, I had no choice but to utilize it in teaching and learning.

Science has always been perceived as being out of reach of most young people. These are young folks who society says are not the best. They are not smart or valued. I see them engaging in hip-hop and expressing the same skills, traits and dispositions that I see in the most brilliant scientists. They’re curious and make keen observations. They’re thinking and speaking through metaphor and analogy and deconstructing complex ideas. I’m like, “Whoa! You’re a scientist.” But they believe that they’re not. My work is to remind or inform them of who they are, and show them and their teachers how the skills they have, just by virtue of their engagement in hip-hop, can be applicable in spaces like science.

Then there’s also the cool level, right? You could write a rap about anything in the world. You can certainly write one about science.

We’ll try it. Let’s hold high academic and cultural expectations and remove the perceptions of what science is or should look like. Let’s experiment with cool ways to help youth latch on to content. Then you watch magic happen.

You are director of youth engagement and community partnerships at the USC Race and Equity Center. Tell me more about your approach to education?

Connecting with young people, valuing them and making them feel as though there’s a pathway for them to higher education must be the central focus in all our endeavors. Working in service of young people and their futures requires direct engagement with them about what they need to be their best selves. This requires all the adults who are connected to young people to understand that they are in service to them.

Youth engagement is practical. It begins with conversations and co-creation while maintaining high expectations. It’s about creating opportunities for youth voices to be heard. This requires teachers and other education stakeholders to meet youth where they are. My role is to help those who work in schools to develop the strategies needed to do the same. The goal is to develop a youth engagement ecosystem where access to excellence is maximized because all youth-facing adults are equipped with the tools and trained with the strategies to help youth to be fully actualized.

Young people can only reach their full potential when the entire community supports their intellectual, psychological and emotional growth. One of the essential pieces of our work at USC Rossier is to support the community in fulfilling its potential to support young people. My work is to let the community know that we are accessible and willing to be in direct relationship with them. That’s what community partnership looks like.

USC Rossier is not just a school of education. We are a place where innovation, creativity and imagination abound. We’re interested in engaging with the community off campus and exploring ideas that are not traditionally perceived as having anything to do with education and seeing how they can impact change. Learning can happen in a coffee shop or barbershop as well as in a classroom. I’m the person who helps to envision what that may look like.

What are some of your current research projects?

I’m continuing Science Genius BATTLES, which is a science rap competition. It’s science education meets American Idol and rap battles, where we challenge young folks to write about science, compete in their classrooms and battle to see a winner. The battle kicks off from each school then battles winners from other schools, and those winners go on to a citywide competition. It’s all over the place now. My favorite version of it is in Kingston, Jamaica, where they have reggae and dancehall science battles, which is just amazing to witness. That project is expanding, and it has immense potential for teaching, teacher training and even the creation of musical products.

I’m also designing a certificate program for teachers. It draws from my TED Talk: “Teach teachers how to create magic.” The goal of the certificate is to teach teachers the performance art of teaching. That includes watching videos of the best performers, like Misty Copeland, and watching how she enters the stage and then asking, “How can a teacher enter the classroom the same way?” I’m excited to expand that work with USC because we’re in the middle of an institution and city that can position this as a global sector. My doctoral students and I are developing a set of courses for teachers, and they will graduate with a certificate in teaching as a performance art.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity. For the extended interview, please visit rossier.usc.edu.
The field of social-emotional learning (SEL) is at a moment where it is both lauded and scrutinized in schools. SEL, simply put, involves developing self-awareness, self-control and interpersonal skills within school curricula. The benefits of SEL include an increase in student emotional regulation and empathy, and the ability to make better decisions, which, in turn, can lead to improved test scores, grades and school attendance; increased postsecondary education readiness; and better mental health. With schools grappling with learning loss (p. 27) and an increase in student mental health issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, spending on SEL grew roughly 45% between November 2019 and April 2021, according to a report by Tyton Partners, an education consulting and investment firm.

There has, however, been a backlash against teaching these skills. Some critics say social-emotional learning is not meant to be taught by teachers but is better left to parents. Others have gone further, decrying SEL as a covert means to teach public schoolchildren progressive perspectives on race, gender and sexuality, leading some districts to eliminate SEL from their curriculum entirely.

In all of it, the science of social-emotional learning is still emerging, and that’s one of the goals of the USC Center for Affective Neuroscience, Development, Learning and Education (CANDLE), a USC Rossier research center founded and directed by Professor of Education, Psychology & Neuroscience Mary Helen Immordino-Yang.

Immordino-Yang didn’t like school as a kid. She was always interested in the natural world—trying to understand nature and humans’ role in it—but never felt as if she fit in at school. Immordino-Yang studied developmental psychology, lived in various countries after her undergraduate studies, and worked with her hands building boats. Then she injured her hand and found work as a science teacher in a struggling district south of Boston.

It was there, in a classroom of refugee students from all over the world, that she realized how fascinating the problem of education is. “It was the area that I really had always been looking for,” Immordino-Yang says. “It was a problem that was about developmental psychology and the development of mind, but it was also deeply cultural and social, with real-world complexities and implications, unlike what I was seeing in the developmental psychology lab.”

Immordino-Yang, the Fahmy and Donna Attallah Chair in Humanistic Psychology at USC Rossier, has found a way to funnel her varied background into a unique and emerging field. CANDLE, founded in 2020, integrates research on neuroscience, education and psychology to create a new understanding of development and teaching.

WHAT SCHOOLS GET WRONG ABOUT SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

CANDLE’s work often focuses on social-emotional learning, which can be a problematic concept, Immordino-Yang...
It suggests that some kinds of learning are social-emotional, and then the rest of learning is just regular cognitive, for example, scanning teachers’ brains as they graded student work in an MRI machine to show that teachers who think about their role more completely may have a more consistent pattern of engaging with their students’ work.

They are also working on longitudinal studies of brain development on inner-city, low-socio-economic-status youth from immigrant families throughout Los Angeles County, Immordino-Yang says. The team has conducted extensive qualitative interviews with the kids over several years, and, via the MRI scanner, they have looked at their brain development and functioning as the youth are making sense of complex social stories in real time. The results show that beyond IQ, socioeconomic status or their parents’ education level, brain development can be predicted by the way kids engage with narratives about who they are, Immordino-Yang says. “It’s a really powerful statement about the power young people hold through their own thoughts and feelings to grow themselves over time.”

Another project, being worked on with University of Michigan Professor Jamaal Matthews, is trying to understand how a young person’s processes of creating meaning become the substrate for their biological growth. Matthews received a three-year NSF mid-career faculty fellowship with Immordino-Yang to study social affective neuroscience and collaborate with CANDLE researchers to forge a new conversation and research approach that brings together racial equity studies with developmental brain studies in adolescents.

“We’re trying to understand the sort of psycho-biological, psycho-social, cultural, biological nature of adolescence,” Immordino-Yang says. “It’s really about changing the way we think of teaching as a profession in secondary school. What is the role of the teacher in kids’ lives? What do teachers need to know to do their job, because what students do they need to have to be effective in these spaces?”

The work is part of a scholarly body that could spend traditional ideas about teaching and learning. One of CANDLE’s current challenges is that society has deeply held assumptions about what learning is about, what school is for and what it means to think, Immordino-Yang says. And those assumptions are problematic in many ways. “The thinking and focused attention and quote-unquote academic learning is directly tied to the ways that students are feeling, and that’s directly tied to the ways that their social world is structured,” she says.

**Skateboarding Tricks and Social Skills**

Zeé Corwin has been diving into the world of skateboarding for the past several years. Corwin, a research professor at USC Rossier who is the principal investigator for the Promoting At-Promise Student Success project for the USC Pullias Center for Higher Education, believes we can learn a lot from studying the intersection of skateboarding, mental wellness and community. She started USC Skate Studies, along with an interdisciplinary group of colleagues, to highlight the experiences of youth who are passionate about skateboarding—both those who are in communities of skaters and those who feel disenfranchised from groups.

Their research includes a national survey, case studies conducted in seven diverse regions of the United States, and an L.A.-based participatory action research study involving documentary filmmaking. The study’s focus is on skaters from low-income and/or marginalized backgrounds and the findings reflect diverse perspectives. By gaining a deeper understanding of the complexity of skateboard ecosystems, the researchers say they hope to inform the way that society views and interacts with skateboarders.

Their research can be seen in action at local schools she has had a chance to work with. “We’re trying to understand the sort of psycho-biological, psycho-social, cultural, biological nature of adolescence,” Immordino-Yang says. “It’s really about changing the way we think of teaching as a profession in secondary school. What is the role of the teacher in kids’ lives? What do teachers need to know to do their job, because what students do they need to have to be effective in these spaces?”

