

USC Rossier

M A G A Z I N E

USC ROSSIER SCHOOL OF EDUCATION MAGAZINE : FALL / WINTER 2021

BREAKTHROUGH LEADERSHIP

What Does Leadership Look Like After the Pandemic?

The new tools leaders need for today's challenges

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ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS GASH

Dear Friends,



As the nation's schoolchildren and college students returned to classrooms this fall, educational leaders found themselves confronting a variety of unprecedented challenges and controversies wrought by the pandemic. Still contending with the serious public health threat, superintendents, school boards and

college administrators are dealing with mask and vaccine mandates (or none), as well as vociferous opposition to each; student learning loss; an alarming rise in mental health needs; greater awareness of the systemic inequities that threaten the well-being of children and families; and bitter debates over critical race theory and how to teach the history of racism in America. What a way to start the school year!

To navigate these issues while keeping an eye firmly focused on student support and outcomes, educational leaders find themselves compelled to acquire a new set of skills. Resourcefulness, tact and diplomacy, and an ability to communicate to divided constituencies are just some of the attributes required. What is needed is a form of leadership that many educators lack training or experience in, through no fault of their own.

This issue of *USC Rossier Magazine* explores how we might address the gap in real-world preparation that educators may be experiencing. How do those in leadership positions break through the challenges they are confronting to make a difference for their students and communities?

At USC Rossier, we believe the answers lie in our willingness to re-examine how we prepare these leaders, and we are looking at our own curriculum and approach to graduate training. As one of the nation's premier producers of educational leaders, USC Rossier is committed to ensuring that these professionals receive the very best training for tackling the complex issues they will face. We will do this, in part, by ensuring that our faculty has the knowledge and experience—but also the intuition and the empathy—to instill the next generation of “Breakthrough Leaders” with these same vital qualities.

One leader and USC Rossier alumnus whom you'll read about in this issue emphasizes the need for much more of one simple human quality. It's a quality that is fleeting at the best of times, but one that he feels is in especially short supply in our world right now. You'll also read how USC Rossier is moving to support him and all Breakthrough Leaders, from K-12 through higher education, through innovative policy proposals and groundbreaking research. And you will get additional perspective from alumni leaders working in fields outside education.

As the return to school proceeds and we watch the news, warily, hoping that our long period of disruption soon ends, USC Rossier is committed to equipping today's leaders as fully and effectively as we can to meet the historic new demands of their profession.

Fight On!

Pedro Noguera

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

On August 31—the first day of school at Long Beach Unified—Superintendent Jill Baker EdD '04 asks first graders at Roosevelt Elementary School if they have lost any teeth yet.

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Breakthrough Leadership

What does it mean to be a good leader? Styles of leadership and what makes one an effective leader change with the culture and context of the moment. In antiquity, empires were judged by their size and their ability to expand their borders, and the emperors who ruled them were often worshipped as gods and lauded for their abilities to conquer their neighbors. These days, the idea of leaders being at the center of all things is changing, as we are beginning to see leaders not as the person with all the answers, but the one who is asking the right questions.

It's easy to be an armchair expert in leadership, but the doing of leadership is no easy task, particularly when one considers the moment we find ourselves in. In this issue of *USC Rossier Magazine*, we explore what effective leadership looks like in these times. What are the questions leaders should be asking as we seek to rebuild and revitalize our educational systems so that we are adequately responding to the truths that were elucidated by the pandemic? What skills do leaders need to successfully serve their communities? These are the questions we grapple with in our lead feature story, "What Does Leadership Look Like After the Pandemic?" (p. 12). You'll also read about two alums who navigated the pandemic and evolved their roles as education tech leaders (p. 24). Professor Tracy Poon Tambascia EdD '07, newly elected president of the USC Academic Senate, shares her approach to leadership in this issue's "In Conversation" interview (p. 30), and Air Force Maj. Kristine Poblete EdD '17 reflects on the mentorship from the strong women who have helped her discover her strengths (p. 40).

Just as our society and the institutions that hold us together evolve, so too do the techniques, skills and strategies needed from today's leaders.

Kianoosh Hashemzadeh, Editor



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STORY IDEAS? FEEDBACK?