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**We are always deeply social and emotional in everything we think about. We think because we want to; we think because it matters. Those are emotional drives.”**

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

**Research in Action**

Immordino-Yang’s research can be seen in action at local schools she has partnered with. Da Vinci RISE High in South L.A. is an independent studies high school that serves predominantly foster and housing-unstable youth, says Erin Whalen, the school’s executive director. “We were built and designed for the youth in those populations: If we create a school model with the most at-risk students in mind, that will serve all students really well,” he says. Whalen says Immordino-Yang’s work has been incredible because a school serving at-risk students, many metrics and outcomes are rooted in the manifestations of trauma, but at RISE, they start at the most basic of a person’s needs. They have mental health services, family counseling and behavior interventionists all housed at the school. The school doesn’t suspend or expel students. Whalen says the school uses Immordino-Yang’s work as a basis to place social-emotional learning at the core of the school experience. “Mary Helen has been an incredible thought partner,” Whalen says. “She’s one of our first folks in the mental-health psychology realm to validate the work we’re doing.”

He points out that skills like self-regulation and agency aren’t separate from academic skills: “Social agency and self-management exist in the history class-room, on the playground and in math class.” Those skills are also what employers are looking for—while role crisis can be Googled, social-emotional skills require students to know themselves in a deeper way.

At New Village Girls Academy in Los Angeles, principal Jennifer Quniones started working with Immordino-Yang two years ago, to see how to best support teachers. The school focuses on students who are not successful in traditional settings. They might be single parents, students who have been bullied or those with other high needs. “You can imagine the amount of social-emotional learning trauma they bring to school with them,” says Quniones. “One thing that has been ignored is the amount of trauma is also carried by the adults working with them.”

Immordino-Yang is leading a team of researchers to figure out how to help teachers manage their stress—so to put on their own oxygen mask first,” she says. Whalen says she worked with another school where she noticed a correlation between teachers who were angry and frustrated and the likelihood that their students would violate probation terms and end
It’s not easy work. Immunodino-Yang says developing a new knowledge of education and neurodevelopment is messy, generative and not always efficient. She is publishing papers in neuroscience journals, but also journals of education, philosophy and political science.

Still, she hopes CANDLE’s work will contribute to a more inclusive educational world, one that focuses on process instead of outcome in development and learning. The rise of social-emotional learning curricula around the country has been heralded as a tool to promote equity in learning. But, she thinks that in the future, teachers and students will start to appreciate the deeply cultural nature of human biology and understand more diverse perspectives around science learning and teaching—based on development.

“We’re really inventing a new transdisciplinary approach to developmental science,” she says, “with the goal of creating a richer, more modernized understanding of human development.”

“Mary Helen Immunodino-Yang brought edu-babble to a level that everyone can understand. She talks about how the brain functions, what stress causes and the damaging effects it can have on the development of a child.”

—Jennifer Quinones, principal at New Village Girls Academy

A new research project led by Darnell Cole explores the impact of multigenerational STEM mentoring on L.A. middle schoolers.

How do you boost the numbers of marginalized students in the sciences?

That’s a question Darnell Cole, a USC Rossier professor of education and co-director of the Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice, has wrestled with throughout his career. His new research project, known as SEEDS (Student Engagement, Exploration and Development in STEM), sets out to answer it by exploring the impact of multigenerational mentoring on the math and science engagement of middle school students from economically disadvantaged Los Angeles neighborhoods.

“Our focus is connecting the middle school students with college students who live in these communities as mentors and mentees together around the construct of STEM engagement through online gaming,” Cole said. “The middle school students get to see people who look like them, who might have experienced things that they’ve experienced, engage in science concepts.”

The mentors, several of whom are USC students, are all majoring in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) subjects at two- and four-year colleges, and they benefit up back in juvenile hall. By being proactive about wellness and stress reduction, she says, her school has retained more teachers, and they are doing better than before. “If we’re not making sure the adults molding them are OK, then we are failing completely,” she says. “If we wanted to promote the practice of wellness, we also needed to be the example for our girls.”

The study has concluded, and researchers from CANDLE are putting together the data with the hope of doing a follow-up in the future. “Mary Helen is very special in what she can do,” Quinones says. “She brought edu-babble to a level that everyone can understand. She talks about how the brain functions, what stress causes, and the damaging effects it can have on the development of a child.”

“She brought a real wealth of knowledge of the actual scientific evidence, thinking about how to incorporate wellness into math, science and history,” Quinones adds. Immunodino-Yang is also helping the school think about how to teach courses that are culturally responsive and how to help teachers have mechanisms to help students develop self-awareness to be able to better communicate.
from their relationship with the middle school students as well. For one, they are viewed by the middle schoolers as scientists rather than as college students at risk of not graduating. As those from low-income backgrounds and communities of color are often framed, Cole said. “It helps solidify their identity beyond these kinds of characteristics that are often deficit-oriented and changes into an asset-oriented view,” he said.

As the middle schoolers receive guidance from college students, the college students are mentored by professionals—who coach them through the undergraduate experience. They can help them transition to graduate school or to a STEM career. “Our professional mentors are able to engage our college students in meaningful, thoughtful ways with their career pathway information as well as their own kind of navigational and aspirational capital,” Cole said.

In addition to Cole, SEEDS includes co-principal investigators Christopher Newman, an associate professor in the Department of Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University, Shafqat Ahmad, a USC Rossier professor of clinical education and co-director of the Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice; and Ting-Han Chang, a postdoctoral researcher at the center. Graduate and undergraduate students also have leadership roles in the project, which kicked off in 2019 with a pilot phase. The first year of the project at full scope is now underway, a development Cole attributes to the partnerships and grant funding that have made SEEDS possible. That includes a close connection with the USC McMorrow Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI), a seven-year enrichment program to help students from South and East Los Angeles earn college admission. NAI hosts a Saturday Academy at two USC sites with four schools: El Sereno Middle School, Florence Nightingale Middle School, James A. Foshay Learning Center and Murchison Street Elementary. About 450 students from those schools take part in the SEEDS program.

NAI “has allowed us to come in and provide the SEEDS program using online games to promote STEM content learning as well as mentorship around STEM concepts and ideas,” Cole said. “The online games are part of the award-winning Legends of Learning curriculum specializing in math and science for design for distance, hybrid and blended learning.”

Lizette Zarate, NAI program director, said she appreciates Legends of Learning because students can use the content with no prior knowledge of the lessons included. “We had a science component as part of our program pre-SEEDS, and it’s all hands-on, inquiry-based science that we do,” she added. “What SEEDS brings—is a game-based program from kids bring in their laptops and when they get to play video games that are science-focused.”

The city of Los Angeles is another important SEEDS partner. The college students now participating in the project applied through L.A.'s Youth Development Department, which pays a collective sum of $40,000 to cover $15 SEEDS internship roles. Through its relationships with organizations such as Para Los Ninos, Brotherhood Crusade and Archdiocesan Youth Employment Services-Los Angeles, the USC McMorrow Neighborhood Academic Initiative has helped recruit college students to serve as SEEDS mentors.

Having granted SEEDS $18,781 in September 2022, the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation makes the project possible, Cole said. That grant covers two years, while the city of Los Angeles plans to make an annual financial commitment to SEEDS, Cole said. He hopes to develop a variety of partnerships that can provide corporate or individual funding for the SEEDS project. Cole would also like to replicate this as they reach out across the country to evolve the outreach it is doing.

“The wonderful thing about SEEDS is that it creates these significant partnerships between foundations, the city of Los Angeles and post-secondary institutions as well as LAUSD and other schools that are participating in this work,” Cole said. “It creates this opportunity to have these partners who occupy different places in the city come together around one common goal. We have come together to help them support students when they get to play video games that are science-focused.”

The city of Los Angeles is another important SEEDS partner. The college students now participating in the project Foundation grant that aimed to bring physicists, scientists, social scientists and educators together so they could brainstorm about ways to increase the participation of racialized minorities in the sciences, particularly in physics and astronomy, Cole said. “We were able to create a preconference experience [for] the National Society of Black Physicists,” Cole said. “We pulled together all of these scientists who were physicists, astronomers, worked in national laboratories, and put them in the same room with social scientists and educators and began to ask and workshop these questions. We were able to generate a few significant ideas, and [SEEDS] is one of those ideas.”

Although SEEDS is new, the project has already yielded some preliminary results. Students who participate in SEEDS, so far, have performed similarly academically to the same schools they don’t. This may be, in part, because students are still not enrolling in STEM classes for a year after schools shut down amid the COVID-19 crisis in March 2020. While the Los Angeles Unified School District held classes online during this period, research has found that students in communities of color and low-income communities had low participation rates in remote instruction and that their test scores in a variety of subjects continue to suffer.