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ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS GASH

USC ROSSIER COMMENCEMENT, MAY 16, 2021. USC PHOTO / MICHAEL BAKER

Embracing Change While Honoring Tradition

This Qatar-based Global EdD student is exploring how

By Diane Krieger

MAHA AL ROMAIHI HAS POLITICAL AMBITIONS, and she isn't coy about them. "I aspire to be Qatar's minister of education," says the 43-year-old international student, smiling confidently. Now in her third term in USC Rossier's Global Executive Doctor of Education program, Al Romaihi sees the doctorate as an essential step.

As founding director of the Tariq Bin Ziad School (TBZ), she's already a trailblazer. TBZ is a bilingual school run by the nonprofit Qatar Foundation with a mission to fuse a progressive International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum with a culture deeply rooted in Qatari heritage.

Women like Al Romaihi—backed by Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, wife of the Father Emir and co-founder and chair of the Qatar Foundation—are leaders in Qatari education. The Qatar Foundation, a Doha-based nonprofit, operates 13 independent K-12 schools and runs dozens of other projects based in its centralized Education City, where eight world-class universities operate degree-granting satellite programs on a shared urban campus.

Qatar faces unusual educational challenges and opportunities. "We're a population of 2.6 million people—almost all live in [Doha]—but only 330,000 are Qatari citizens," explains Al Romaihi. Eighty-eight percent of students are noncitizens—the children of South Asian guest workers, expats and businesspeople from neighboring Middle Eastern and African countries, as well as from East Asia, Europe and North America.

Qataris appreciate Doha's multicultural vibe, but they're proud and protective of their language, heritage and Islamic traditions. "Huge changes are happening," Al Romaihi says. "At the same time, we are very keen to keep to our roots."

In 2019, when Al Romaihi took the helm at TBZ, she was tasked with reimagining how it could adhere to the progressive IB framework while embracing Qatar's distinctiveness. The key, she believes, lies in 50-50 bilingual education—half-English, half-Arabic. "The question is: How can we introduce a dual-language program that gives Arabic the status we want it to keep, while also learning English, which is the world language of business and economics and gets you so many opportunities?" she says. For her EdD thesis, Al Romaihi will look at models around the world and determine what best fits Qatar's circumstances.

Al Romaihi loved the English language from a young age in Qatar and says her "English teacher was my idol." Her



parents spoke little English. Dad worked as a government clerk; Mom was an administrative assistant. Neither had an education beyond middle school. She grew up steeped in 1980s and '90s American pop culture. "I know all of Madonna's and Michael Jackson's songs," she says. Watching American TV shows like *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* greatly improved her vocabulary.

After earning her bachelor's in education from Qatar University, she became an English teacher. She got promoted to curriculum coordinator, then vice principal and principal. Along the way, she earned a master's in educational leadership, also from Qatar University. Eleven years ago, she moved from Doha's public school system to the Qatar Foundation's network of independent schools.

She also raised two sons. Both are now students at Education City: Abdullah, 19, studies media and communication through Northwestern University in Doha, and Abdul Aziz, 18, begins his freshman year in Texas A&M University's mechanical engineering satellite program.

For Al Romaihi, the decision to enroll in the Global EdD program was driven by curiosity about what works outside Qatar. The ability to study part time and continue as TBZ's director was "the cherry on top." Her husband, Soud, a retired police officer, is "very supportive," she adds.

While the program's trips to Los Angeles and Singapore were canceled in 2020, her cohort finally met in person in July, when they convened for their first eight-day residential session at USC. Al Romaihi can't wait to explore more of the global education landscape with her classmates. Future intensives will take them to Helsinki, Johannesburg and São Paulo, Brazil, where they'll interact with local education leaders and visit innovative lab schools.

"This is the beauty of the program and why, I think, most of us signed up," she says. "Because we all love traveling, love to be in different cultures and want to get to know the educational scene of each country." —R

↑ Last summer, Maha Al Romaihi and other students in the Global EdD program were finally able to meet in person for the first time. The cohort gathered at the USC campus for their first eight-day residential session.

PHOTO BY BRIAN MORRI / 211 PHOTOGRAPHY

Dean Noguera interviews U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona as a part of EDTECH WEEK

By Brian Sokia

IN AN EVENT LIVE STREAMED IN APRIL, USC Rossier Dean Pedro A. Noguera interviewed U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona. The conversation spanned a variety of topics related to how schools can leverage funds from the American Rescue Plan to support students and families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted some of Cardona's priorities as the nation's top educational leader.