“One of the things that this program does—not only the SEEDS program, but also NAI—is that it creates an opportunity to bring these students back face-to-face and engage them in some hands-on work around science,” Cole said.

“Over the course of the program, SEEDS participants develop a stronger sense of their identity as potential scientists.” — Darnell Cole, USC Rossier professor of education and co-director of the Center for Education, Identity, and Social Justice

“Students see themselves as scientists, they’re more likely to engage in science-related work and more likely to persist through the challenges that they experience in science-related work.” — Darnell Cole, USC Rossier professor of education and co-director of the Center for Education, Identity, and Social Justice

Where SEEDS participants differ from their peers who aren’t involved in the program is in science identity. Baseline mean scores have found that over the course of the program, SEEDS participants develop a stronger sense of their identity as potential scientists.

Cole said the research indicates that SEEDS participants grow in their ability to identify adults or mentors available to offer them guidance in pursuing scientific interests. He emphasized, however, that these are preliminary findings, and he doesn't want to overstate their significance. More research needs to be done on the SEEDS pilot points to a need for concerted effort to create a start of a meaningful trend with regard to science identity.

“The science identity has been cited in the literature as being these fundamental, core concepts, that if students and individuals, as they’re developing, see themselves as scientists, they’re more likely to engage in science-related work and more likely to persist through the challenges that they experience in science-related work.”

Equally important, Cole added, is that the college students serve as role models to their middle school mentees, instilling in them the belief that they, too, can go to college and become STEM majors. Zarate said the college students contribute to making science fun for their young mentees. That some of the college students took part in NAI themselves just deepens the connection between them and the middle schoolers.

“In their science class, the kids [are with their science teacher cutting up cows’ eyeballs, which is actually a lesson that we did a few weeks back],” Zarate said. “They’re focused on that. In the SEEDS period, it gets to be more informal, more personal, kind of like, ‘My mentor’s here. I’m playing this cool video game—that’s really science. It’s disguised learning, but they get to connect and ask questions that they probably wouldn’t get to ask their teacher, probably wouldn’t feel comfortable asking their teacher.”

With the mentorship of these college students, the SEEDS middle schoolers can explore STEM careers, and individuals, as they’re developing, see themselves as potential scientists. Cole said. Stereotypes may lead to a phenomenon known as “stereo-type threat,” in which marginalized people hear negative stereotypes about their group, such as “Black and Brown students aren’t good in STEM,” and proceed to struggle in that subject.

“Once marginalized students or low-income students walk into [STEM] environments, and they’re stereotyped about how they have to access these environments, their inability to be successful academically, the fact that they don’t look like a scientist, the fact that they can’t wash hands in many ways because we’re redefined, for the middle school students, who they see as scientists, and we’ve also helped reshape and cultivate how college students now are in how they approach the middle school students. So, it’s a wonderful kind of thing that stereotype threat doesn’t rile around the center of the experience.” —
After a semester mentoring middle school students as part of the SEEDS project, USC neuroscience major Ka’eo Wongbusarakum better understands the challenges and work ethic involved in being a teacher. “I think that it’s given me a lot more appreciation of teaching as a career and the work and effort that goes into not only controlling the class but engaging the class and having them have a worthwhile time and get something out of this period,” he says.

He applied to become a mentor for the program because he was intrigued by its focus on multigenerational mentorship. As he mentors middle school students with the hope of piquing their interest in the sciences, he, in turn, has the opportunity to be mentored by doctoral students and STEM professionals. These relationships, he says, have the potential to influence his future.

For Wendy Rodriguez, serving as a SEEDS mentor is a homecoming of sorts. A senior biology major at Claremont McKenna College, Rodriguez participated in the USC McMorrow Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI) when she was in middle and high school at Foshay Learning Center. “So it’s pretty nice to know that I get to work with students that are going through the same program. I see myself reflected in them.” She’s happy to see NAI expand its reach to the variety of schools participating in the SEEDS project. Trying to get students from economically disadvantaged communities more interested in the sciences may have a particular impact on girls, who are underrepresented in STEM fields. In high school, Rodriguez remembers being the rare girl on the robotics team. “It was a big thing for us to have girls on the team,” she says. “I do think that representation in the sciences can get better for women and girls, and I definitely see that this program can help support that.” The students she has interacted with as a SEEDS mentor seem interested and engaged in their science curriculum, Rodriguez says. Her goal is simply to support them any way she can.

Students in the SEEDS project play the award-winning online video game Legends of Learning, which has a STEM focus and does not require students to have prior knowledge of the lessons featured. “It’s a great idea, and most of them find it enjoyable,” college mentor Ka’eo Wongbusarakum says of the game. “Just having the science in the background is enough to get kids thinking about STEM, or to just help them learn things, even if it’s subconsciously, even if they’re not memorizing things and being tested on it. Just having it in the game helps them to think about it in a new way or to actually integrate it into their knowledge.”
IN FEBRUARY 2022, Los Angeles Unified School District welcomed a new superintendent, Alberto Carvalho. Carvalho, an immigrant from Portugal, has a career in education at Miami-Dade County Public Schools in Florida, where he was a science teacher. After serving as an assistant principal, Carvalho moved to Miami-Dade’s central office, where he served in various roles including chief communications officer and assistant superintendent. In 2008, Carvalho was tapped for the role of superintendent. His 14 years at the helm of one of the largest urban districts in the nation would see it rise to one of the highest performing. A self-described “eternal optimist,” Carvalho intends to lead LAUSD toward sustained improvement. In "eternal optimist," Carvalho intends to lead LAUSD toward sustained improvement.

Alberto Carvalho Has Arrived in L.A. With Plans to Make LAUSD the Premier District in the U.S.

IN CONVERSATION

Alberto Carvalho, Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District welcomed a new superintendent, Alberto Carvalho. Carvalho, an immigrant from Portugal, began his career in education at Miami-Dade County Public Schools in Florida, where he was a science teacher. As serving as an assistant principal, Carvalho moved to Miami-Dade’s central office, where he served in various roles including chief communications officer and assistant superintendent. In 2008, Carvalho was tapped for the role of superintendent. His 14 years at the helm of one of the largest urban districts in the nation would see it rise to one of the highest performing. A self-described "eternal optimist," Carvalho intends to lead LAUSD toward sustained improvement. In "eternal optimist," Carvalho intends to lead LAUSD toward sustained improvement.

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PN: One of the issues that comes up often in L.A. is whether the district is too large. Do you think the district should be broken up and split into smaller districts?

AC: I actually don’t. I’ve studied this. I’ve looked at the performance of larger districts and midsize districts. Miami is not only one of the largest districts in the country—it’s now the third largest in terms of enrollment. And its performance, according to two administrations of NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) is number one in the country out of the 27 TUDA (Triad Urban District Assessment) districts. So, is being that large detrimental to educational attainment? I don’t think so.

What I do believe, however, is that there ought to be a degree of coherent theory of action that is seen in districts regardless of size. I do believe that under my realignment plan that takes the district from six local districts into four regions, with greater agreements regarding curriculum, materials support, coherent funding that’s differentiated on the basis of need and progress-monitoring tools, [that] the size of the district [will be] consequential.

PN: Could you explain for our readers why declining enrollment is a threat to the district, and what you’re approaching to respond to this challenge?

AC: In California, education is funded on the basis of two critical elements: enrollment, and the average daily attendance. Those are two issues that are significantly impacting the financial viability of our school system.

With that said, let’s be real. There are a number of factors that continue to influence enrollment rates in Southern California [including] declining birth rates in Los Angeles [and the] high cost of housing, which drives families to move to more affordable areas, whether it is within the state or outside California. While it’s true that the bulk of our funding is tied to the average daily attendance rate in school, social work and others, working with USC Rosier to support children, families and educators. We’ll be in touch about what comes out of this important gathering.

Let’s close with this, Alberto. When you came to L.A., I used the analogy that bringing you to L.A. was like the Lakers acquiring LeBron James. So, if I stick with that analogy, despite his great track record, LeBron is having some trouble with the Lakers right now. The team as a whole is not looking so good, and part of the problem appears to be that he doesn’t have the team he needs to win consistently. What about you? Do you feel like you have the team in place to get the work that needs to be done accomplished?

AC: I do. With that said, we have released to the board the realignment and reorganization plan that has created a number of new positions, and I’ll give you a couple of examples. I’m creating an educational transformation position that’s going to concentrate all efforts on the most fragile schools in the district [and] incorporating our work regarding BSAP (the Black Student Achievement Plan) and HEET (Humanizing Education for Equitable Transformation). This is a critically important position [that will] advocate and lift the needs of these schools at all levels of the central office.

Secondly, we created an eco-sustainability officer who will make decisions that will impact how we procure, who we contract with, the whole issue of shading in schools [and] greening of schools as well as maintenance efforts to improve outdoor learning spaces.

But, by and large, I have gotten to meet, know [and] understand the team that was here prior to my arrival. There is immense talent at the central level, the local district level and the schools. What has lacked is not raw talent, expertise [or] skill. What I found was lacking was the interconnectedness between different divisions, breaking down silos and creating systems of support that, at the end of the day, elevate the potential in schools.

I have the team members I need, and I have the team members that go beyond Beaudry District in America is rather strong, and I will not tire until we surpass where I left Miami. That’s the goal – to lead by Shaun Harper, the USC Race and Equity Center is teaching business leaders, educators and administrators how to better serve their communities with evidence-based strategies to advance equity.
Students in many fields are graduating without the skills needed to effectively address issues of race and implicit bias in their workplaces. “A lot of the work that we do at the Center is remediation,” says Harper. “We work with professionals to teach them the things they never learned in their educational training.”

The Center’s mission is to illuminate, dismantle and disrupt racism in all its forms and is “unapologetically invasive in workplace settings and the larger society,” says Shaun Harper, executive director of the USC Race and Equity Center. “At the same time, our educational institutions teach students far too little, sometimes nothing at all, about diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).”

“Most of our work at the Center is focused on educators, administrators and leaders, and equipping them with the skills that are needed to better teach and lead,” says Harper, who also holds the Clifford and Betty Allen Chair in Urban Leadership at USC Rossier. “We educate them about isms and phobias: sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism and more. But more importantly, we’re teaching them how to disrupt and dismantle those isms and phobias in the workplace.”

DEI training programs like the Center’s Racial Equity Leadership Academies educate professionals to develop cultures of inclusion within their own organizations. Equity-focused curricula help them learn to talk about race and racism, increase their understanding of DEI practices and develop strategies to implement positive change in their organizations.

Learning opportunities are customized to fit the specific needs of businesses and institutions. “We can be working with a company as big as Nike on a Monday,” says Harper, “then addressing two dozen teachers in an individual middle school on Tuesday, and working with a group of STEM department chairs on Wednesday.”

Rigorous interdisciplinary research is key to the Center’s evidence-based methods. At USC, more than 100 faculty members collaborate on research with Center experts and contribute to the development of useful tools such as the annual National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates. The Black Students 50-State Report Card grades public colleges and universities on racial equity indicators, and a recent report offers professional sports teams and leagues resources for advancing racial justice.

Since its inception, the Center has worked with more than 700 partners and clients, with projects ranging from strategic advice for academic and business leaders to multi-session corporate and campuswide training series. Courses are led by an interdisciplinary cadre of more than 60 distinguished scholars and DEI experts.

At USC, the Center provides no-cost, multyear professional DEI learning experiences to administration, staff and faculty. These live virtual sessions can accommodate up to 10,000 employees.

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K–12 RACIAL EQUITY ACADEMIES

“We’re responsible for educating all of our students, especially students of color who experience dire racial inequalities and who have been historically marginalized in schools,” says Erica Silva EdD ’19, associate director for the Center’s K–12 Professional Learning Programs. “At this time, when the national conversation around equity is so polarized, the Center plays a role in dismantling racism in schools.”

In 2021, 15% of students in America’s public schools identified as Black and 35% as Latino/Hispanic. Partnering with schools throughout California and across the country, the Center’s K–12 Racial Equity Academies offer principals, counselors, superintendents, faculty and staff the tools they need to serve their diverse student bodies. Latino and African American students comprise 8% of the Los Angeles Unified School District’s population.

In 2020, Harper partnered with LAUSD to create a Racial Equity Leadership Academy for principals and administrators in the nation’s second-largest school district. The Center’s chief academic officer, USC Rossier Professor of Clinical Education John Pascarella, designed and facilitated the ongoing project in coordination with the district’s Darnise Williams EdD ’19. Participants completing the program received an executive leadership certificate from USC Rossier.

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The academy offered a DEI learning series to 124 principals and administrators in LAUSD. “By approaching their work with a race-conscious lens, leaders were able to go back to their school communities and have productive discussions about race and racism with school staff,” notes Silva, who joined USC Rossier as the associate director for K-12 policy and programs in 2021 and, later, as an adjunct professor in the Master of Arts in Teaching Program.

Adalberto Vega, principal of John Litchy Middle School in the Pico-Union neighborhood of Los Angeles, says, “The academy allowed me to understand my own biases and gave me the confidence to lead Litchy stakeholders in brave conversations about race.”

As part of a schoolwide focus on racial equity, Vega addressed inequities faced by Black/African American students. He worked with school leaders to create the Black Students Matter Committee. To include it in the schoolwide objectives, the principal embedded his racial equity project in Litchy’s annual School Plan for Student Achievement. As the initiative progressed, he collaborated with the Los Angeles Center for Love and Justice and LAUSD’s Local District Central to inaugurate anti-racist educational projects for students and parents.

In 2017, the Center launched a Racial Equity Academy for Inglewood Unified School District, to provide DEI training for 200 teachers, counselors and administrators in the Los Angeles County-based district. The Center has worked with public and independent schools and districts across California and the nation and plans to expand its program to include more opportunities for teachers and school leaders to learn how to advance racial equity in their organizations.

STEM RACIAL EQUITY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The Center’s Racial Equity Leadership Academies have helped principals and administrators in a range of academic disciplines acquire much-needed skills in the practice of racial equity. The Racial Equity Leadership Academy for STEM Leaders is targeted to racially diverse school counselors and administrators in Los Angeles County-based districts.

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NIKE MULTYEAR DEI LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

“We’re talking about the biggest brand on the planet,” Harper says, discussing the Center’s dynamic multidisciplinary partnership with Nike. Launched in 2020, the partnership focuses on advancing DEI in every continent where the Nike, Converse and Jordan brands operate.

From the C-suite to the warehouse, the more than 300,000 employees in Nike’s ten global facilities are focused on disrupting discrimination, exploitation and homophobia in the workplace. “As we engage the corporation’s 75,000 employees, we’re developing a scalable, replicable approach to partnering with businesses of comparable magnitude,” notes Harper.

Since its inception, the Center has acquired vast experience helping corporations achieve their equity goals. In 2019, it partnered with USC Marshall to launch a professional learning portfolio for businesses, offering executive education to companies ranging from Citibank and T-Mobile to Wondery, PayScale and more.

The massive companywide endeavor with Nike began in 2019 with a DEI Leadership Acceleration Academy for nearly 400 Nike leaders across the globe. Framed within the context of the Nike workplace, sessions addressed such issues as how to recognize and reduce implicit bias, best practices for partnering with employee networks, and strategies for disrupting homophobia and heterosexism.

In 2021, the Center launched the Professional Learning Series, a course of live, online DEI learning sessions for thousands of Nike managers worldwide. Additionally, two digital short films were produced on a range of DEI topics for all Nike employees worldwide.

Brandi Junius, the Center’s director of corporate partnerships, points to an important area of the corporation—the Nike United Networks. “At Nike, affinity groups represent Black and LGBTQIA+ employees, women and others,” she says. “We’re working with network leaders to help them improve the impact of their activities, and they need to move the DEI project forward.”

The Center’s work with Nike and other businesses is grounded in their research on organizations of all sizes and contexts. “Data shows that diverse companies are more productive,” Junius says. “When you don’t treat your employees fairly, you have high turnover. It becomes difficult to recruit, hire and train talented people. But when organizations like Nike lead the way, it’s saying this is not theoretical. This is attainable.”

THE FUTURE

Looking back over the Center’s achievements, there’s something Harper would like to change. “I’d like to get ahead of the process before people enter leadership positions,” he says. “That’s an important role for higher education. We ought to better prepare students for citizenship work and for eventual leadership on DEI issues.”

In January 2021, Harper brought Christopher Emdin to the Center. Emdin is the Center’s inaugural director of youth engagement and community partnerships and a USC Rossier professor of education (p. TK). “Chris will create new programs designed specifically for young people,” says Harper.

Among the Center’s ongoing projects, a national commission on historically Black colleges and universities and racial equity launched in January. Also, a four-year initiative that began in 2019 aims to inject DEI strategies for disrupting homophobia and heterosexism within the context of the Nike workplace, sessions addressed such issues as how to recognize and reduce implicit bias, best practices for partnering with employee networks, and strategies for disrupting homophobia and heterosexism.

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As expected, NIL has quickly become a means to attract student athletes. By USC Faculty Athletics Representative

After years of resisting changes to this rule, the NCAA finally capitulated as several states were poised to implement laws that would allow student athletes to receive NIL benefits. These new laws came about thanks in part to a lawsuit filed by former UCLA basketball player Ed O’Bannon claiming damages from a video game producer who profited from his NIL. With this new era comes tremendous opportunities, challenges and responsibility for student athletes and the schools they play for.