The interview was a lead event for EDTECH WEEK, an annual educational technology conference. This year the conference featured *Shark Tank*-style pitch sessions, as well as panels with leaders from technology, business and education. Several USC Rossier faculty members and one student took part in the week's discussions, including Alan Arkatov, founding director of USC Rossier's Center for Engagement-Driven Global Education; Doug Lynch, senior fellow; Anthony Maddox, professor of clinical education; Morgan Polikoff, associate professor of education; Shaun R. Harper, Provost Professor of Business and Education; Erika Patall, associate professor of education and psychology; Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, professor of education, psychology and neuroscience; and Ammar Dalal, doctoral candidate. —R



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS / SUSAN WALSH

→ U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona speaks during the daily briefing at the White House in Washington, D.C., in August.

KEY FINDINGS FROM DEAN NOGUERA'S INTERVIEW WITH SECRETARY CARDONA

1. Recovery Requires Bold Action

The pandemic has exacerbated inequities in education. Leaders should think big when it comes to addressing the needs of marginalized students, rather than taking incremental steps. "If you're not leading with the unapologetic belief that all children can succeed at high levels, you're in the wrong profession," Cardona noted.

2. Equity Should Be Integral to School Policy

Too often, schools address issues of equity through small gestures. "Equity's not a thing you do, it's a mindset," said Cardona. It needs to be embraced at the leadership level and incorporated into policies and practices.

3. Internet Access for Students Is Essential

Low-income households and students of color who lack reliable Internet have struggled throughout the pandemic. To address the problem, The American Rescue Plan provides funding to improve online access. Access will only become more vital going forward.

4. Civic Education Has Renewed Importance

Schools might consider enhancing or expanding their civics curriculum. Education can help resolve the country's deepening divisions, and civics may provide tools to help students navigate confusing or false information about politics and the role of government.

5. Community Colleges Are Key to Rebuilding the Economy

"Community colleges are going to be the backbone of economic growth in our country," Cardona said. To strengthen the pipeline between secondary and postsecondary schools, he suggested that the two systems need to improve their coordination, and give younger students the opportunity to think of themselves as college students early on.

📶 To view all of the EDTECH WEEK discussions, visit edtechweek.com.



The Avengers student group aims ‘to create revolutionary change in education’

By Kianoosh Hashemzadeh

WHEN JEROME RUCKER, a student in USC Rossier’s Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership online program (EDL online), looks back on his entry into the program in 2019, one thing stands out. Patricia Brent Sanco EdD ’16, who spoke to students at a kickoff event at the Galen Center, advised them to “drink the Kool-Aid.” She was urging students, Rucker says, “to get USC and utilize it.”

Rucker, a 2020 recipient of the Dean’s Superintendents Advisory Group Endowed Scholarship, had applied only to USC Rossier in his search for doctoral programs. Two of his sisters had attended USC, and for him, USC was “the Holy Grail.” He cried when he received his letter of admission. His wife asked him why he was so emotional. Rucker’s reply: “This is over with now. They let me in.”

That fall, Rucker, who also works full time as assistant principal at Los Osos High School in Rancho Cucamonga, California, joined the inaugural class in USC Rossier’s EDL

online program. Students were divided into cohorts, with Rucker placed in Cohort A. Sanco not only told the cohort to drink the Kool-Aid, she gave them an identity they could rally and organize around: the Avengers. Their mandate: “To create revolutionary change in education,” Rucker says. Similar to the Marvel Comics superheroes that inspired the name, Rucker says, each member has their own talents.

Rucker’s classmate Marie Martin, CEO of education media company Alexandria’s World, echoes his sentiment. Some Avengers work in mental health or special education; some run nonprofits. Others are administrators and curriculum specialists. The thing that brings the group together, Martin says, is that they all desire to incite change, and each brings their own “superpower” to the table. Martin most closely identifies with Tony Stark, and his superhero alter ego, Iron Man.

For David Smith, chief technology officer at Tustin Unified School District, the Avengers moniker is akin to a shiny breastplate each member wears under their shirts. Smith identifies with the Hulk: While Smith is angry with “what this world has become,” he is intent on using that anger to propel change. He stresses that the members of the Avengers student group would have “done amazing things with or without USC” but that USC brought them together. And not only will the USC network help them create change together, they, in turn, will help make USC a better place.

Before enrolling at USC Rossier, Michelle Williams, a former classroom teacher and assistant principal, created the Foundation for Black Excellence, a nonprofit that seeks to empower Black families and communities. Rucker affectionately likens the reserved Williams—who works tirelessly behind the scenes to make things happen—to Doctor Strange. However, Williams identifies more closely with the Black Widow. A product of the Los Angeles Unified School District, Williams—like the Black Widow—wants to change the system in which she was raised, and she chooses to use her super powers strategically.

The Avengers’ efforts have not stopped in the classroom. Together, members have launched the “Brothers from the 818” podcast (hosted by Smith), the “Follow the Leader” online journal and the Educational Truth conferences. The conferences, which focus on issues concerning education and social justice, are fast paced Rucker says, which is a better fit for busy educators. In 2020, the Avengers and USC Rossier faculty members shared their expertise at the conference, but in 2021, the group passed the mic to teenagers, who addressed topics including their struggles through the COVID-19 pandemic. The sessions were around 20 minutes each and are available on YouTube.

Rucker, or Captain America (as Smith likes to think of him), was inspired to create educational change well before he set foot on campus. But when he arrived at USC Rossier and met his “dynamic professors” and the Avengers, he thought, “This is going to be life-changing.” —R

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEROME RUCKER



Christopher Emdin, innovative educator and combiner of science and hip-hop culture, to join USC Rossier faculty

By Ross Brenneman

CURRENTLY AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR at Teachers College, Columbia University, Christopher Emdin is well known as a social critic, public intellectual and award-winning academic. Emdin, who begins at USC Rossier in January 2022 as the Robert A. Naslund Chair in Curriculum Theory, will also be joining the USC Race and Equity Center as its inaugural director of youth engagement and community partnerships.

Emdin’s research focuses on democratizing science and transforming urban education. A former middle school and high school educator of science and mathematics, Emdin has designed and taught several courses relating pop culture and education. His most recent book, *Ratchetdemic: Reimagining Academic Success*, builds on the ideas introduced in his *New York Times* best-selling book, *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood*. In *Ratchetdemic*, Emdin offers a revolutionary new educational model that encourages educators to provide spaces for students to display their academic brilliance without sacrificing their identities (p. 39).

Emdin is the creator of Science Genius BATTLES (Bringing Attention to Transforming Teaching Learning and Engagement in Science) and one of the creators of the #HipHopEd movement, a global initiative focused on using the power of hip-hop music and culture to introduce youth to the wonder and beauty of science.

“Chris is an exceptional scholar and one of the preeminent teacher educators in our field,” said Pedro A. Noguera, dean of USC Rossier. “His work has been embraced by educators throughout the U.S. who have been drawn to his unique, creative vision for how to engage students in the classroom and beyond. We are thrilled to have him join us as a member of our faculty at Rossier. He will enrich USC Rossier’s faculty and bring his dynamic vision of learning to our students as future educators.”

“USC Rossier has such an amazing legacy of innovation in education,” Emdin said. “I look forward to contributing to that legacy by building on established traditions and working with my colleagues to bring passion, creativity and academic excellence to urban schools in Los Angeles and beyond.” —R

What we’re watching

A New Vision for Schools webinar series

The Trials and Tribulations of the New School Year: Understanding and Breaking Through the Conflict and Controversies Over Masks, Vaccines and Critical Race Theory

Moderated in September by Dean Pedro A. Noguera, panelists Shaun R. Harper, Provost Professor of Education and Business, Julie A. Marsh, Sandra Lyon EdD ’17, and Neeraj Sood, vice dean of research of the Sol Price School of Public Policy discussed some of the most controversial issues that education leaders have confronted this fall.

From Physical Plant to Mental Health: What’s the Best Use for American Rescue Plan Education Funds?

Hosted in April by Dean Pedro A. Noguera and California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, this panel discussed how districts could use funds coming to the states as part of the federal American Rescue Plan. Panelists included Howard Adelman, professor of psychology, UCLA; Darin Brawley, superintendent, Compton Unified School District; Roxane Fuentes BA ’94, EdD ’15, superintendent, Berryessa Union School District; Sandra Lyon EdD ’17, former superintendent, Palm Springs Unified School District; Julie A. Marsh, professor of education policy, USC Rossier; and Morgan Polikoff, associate professor of education, USC Rossier.

☞ To view the webinars, please visit rscoe.in/newvision.

We the People

Kenya Barris, one of USC Rossier’s newest board members, and former First Lady Michelle and President Barack Obama have executive produced an animated series called *We the People*. The 10-episode series of short civics lessons is available on Netflix.