Access to NIL opportunities is the first step in a long-awaited process to pay college athletes a share of the revenue generated by mega media deals derived from some, but not all, college sports. Of the more than 30 sports sponsored by the NCAA (USC has 21), only men’s basketball and football profited from athletes’ NIL.

Before NIL, student athletes were already inundated with demanding schedules from academics, training, rehabilitation and travel for competitions. They now must manage a new category of stressors, including autograph sessions, photo shoots and other NIL events. Expectations to land endorsement deals also put pressure on student athletes to maintain a strong social-media presence. These new demands impact mental well-being and require athletic departments to provide robust psychological services.

Although these changes present concerns, there is plenty of opportunity for student athlete empowerment through exposure to brand management and financial literacy. NIL is also a platform for social justice initiatives and access to entrepreneurial, career and professional development opportunities. Additionally, there is a potential for deep academic engagement in subject areas such as writing, business management and communications.

The challenges associated with NIL include avoiding illegal inducement of potential student athletes and navigating the mental health concerns stemming from managing yet another demand on student athletes’ time and self-image. As expected, NIL has quickly become a means to attract recruits to attend a particular college, even though the new rules expressly prohibit pay for play. With some colleges providing athletes with NIL deals just for being on a team, there is no clear line as to how these deals can be used to entice potential student athletes. It is the responsibility of schools to avoid illegal recruiting, yet they stand to benefit from the presence of a strong NIL reputation. As such, every institution must walk a fine line between controlling boosters who want to invest money toward that reputation and allowing legitimate opportunities to attract and retain athletes. Student athletes themselves risk losing their eligibility if found to have received money for choosing a particular school.

To address this issue, Kast and her colleagues at USC—two of whom include USC Rossier alumni Brittany Acero Mat ’19 and Brooke McIlvain Mat ’20—developed STEAM-Powered Careers (Room to Read), a 12-book series created to reflect the community they teach, and to educate elementary school students on the variety of groundbreaking and diverse careers in STEAM. Targeting elementary school-aged children, each book features a trio of characters and their animal friends paired with a working USC scientist, many of whom come from underrepresented communities. Offered in English and Spanish, the topics range from engineering to gastroenterology and marine biology to virtual reality.

“We tried to underlie some themes to break different stereotypes,” Kast said. For example, featured scientist Alina Garcia Taormina, a USC Viterbi alum with a PhD in material science, worked with Acero to author the book on nanotechnology. Each book also offers a lesson plan for educators.

Room to Read provided 9,000 sets of the 12 titles to various STEM education programs in the Los Angeles area. In addition to Acero, McMahon wrote the gastroenterology book and Kast wrote the oncology book with her father, Dr. W. Martin Kast; she is also the featured scientist in the polar science book. USC JEP develops service-learning activities for USC students to address community-defined needs. JEP’s STEM education programs include the Young Scientists Program, WonderKids and the Medical STEM program. It was through WonderKids, where Kast and her team discovered the need to create the book series.

“Representation matters,” Kast said in a USC JEP blog. “The data has shown that representation of yourself in the scientists you see in front of you influences your own science identity and how much you persist in STEM fields. Free digital copies of the books, in addition to NGSS-aligned lesson plans and videos of scientist interviews, are available in English and Spanish at RoomToRead.org/Steam. — R

Prior to July 1, 2021, student athletes were prohibited from receiving compensation for the use of their name, image and likeness (NIL). This rule, publicly regarded as unfair, was put in place to protect the amateur status of those competing in college sports, while others, including coaches and schools, profited from athletes’ NIL.

STEAM books for children reflect a diverse community

Three USC Rossier alums collaborated with USC Scientists and a nonprofit publisher Room to Read to author book series, STEAM-Powered Careers.

“We were having a hard time trying to pair science kids’ books—featuring characters that actually look like our kids—with our curriculum,” said USC Rossier alumnus Donovan ‘Dj’ Kast EdD ’20, Director of the STEM Education Programs at the USC Joint Educational Project (JEP), a division of USC Dornsife.

STEM identity and representation falls short in children’s literature. A study published in 2018 stated that half of all children’s books reviewed featured White main characters, and that there were more non-human characters (5%) than there were for minorities combined (4%). In the study, 40% of the children’s books featured an African American/Black main character and 5% featured a Latinx one.

To address this issue, Kast and her colleagues at USC—two of whom include USC Rossier alumni Brittany Acero Mat ’19 and Brooke McIlvain Mat ’20—developed STEAM-Powered Careers (Room to Read, 2022), a 12-book series created to reflect the community they teach, and to educate elementary school students on the variety of groundbreaking and diverse careers in STEAM. Targeting elementary school-aged children, each book features a trio of characters and their animal friends paired with a working USC scientist, many of whom come from underrepresented communities. Offered in English and Spanish, the topics range from engineering to gastroenterology and marine biology to virtual reality.

“We tried to underlie some themes to break different stereotypes,” Kast said. For example, featured scientist Alina Garcia Taormina, a USC Viterbi alum with a PhD in material science, worked with Acero to author the book on nanotechnology. Each book also offers a lesson plan for educators.

Room to Read provided 9,000 sets of the 12 titles (90,000 books total) to various STEM education programs in the Los Angeles area. In addition to Acero, McMahon wrote the gastroenterology book and Kast wrote the oncology book with her father, Dr. W. Martin Kast; she is also the featured scientist in the polar science book. USC JEP develops service-learning activities for USC students to address community-defined needs. JEP’s STEM education programs include the Young Scientists Program, WonderKids and the Medical STEM program. It was through WonderKids, where Kast and her team discovered the need to create the book series.

“Representation matters,” Kast said in a USC JEP blog. “The data has shown that representation of yourself in the scientists you see in front of you influences your own science identity and how much you persist in STEM fields. Free digital copies of the books, in addition to NGSS-aligned lesson plans and videos of scientist interviews, are available in English and Spanish at RoomToRead.org/Steam. — R

Other alumni publications

Embracing Workplace Religious Diversity and Inclusion: Key Challenges and Solutions

Ed Hasan EdD ’18, founder and CEO, Kaizen Human Capital (Palgrave Macmillan August 2022) Challenging organizations to take religion and religious inclusion in the workplace seriously, this book explores multiple perspectives and themes, from workplace stigma and employment discrimination to strategic diversity and inclusion management. Expanding on his USC Rossier doctoral dissertation, the author focuses on integrating theory and practice in examining emerging religious inclusion issues in the workplace, providing insights based on real-world case studies.

By Ellen Evarten

Faculty publications

Teaching and Supporting English Learners: A Guide to Welcoming and Engaging Newcomers

Eugenia Mora-Flores, professor of clinical education and assistant dean of teacher education at USC Rossier; and Stephanie Dewing, assistant professor of clinical education at USC Rossier (Shell Educational Publishing/December 2023)

This professional book provides step-by-step strategies and practical tips to help teachers bring English language instruction into any classroom. With this meaningful resource, teachers will meet English learners’ diverse needs and make newcomers feel safe and welcome.
In business, higher education, or in the K-12 districts, our grads are making a difference in their communities.

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Our graduates are impacting education in the following ways:

- **Superintendent, Temple City Unified School District:** Arthur J. Cunha EdD '07
- **Superintendent, Tecumseh Unified School District:** Haan J. D鞋liamond EdD '19
- **Superintendent, Benedict, Capital Advisors Group LLC:** Ayanna D. Davis EdD '17
- **Superintendent, York University:** Rosea Fuentes BA '94
- **Superintendent, Berkeley Unified School District:** Cheryl Hildreth EdD '19
- **Superintendent, Sierra Nevada College:** Mathew G. Homan EdD '17
- **Superintendent, Beverly Hills Unified School District:** John Hu EdD '18
- **Superintendent, Long Beach Unified School District:** Catalina Lara EdD '17
- **Superintendent, Montclair Unified School District:** Raul Diaz EdD '19
- **Superintendent, Chaffey Joint Union High School District:** K. E. McCaughey EdD '14
- **Superintendent, San Leandro Unified School District:** Steven C. McLoughlin EdD '11
- **Superintendent, San Lorenzo Unified School District:** Patricia C. Spain EdD '17
- **Superintendent, Lincoln Unified School District:** Matthew Mayer EdD '10
- **President, San Francisco Human Rights Commission:** Solaline Leatutufu-Burch EdD '21
- **President, University of California:** Juanita Gonzalez, President (Retired), Pacific Union College
- **President, Santa Clara University:** Matthew Hyatt EdD '19
- **President, Harvard University:** Roger J. Thompson EdD '98
- **President, Cal Poly Pomona:** Cecilia Santiago-Gonzalez EdD '12
- **President, CSU Fullerton:** Maria M. McCoy EdD '19
- **President, UCSC:** Matthew E. Torne EdD

More information about the USC Rossier School of Education can be found on their website at [www.uscrosnier.org](http://www.uscrosnier.org).
USC Rossier Alumnus and Keck Medicine Medical Director Launches Leadership Training Program for Physicians

James Hu MD EdD ’21 turned to USC Rossier’s OCL program to help facilitate systemic change at Keck Medicine.