In the Media

“Research has shown, for Latinx students in particular, the longer they take gap years, the less likely it is that they are going to return back to campus. So that is something to be very cognizant of, that institutions should be aware of how to support students if they do choose to take a gap year—whether it is by force or voluntarily.”

— **EDGAR LOPEZ**, USC Rossier doctoral student, on CNBC

“Community colleges are the engine of opportunity. If they are not aggressive at reaching out to these students and creating opportunities for them to be on campus, they are going to lose these students.”

— **TATIANA MELGUIZO**, professor of education, in the *Los Angeles Times*

“I don’t think that all students should be taught in the same way. That doesn’t make sense, especially if you have a child in that class and you know that child thinks differently or is more advanced than other students.”

— **ANGELA HASAN**, professor of clinical education, in *The Washington Post*

“Students don’t learn about how color became a way to distinguish who was enslaved and who was free. They learn that the slaves were freed. But they have no idea that the period of Reconstruction—what came after Juneteenth—was the deadliest for Black people.”

— **AKILAH LYONS-MOORE**, assistant professor of education, in *The Orange County Register*

“I’m less interested in standardized tests that are used to rank kids, and much more interested in assessments to diagnose learning needs.”

— **PEDRO A. NOGUERA**, dean of USC Rossier, in *The New York Times*

The Education (Re)Open aims to surface solutions to education problems

AFTER A YEAR OF MASSIVE CHALLENGES, USC Rossier’s Center for Engagement-Driven Global Education (Center EDGE) launched the Education (Re)Open to crowdsource solutions to education problems from students, parents, teachers and school leaders.

Intent to gather the best practices, collective wisdom and ingenuity born from the challenges of teaching and learning during the pandemic, Center EDGE sent out a call for ideas in the spring of 2021. Hundreds of submissions poured in from across the country and world. Applicants competed for a \$1,000 award and the chance to have their idea showcased on the Education Solutions Exchange (ESE), a hub created by design firm IDEO to house the best ideas. Free to access, the ESE debuted in July with 56 projects.

“When faced with a challenge as momentous as our entire education system and society being ravaged by a pandemic, we must innovate.”

— **Alan Arkatov**, director of Center EDGE

“When faced with a challenge as momentous as our entire education system and society being ravaged by a pandemic, we must innovate—and do it in ways that fully utilize all of our resources. This is a historic moment in time, and by crowdsourcing solutions and implementation by those that know it best, we can not only address the plethora of issues caused by COVID-19, but the long-standing teaching and learning inequities across all of education,” says Alan Arkatov, founding director of USC Rossier’s Center EDGE.

The Education (Re)Open is supported by a broad group of partners. Lead funding was provided by the Andrew Nikou Foundation (p. 48) with additional funds provided by Great Public Schools Now, the Joseph Drown Foundation, the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation, Annenberg Learner, the Johnny Carson Foundation, Shmoop, Eva Stern, the Khayami Foundation and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. —R

To access the ESE, visit educationsolutions.net.

Insights from the U.S. Department of Education’s Equity Summit Series

By **Brian Soikia**

SINCE MARCH 2020, thought leaders and policy-makers have discussed how to use the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to reform schools. The first event of the Equity Summit Series, hosted by the U.S. Department of Education in June, attempted to more clearly define actions being taken to address long-standing inequities. The event, which featured opening remarks by First Lady Jill Biden and U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona, featured a panel of educational professionals from across the country, including USC Rossier Dean Pedro A. Noguera, superintendents, and an award-winning teacher and school counselor. Moderator U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten sought insight from the panelists about how to harness the momentum of this moment. —R

To view this event, please visit youtu.be/RaZAEvhuvM.

→ Giovana Castenada of Make the Road New Jersey, an organization that works to empower Latino and working-class communities, addresses the crowd in Elizabeth, N.J., during the National Back to School Week of Action on Tuesday, Aug. 17, 2021. The students are asking their school districts to invest American Rescue Plan funds in mental health programming, free, quality lunches, and resources that allow students to thrive.



KEY FINDINGS

Increase Communication With Parents

Schools should engage families to better serve students, especially as the country faces a student mental health crisis exacerbated by the pandemic. Whether it’s an informal coffee between parents and school leaders, a survey or a dedicated focus group, parents can provide insight into students’ needs that educators may not otherwise know about.