Story: Hope Hamashiga

TOP-SHELF CLINICAL CARE AND CUTTING-EDGE medical research are, for obvious reasons, at the core of Keck Medicine of USC’s mission. But there have been times, according to James Hu MD EdD ’21, when this laser focus on medical excellence has left its leaders unable to solve problems like physician burnout, lack of engagement and faculty retention.

“Leaders at many academic institutions are chosen because they are experts in their specific fields, not for leadership qualities,” said Hu, a physician and medical director of the Sarcoma Program of USC. “I felt that leaders were coming up with linear solutions to complex problems focused on the individuals and not the environment.”

Though Hu wanted to help facilitate systemic change within Keck Medicine, he also believed he needed to learn some new, nonmedical skills. In 2018, he decided to pursue a doctorate in organizational change and leadership (OCL) at the USC Rossier School of Education.

He says his time at USC Rossier gave him new insights into the skills that leaders need to employ to lead successful organizations. To put his new knowledge to the test, he is now teaching a leadership training course for program directors and division chiefs at Keck Medicine that is based on research he conducted as an EdD student.

For his dissertation, Hu created a survey that he sent to 2,145 colleagues about physician burnout and leadership behaviors. It helped him understand which leadership behaviors boosted morale and engagement among his colleagues and which fell flat.

Though there are many leadership training courses already available through books, online and in person, the course Hu created, the Keck School of Medicine Leadership Program, is unique because it is homegrown. “This one is grounded in data about our unique opportunities and barriers and being taught by instructors from USC,” said Hu.

In the 11-month program, which launched in the fall, participants attend lectures on subjects including theories of leadership and systems thinking. They do homework and attend in-person sessions to discuss the material as it relates to challenges they are facing. Each student will create an implementation plan to overcome a problem they identify that is unique to their department.

“They will come to learn how to address complex problems and learn when they need to implement new processes because the existing framework is falling,” said Hu.

“The course is something of a departure, in that teaching colleagues from other USC schools is not the norm, said Maria Ott, the Irving R. and Virginia A. Melbo Chair in Education Administration and a professor of clinical education at USC Rossier. Nevertheless, Ott—one of the instructors in Hu’s course—said the leaders at USC Rossier believe that cross-discipline sharing can be enormously beneficial.

“Leadership development is core to what we do at USC Rossier,” said Ott. “And while people may not think that doctors need leadership training, we believe that every field needs it and can be improved by developing the leadership potential of their team.”

Ott also noted that 27 (more than one-third) of the directors and division chiefs at Keck Medicine signed up for the course, an indication that there is demand for this kind of training and a broad commitment among the leaders at Keck Medicine to improving the organization.

“If we were offering something they didn’t need or didn’t want, they wouldn’t have signed up for it,” said Ott. “It’s a compliment to Dr. Hu because he has a vision about taking a great organization and making it better, I think he has inspired them with his vision of where this organization can go in the future.”

For his part, Hu said he is impressed with the leaders who are taking his course because it is a commitment of time and effort to improve themselves and the organization. “Leadership is incredibly hard,” noted Hu, “but it can be taught, and my hope is that we can grow a cadre of informed and motivated leaders who will affect positive change in the culture of our organization.”

1990s

PAUL MCBARRY MS ’94 earned an MS in education at USC and an MA in TESOL at California State University, Los Angeles. Paul recently completed their eight-year quest as a lecturer at the USC International Academy and continues to work for the Los Angeles Unified School District’s Division of Adult and Career Education.

JENNIFER PRINGLE-STAR NSH ’95 is the principal at San Felicita and Perpetua School in San Marino, Calif.

2000s

BRENNA ALBERT BS ’01 joined Medline Industries as a vice president, global controller. In this role, Brenna will oversee all accounting and controller functions globally. Medicine does business in more than 90 countries with revenues of approximately $120 billion in fiscal year 2021. Her training in education and leadership at USC Rossier is critical for her in this prominent leadership position.

JENNIFER VEGA LA SERRA PhD ’02 was awarded the Carter Doran Leadership Award from the California Community Colleges Chief Instructional Officers at the Spring Conference in San Francisco in April for her statewide work on diversity, equity and inclusion.

JEANNETTE CHIEN EdD ’04 was awarded the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators 2022 Central Office Administrator of the Year award in July in Santa Clara.

2010s

ROSE HAJIAN MAT ’10 is the third grade elementary teacher at Pilgrim School in Los Angeles.

CRAIG BARTHOLIO EdD ’10 is the coordinator for special education at Chino Valley Unified School District, where he leads instructional, academic and administrative technology services.

MARIE DACUMOS EdD ’08 was awarded the Alex Odeh Memorial Award for her scholarship, leadership, activism and philanthropy by the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

ROGER RICE EdD ’07 taught at an American Indian reservation in Arizona in the 1990s, a division of Akison, Andelson, Loya, Raud & Romo, supporting education leaders in all areas of practice but especially in human resources, continuing education and alternative education.

MARIE DACUMOS EdD ’08 is in a new role at the USC Rossier Office for Professional Development Programs overseeing the School Leadership Academy and Urban Superintendents Academy.

THOMAS TAN EdD ’08 is the executive director of technology services at Huntington Beach City School District, where he leads instructional, academic and administrative technology services.

MIRIAM EZZANI EdD ’09 is an associate professor of educational leadership in the Texas Christian University College of Education. She received a promotion and tenure in spring 2022.

DIANE SHAMMAS PhD ’09 was awarded the Alex Odeh Memorial Award for her scholarship, leadership and philanthropy by the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Diane was also recognized with a humanitarian Award by the South West Asian North African (SWANA) students association of California State University for her support to push forward the vote of CSUs to approve a SWANA classification for applicants. She also set up an annual fund for California State University, Fullerton to support SWANA student activities, a SWANA center within CSUF’s Diversity Center and faculty to teach Middle East and diaspora studies.

Highlights From Class Notes

Class Notes are compiled and written by Tom Artauga, USC Rossier’s director of alumni engagement. For additional Class Notes, please visit rossier.usc.edu/alumni/class-notes. To submit updates for consideration or future magazine issues, please email alumni@rossier.usc.edu.

JOIN MORE THAN 2,500 ALUMNI & CURRENT STUDENTS ON THE USC ROSSIER CAREER NETWORK!

The USC Rossier Career Network is our online networking and mentorship platform designed to connect members of the USC Rossier family (students, alumni, faculty and staff). Platform features include a searchable member directory and a built-in messaging system. Users can pose questions to the entire community, join groups, share job leads, learn about events and explore resources.

— Join today at rossier.peoplepro.com
REGINA ZURBANO EdD ’11 is the new director of curriculum and instruction—secondary for the Palmdale School District in Palmdale, Calif. She is excited to join this dynamic organization that serves almost 18,000 students in Grades K-10 living in the greater Palmdale area in the Antelope Valley. Regina oversees the MIP Grant, which supports the five Nationally Certified Magnet Academies (6-8), the upper grades of three K-8 schools and one charter high school. She provides leadership in the ongoing development and improvement of curriculum and instruction in PSSD for the middle school and high school levels, assists in the planning, organization, support and evaluation of the curriculum and assessment programs of PSSD; and works collaboratively with all district personnel to develop a high-quality educational program for all students, processes and products. This is a homecoming for Regina as she grew up in the Antelope Valley.

LAURA REDARON Mat ’12 completed an EdM in independent school leadership from Teachers College, Columbia University, in February 2023. She pursued this course of study while also working full time as an English language arts coordinator and English teacher at Sierra Canyon School in Los Angeles. In addition, since graduating from USC in 2013, she and her husband have welcomed two daughters, Vivian (2018) and Eleanor (2020). She is in her 11th year of teaching with a demonstrated commitment to being an agent of positive change in educational settings.

MATTHEW JELLICK Mat-TESOL ’12 returned home to California after six years of living and teaching in China. During this time in Shenzhen, he became the assistant director of the language department at his university, worked in partnership with the U.S. Embassy on teacher development programming across the country and was invited to join the Executive Committee of the USC Alumni Association of South China. MATTHEW CROWThER EdD ’14 is the new director of curriculum, instruction and assessment for one of Los Angeles’ earliest charter organizations, The Accelerated School (TAS), which is composed of 1,800 students at Wallis Annenberg High School, the upper grades of three Accelerated Charter Elementary School (ACES). Campuses are located less than a mile from USC’s campus and serve students of the South Los Angeles community. Among his first-year focus areas are elementary-middle-high school articulation, college/career readiness for the high school and working with the site leaders on continuing to support students returning to school after more than a year at home due to COVID-19 during a mentoring block most of the fall of 2021. The new focus aims to advance prosperity in San Francisco’s diverse Black communities.

SAIDH LEATUTUFO-BURCH EdD ’21, inaugural director of San Francisco’s Dream Keeper Initiative (DKI), is well on her way to “changing the way the world works.”

Part of Mayor London Breed’s response to the killing of George Floyd, the initiative is a citywide effort launched in 2021 to advance prosperity in San Francisco’s diverse Black communities. It began as a one-time reallocation of $10 million in law enforcement funding to reimagine public safety and address structural inequities, but has grown into an annual fund earmarked for Black-centered cultural arts and programming. Last year, DKI awarded 141 grants worth $80 million.

“This is the first time that San Francisco has intentionally geared resources toward these communities,” explains Leatutufu-Burch. “It’s an acknowledgement of the historical harm that we experienced during redevelopment—the massive displacement of Black folks, the number of educational and economic disparities, as well as over-policing in the Black community.”

San Francisco was once a hub of Black prosperity. In its heyday, the Fillmore District was known as the “Harlem of the West.” Recent decades, however, have seen the city’s Black population collapse—from 9.1% in the 1970s to under 6% today.

DKI’s mission is to promote prosperity in San Francisco’s diverse Black communities, and that’s an important adjective for Leatutufu-Burch, who “unapologetically” identifies as both Black and Samoan. “The Black community is not a monolith—we’re a mosaic,” she says.

A self-described “organizer, activist and disruptor of anti-Black racism and systems rooted in White supremacist ideology,” she brings a reformer’s zeal to government service. “I enter my every work day with that mindset,” she says. “What I’m most passionate about and hopeful for is attaining Black liberation and indigenous sovereignty in my lifetime.”

Leatutufu-Burch chose the Organizational Change and Leadership program because she sees herself as a reformer. She was drawn to the program’s practical focus and ideal for “folks who don’t just want to think about the way the world works, but actually want to change the way the world works.”

The 33-year-old San Francisco native is the youngest child of a Hawaiian-born Samoan father, a city field engineer, and an African American mother, a retired deputy sheriff. Leatutufo-Burch and her siblings grew-up economically poor, living in North Beach public housing. A first-generation student, she earned her bachelor’s in political science at the University of San Francisco in 2011, and her master of public administration at San Francisco State in 2015.

ALUMNI NEWS

BUU VAN NYGREN EdD ’21 Elected NAVAJO Nation President

At 35, Buu Van Nygren EdD ’21 became the youngest person elected president of the Navajo Nation on Nov. 8. A 2021 graduate of USC Rossier’s Organizational Change and Leadership Program, Nygren upsets popular incumbent Jonathan Nez. Nygren and his running mate, Michelle Montoya, defeated Nez and running mate Chad A bigger 40.5% to 42.1%. Montoya is the first woman to hold the position of vice president. The offices carry national influence because the tribe’s reservation is by far the largest in the U.S. at about 430,000.

Its population of about 400,000 is the largest economy in the world. The offices carry national influence because the tribe’s reservation is by far the largest in the U.S. at about 430,000.

Nygren’s platform focuses on creating a network of mentors who were templates for Leatutufu-Burch, who “unapologetically” identifies as both Black and Samoan. “The Black community is not a monolith—we’re a mosaic,” she says.

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KELSEY IINO EdD '14 was appointed to the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) Board of Trustees. LACCD is the largest community college system in the country.

ARNOLD LANNUZI EdD '14 was appointed president of Damien Memorial School in Honolulu. He is an alumnus of Damien and will be the school’s fourth president. Before his return to Damien, he had a distinguished career with the FBI and the Hawaii Department of Education.

BEN DIMAPINDAN EdD '15 was appointed associate dean of communications strategy and digital media at the USC Gould School of Law.

KATHERINE STOPP EdD '15 was named superintendent of the Fontana Valley School District. She is the first woman in the district’s nearly 60-year history to serve in this role. Four Valley School District is composed of 10 schools serving more than 6,000 K-8 students from Fountain Valley and Huntington Beach. Cali, Katherine is the perfect candidate to continue the spirit of excellence of FVSD for many years to come, and the FVSD community is excited for her appointment.

JOSIEHLYN MARTIN ME '16 is the assistant director of residential life for care and support at Cal State University, Monterey Bay. This role entails serving on the departmental leadership to make critical decisions around support processes for our residential student population. The position also handles high-level crisis management and collaborates with various campus partners for appropriate referral.

CLAARA A. FINNERAN EdD '16 is the new superintendent of Lompoc Unified School District in Santa Barbara County. Between 2016 and her new position, she has served as assistant superintendent of education at Las Vegas Unified School District in Calabasas. She is fluent in Spanish and American Sign Language. Clara received a bachelor’s in psychology, Spanish and theology from Notre Dame, a Master of Arts in Teaching from the university of Portland, and an MA in Educational leadership from the University of San Francisco. She earned her doctorate in Educational Leadership from USC Rossier.

OSCAR LUGO MAT '16 was serving as assistant superintendent of the Fountain Valley School District. She is the first woman in the district’s nearly 60-year history to serve in this role. Fountain Valley School District is composed of 10 schools serving more than 6,000 K-8 students from Fountain Valley and Huntington Beach. Cali, Katherine is the perfect candidate to continue the spirit of excellence of FVSD for many years to come, and the FVSD community is excited for her appointment.

NICOLE WHITNER EdD '18 is assistant vice president and dean of students (AVP/ODS) at the University of San Diego. Nicole serves as a member of the Student Affairs Leadership Team and as a principal adviser to the VP of Student Development. Central to the work of the entire Student Division is a focus on the diversity of the student learning experience as embodied in the Thriving Student Model, which seeks to facilitate a leading-edge curricular experience grounded in inclusion, diversity and equity. The AVP/ODS oversees areas such as residential life, student conduct and the Center for Student Success.

JAYNEMARIE ANGBAH EdD '18 is director, Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Change Learning Journey, at the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies. In this role, she champions, promotes and helps shape and implement equity-based initiatives across the organization’s operations, talent and HR, and communications teams, as well as serves as a resource for grantmaking portfolios and programs. She also is supporting and strengthening an equitable and inclusive culture and a sense of belonging across all teams at Schusterman.

SANISHA MUEPO EdD ‘18 is the new G.T.E. (gifted and talented education) coordinator at Harte Prep Middle School in Los Angeles. Her company, Think Big Educational Services, has a podcast on Apple, Spotify, Amazon and Bullitt in Flight Radio featuring topics on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, college access, scholarship resources, relationships and more.
Leading With Love and Care

San Diego County Superintendent Paul Gothold EdD ’17 aims to improve conditions for all students, including migrant and transborder students.

Story: Adriana Macias

SAN DIEGO COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT PAUL GOTHOLD EdD ’17 has been an educator for 30 years, but he didn’t intend to be. A business major, he ended up in the classroom inطار 1992 and fell in love with teaching. In Gothold’s fourth year of teaching, a principal pulled him aside and asked him to help mentor other teachers. Once Gothold saw the impact he could have in scaling his knowledge and techniques for working with students, he was hooked, and he moved into a leadership role as an assistant principal.

“I was fortunate that people saw skills in me at that time that I didn’t necessarily see in myself,” he said.

Seeing the potential in students that others might not see is something that drives Gothold today as he leads the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) in improving learning conditions so all students can be college-ready. SDCOE serves the region’s most vulnerable students, supporting nearly 300,000 students and 42 school districts. With the county touching the U.S.-Mexico border, SDCOE has served unaccompanied minors and transborder students, or those who cross the U.S.-Mexico border to attend school. While the exact number of transborder students is unknown, it’s estimated that the Tijuana-San Diego region has thousands.

One program that Gothold led to support unaccompanied minors was Future Braviles at the San Diego Convention Center, which served as a temporary shelter for them in 2021. The ad hoc school ran classes twice a week for a few hours a day, serving over 3,500 students for four months. The effort drew employees from across SDCOE departments to create a curriculum, teach, and provide materials, technical needs and translation support for unaccompanied migrant students.

Despite threats made to his family as a result of the program, Gothold persevered. “Those threats were addressed, but they are indicative of what we can come up against when we try to educate young people who are in extremely difficult circumstances,” Gothold said.

In accommodating the transborder students, Gothold spoke proudly of the Global Academy of California, a National City-based college-preparatory independent study program for ninth- through 12th-graders designed to foster students’ global competency. The Global Academy affords both local and transnational students the flexibility to earn a high school diploma based on articulated criteria recognized by SDCOE.