Embrace Creative Solutions

Schools should “think holistically about the needs of children,” commented USC Rossier Dean Pedro A. Noguera. Focusing on academics and standard school operations may not be enough to fully support students if they are experiencing other personal challenges.

Creative solutions panelists employed in their own districts include:

- Mental health clinics for families on site.
- Free transportation to school for students in need.
- Laundry services on site to increase attendance at a low-income school located in a “laundromat desert.”

Use Data as an Equity Tool

Data can be used by internal teams to assess a variety of issues, including those related to equity. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to solving problems, said Alberto M. Carvalho, superintendent of Miami-Dade Public Schools. With data (and a staff trained to interpret it), schools can determine more targeted support for students, depending on their level of need.

Seek Input From Students

Students are impacted by many school policies but are often left out of policy decisions. Instead, schools should include them in conversations around topics such as reopening and curriculum, suggested Alejandro Diasgranados, an elementary school teacher in Washington, D.C.

Be Accountable for Equity Practices

To fully commit to educational equity, schools must hold themselves accountable for their efforts. This means drafting a formal policy that includes accountability measures, and establishing a framework to recognize problems, define solutions and measure effects over time.

The **PULLIAS CENTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION** was awarded a \$320,000 grant from the Arthur Vining Foundation for a qualitative study of campus leadership teams to explore how they achieve equity goals through equity leadership practices.

The **CENTER FOR ENROLLMENT RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE** (CERPP) was awarded a \$30,000 one-year grant from the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools for its USC College Advising Corps program.

PATRICIA BURCH, professor of education, **ADRIAN HUERTA**, assistant professor of education, and **ELIZABETH KIM**, assistant professor of social work, were awarded a USC Zumberge Grant to continue their work with Los Angeles County Office of Education schools.



YASEMIN COPUR-GENCTURK, assistant professor of education, was selected as one of the National Science Foundation fellows to participate in the three-year Summer Institute in Advanced Research Methods for STEM education research.

ZOË CORWIN, associate research professor, **ADRIANNA KEZAR**, Dean's Professor of Leadership, **JOSEPH KITCHEN**, assistant research professor at the Pullias Center for Higher Education, and **HOPE MCCOY** and **RALITSA TODOROVA**, both postdoctoral research associates at the Pullias Center, were awarded a grant from The Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation to study how at-promise students experience campus life and how programs and institutions best support at-promise student success at three University of Nebraska campuses.

DARNELL FINE, student in the EdD in Educational Leadership program, Singapore cohort, was named an Emerging Leader by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

ADRIAN HUERTA, assistant professor of education, received the Outstanding Faculty Member award from the Rossier Student Organization Council.

MARY HELEN IMMORDINO-YANG, professor of education, neuroscience and psychology, and Jamaal Matthews of the University of Michigan were awarded a National Science Foundation Mid-Career Advancement Program grant for a study titled "MCA: The Neurophysiology of Teaching Secondary Mathematics for Transcendent Purpose and Cultural Relevance." Immordino-Yang also received multiple grants and awards including a \$100,000 grant for leading a project funded through the Advanced Education Research and Development Fund, titled "Bet 1 (Self Efficacy) Seedling" and a \$95,000 grant from the Templeton Foundation to continue her research project, "Intellectual Virtues Academy High School: Capacity-Building, Research, and Dissemination."

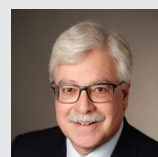
KATE KENNEDY, student in the PhD in Urban Education Policy Program, was selected for the 2021 Emerging Education Policy Scholars cohort through the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and the American Enterprise Institute.

ADRIANNA KEZAR, Dean's Professor of Leadership and director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education, was appointed editor of *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, and, with **CYNTHIA VILLAREAL PHD '20**, post-doctoral associate at the Pullias Center, was awarded a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to develop tools for leaders engaged in institutional transformation.

ADAM KHO, assistant professor of education, USC Rossier Dean **PEDRO A. NOGUERA** and **ERIKA PATALL**, associate professor of education and psychology, were awarded the Zumberge Diversity and Inclusion Award (\$30,000) for their research study titled "Hattie's Influences on Student Achievement Under an Institutionally Racist System: What Works for Black and Brown Students?"

NEHA MIGLANI, graduate school fellow in the PhD in Urban Education Policy Program, received the 2021 Social Science Research Council's Religion, Spirituality, and Democratic Renewal Fellowship, funded by the Fetzer Institute. She also was awarded the 2021 AERA Division G Small Grant for her dissertation on educational well-being.