“The success of the Global Academy led to more conversations with Mexico,” Gothold said, including the development of a binational diploma that would be good on both sides of the border. “The goal is to make sure that the kids have access to skills and learning opportunities regardless of which side they live on. There are benefits to the whole region by ensuring that young people are prepared academically to contribute to society.”

Professor of Clinical Education Darline Robbins, a former superintendent of the Los Angeles County Office of Education, has served as a role model and mentor during Gothold’s career. “It has been a privilege to have worked with Paul and witness his career trajectory, from teacher, principal and superintendent,” she said. “His genuine love for students, staff and the community he serves is what drives him to be a servant leader.”

Gothold credits USC Rossier for providing him with the theories and research-based evidence to validate the work that he has done on behalf of marginalized students. “I taught probation-expelled kids in L.A. County. I saw how students were excluded from the education system. We had to rebuild these students and restore their hope. I loved watching kids turn their lives around,” said Gothold. “USC gave me a framework and access to research that I could hang onto and explain the ‘why’ to people about how to better serve historically marginalized communities.”

IN MEMORIAM

Susan Jane Rainley EdD ’83, who served as superintendent of the Riverside Unified School District from 1998 to 2009, passed away Sept. 25, 2022. She was 75. Rainley started teaching in the late 1960s, and at age 33 she was appointed principal at Brea Olinda High School, one of only six women to be a high school principal in California at the time. After her tenure leading Riverside Unified, Rainley served two terms in the Riverside County Office of Education. She also volunteered for, and often led, numerous charitable organizations in the city.

Katherine Cifonne GCT ’20 (a mild/moderate special education teacher at Los Gatos Union School District in Los Gatos, Calif.) and was named the 2021-2022 LSUIG Special Education Teacher of the Year.

ERIK HOLLANDER EdD ’20 is an associate professor of business at Concordia University Wisconsin and was awarded the 2022 Barrett School of Business Undergraduate Business Faculty of the Year.

ENRIQUE RUACHO EdD ’20 is chief of staff for Superintendent Lamont Jackson at San Diego Unified School District.

CLAUDIA MONToya-ANDREWS ME ’20 is director of career education at Coastline College in the Coastline Community College District in Orange County, Calif.

BRANDON ELLIOTT EdD ’21 is the recipient of the Louis Botto Award for Innovative Action and Entrepreneurial Zeal from Chorus America.

MARIANNA CID Mat ’22 is a third-grade Spanish dual language teacher for Los Angeles Unified School District.

HOWARD CROOM EdD ’22 is the associate athletic director, chief diversity officer and director of student services and affiliated faculty in the School of Language, Culture and Society at Oregon State University.

GARY SAUNDERS EdD ’22 is the interim executive director for Gorman Learning Charter Network in Redlands, Calif.

DOMENIKA LYNN BS ’98, MFT ’15 APPOINTED TO THE COMMISSION ON PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS

Domenika Lynch BS ’98, MFT ’15, executive director of the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program, has been appointed by President Joe Biden to the Commission on Presidential Scholars.

The commissioners, eminent private citizens selected from across the country in the fields of education, medicine, law, social services and business, among others, make the final selection of the 15 Presidential Scholars. The scholars demonstrate exceptional accomplishments in academia, the arts, career and technical education, and an outstanding commitment to public service.

Lynch also was appointed to serve on the U.S. Small Business Administration Council for Underserved Communities. She has led the Aspen Institute program since the summer of 2020. Before that she served as president and CEO of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, an organization founded by Hispanic members of Congress.

ALUMNI NEWS

MICHELLE MALTER EdD ’18 joined The SCAN Foundation as senior policy analyst. Michelle serves as the principal analyst supporting the foundation’s vision, mission and strategic priorities by evaluating, reporting on and engaging with communications, policy and programmatic issues related to aging, health, family caregiving and long-term care efforts.

TERRI HORTON EdD ’18 was included in Onalytica’s 2022 Who’s Who in Future of Work Global Report, listed as a key opinion leader and expert with high authority and credibility.

STEPHANIE BURROUGHS EdD ’19 is the assistant superintendent at Foxborough Public Schools in Foxborough, Mass., and oversees all K-12 curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development.

CNSUOLO HERNANDEZ WILLIAMS EdD ’19 is the associate superintendent–student services at the Ventura County Office of Education.

BEATRICE BAVANIDES MAT ’19 is the director of career services at Bank Street College of Education in New York City.

JULIE AGUIRRE-JACINTO EdD ’19 is the director of elementary education at Morgan Hill Unified School District in Morgan Hill, Calif.

MARTHA MONAHAN EdD ’19 is the director of human resources at Palisades Charter High School in Pacific Palisades, Calif.

KRISTINA WRIGHT EdD ’19 is the director of learning and design at the Making Waves Foundation in Richmond, Calif., and is responsible for the design and implementation of responsive and innovative college access and success models, and program strategies grounded in data, student and community voice, and best practices to ensure all students thrive on their college journey, by design.

SONIA MAXSON GCT ’19 is the resource specialist at Chámakilawish Pechanga School, working with special education indigenous students on a small Indian reservation in Southern California.

2006

KATHLEEN CIFONNE GCT ’20 (a mild/moderate special education teacher at Los Gatos Union School District in Los Gatos, Calif.) and was named the 2021-2022 LSUIG Special Education Teacher of the Year.

ERIK HOLLANDER EdD ’20 is an associate professor of business at Concordia University Wisconsin and was awarded the 2022 Barrett School of Business Undergraduate Business Faculty of the Year.

ENRIQUE RUACHO EdD ’20 is chief of staff for Superintendent Lamont Jackson at San Diego Unified School District.

CLAUDIA MONToya-ANDREWS ME ’20 is director of career education at Coastline College in the Coastline Community College District in Orange County, Calif.

BRANDON ELLIOTT EdD ’21 is the recipient of the Louis Botto Award for Innovative Action and Entrepreneurial Zeal from Chorus America.

MARIANNA CID Mat ’22 is a third-grade Spanish dual language teacher for Los Angeles Unified School District.

HOWARD CROOM EdD ’22 is the associate athletic director, chief diversity officer and director of student services and affiliated faculty in the School of Language, Culture and Society at Oregon State University.

GARY SAUNDERS EdD ’22 is the interim executive director for Gorman Learning Charter Network in Redlands, Calif.

ALUMNI NEWS
Transforming Educational Opportunities

The USC Rossier Educational Equity Initiative is reinventing education to be responsive to the needs of every learner.

By Katrina Nash

Dean Pedro A. Noguera launched the USC Rossier Educational Equity Initiative in the fall at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. The ambitious initiative consists of five priority projects designed to create transformative educational opportunities for children in Los Angeles and across the country.

In his opening remarks, Dean Noguera reflected on the goals he set forth for USC Rossier when he joined the school in 2020, asking, “How do we create the change our system desperately needs? What can we at USC Rossier do that no one else can?”

Focusing on the needs of every learner, Noguera said, “The education system has lost its center,” adding, “Rossier is place-based, located in the middle of a community that needs quality teaching as much as any place in our country.”

At a time when a deepening partisan divide is threatening the foundations of our democracy, the Democracy Project is rethinking how civic education can meet this challenging moment. “In some ways, I believe the education system has lost its center,” said USC Rossier Board of Councilors member Gary Crisp, who was also in attendance. “I want to support the next generation of children to be the best they can be, live their dreams and have the right tools to succeed in life.”

The Democracy Project will provide teachers with a curriculum to help students learn about complex issues while simultaneously teaching them how to conduct independent research and engage in civil discourse.

Expanding the Teacher Residency Program will provide more than 30 talented, bright students with a fully funded Master of Arts in Teaching degree, a living stipend and a two-term teaching position with a mentor teacher, adequately preparing them for the challenges ahead. “Our institution is committed to ensuring that school leaders are prepared to face the challenges of today as well as create equitable learning environments through the establishment of practices and systems that ensure positive learning outcomes for all students,” said USC Board of Councilors member Patricia Brent-Sanco EdD ’16.

As part of the Educational Equity Initiative, USC Rossier will work directly with LAUSD to train new teachers, support existing teachers with professional development in instructional best practices and provide critical social services to children and families. “The future of teaching is more threatened than it has ever been in our society,” said USC Rossier Board of Councilors Chair Reverta Franklin Bowers BA ’70, who spoke at the launch. “Rossier is place-based, located in the middle of a community that needs quality teaching as much as any place in our country.”

To learn more about the USC Rossier Educational Equity Initiative, please visit rossier.usc.edu/equity or contact Alex Pampalone, associate dean for advancement, at pampalon@rossier.usc.edu.
A perfect day for football, and for meeting up with classmates and friends! USC Rossier students pose at the school’s annual Homecoming Picnic on Nov. 5, 2022.