USC Rossier Dean **PEDRO A. NOGUERA** received the 2021 International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Impact Award for his outstanding work to improve learning for all students and creating system-wide change in the field of education.



LAWRENCE O. PICUS, Richard T. Cooper and Mary Catherine Cooper Chair in Public School Administration, received the 2021 Association for Education Finance and Policy Outstanding Service Award.

MORGAN POLIKOFF, associate professor of education, was awarded a \$55,000 grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for a study of the educational impact of COVID-19 on children and families.

JULIE POSSELT, associate professor of higher education, was named associate dean, USC Graduate School.

JOHN BROOKS SLAUGHTER, Dean's Professor of Education and Engineering, was appointed University Professor by USC President Carol L. Folt.

TRACY POON TAMBASCIA EdD '07, professor of clinical education, was elected president of the USC Academic Senate (p. 30).

BRENDESHA TYNES has been awarded the Dean's Professorship in Educational Equity.



JASON WOMACK, doctoral student in the EdD Organizational Change and Leadership program, received the 2021 Secretary of the Air Force Leadership Award.

CASEY PHILIP WONG, visiting scholar at USC Rossier, was awarded the 2021 Chancellor's Award for Postdoctoral Research at UCLA.

→ Students in a combined fourth- and fifth-grade class work together on a poster about the Lunar New Year.



Creating the Conditions for Student Leadership

By Julie Slayton, Professor of Clinical Education

THERE IS A LOT OF TALK IN K-12 education about the importance of "student-centered" classrooms and many definitions of what it means to create these types of classrooms. They can be places where students' language, culture and lives outside of school are used by the teacher to form a curriculum or as bridges to academic content. They can be places where students carry the cognitive load, co-constructing knowledge through discussions that are grounded in the course content and connected to the real world.

A student-centered classroom can also be a place where students develop and demonstrate leadership. To create such a classroom, teachers must act intentionally and think carefully about what it means to them to have students lead. Leading is not the same as handling tasks such as distributing and collecting materials. Leading is taking responsibility in important ways within the context of the established behavioral and academic learning conditions of the classroom. It means having authority in the classroom to make decisions and the responsibility to do so.

ESTABLISHING EXPECTATIONS

First, for students to lead, clear behavioral expectations need to be in place. These should be established the first day of class. Clear expectations let students know what they can and should do to ensure that they are able to make the most of their classroom time. Behavioral expectations include being respectful of fellow students and the teacher as well as creating and promoting an emotionally and physically safe classroom by having high expectations for themselves and one another.

Teachers must also model these expectations, reinforce them and ask students to be responsible for them by demonstrating them and holding their peers accountable to them. Power in the classroom cannot only reside with the teacher. It must also be distributed to the students if the teacher expects the students to lead. Thus, when students behave in ways that are contrary to these behavioral expectations—teasing, bullying or interrupting—the teacher should expect students to lead by helping their peers recognize that their behavior violates the expectations of the classroom and asking their peers to abide by these established classroom expectations.

CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE, TOGETHER

Second, with respect to academics, teachers should communicate their expectations that students will participate in the co-construction of knowledge. They will do this by being actively,

intellectually engaged in the content—whether it be math, science or English—and with their peers. To foster student leadership during instruction, the teacher will need to help students develop the skills to engage each other in this co-construction of knowledge by modeling what that looks like. Teachers must also provide appropriate scaffolds, by assigning roles to students—like timekeeper, moderator or notetaker—and giving them opportunities to practice giving and receiving feedback from the teacher and each other.

As with behavioral expectations, the teacher will need to commit to sharing power with students and enlist them in holding themselves and one another to these academic expectations. For example, the teacher can model ways to invite new voices into an ongoing conversation and then ask students to do the same. This can be demonstrated by asking students such questions as, "I was wondering what your thoughts are about... Would you share them with us?" This sentence stem can then be used by students to practice the act of welcoming their peers into a conversation about the content.

Student leadership can be an essential tool in developing a student-centered classroom. Yet, for students to lead in the classroom, teachers must have defined for themselves what student leadership sounds and looks like. And then teachers must be proactive in creating the conditions where student leadership is possible. —R

What Does Leadership Look Like After the Pandemic?

Kindness, creativity and relationship building are among the essential skills education leaders need to break through the challenges of today.

Story: Elaine Woo
Illustration: Chris Gash



In March 2020, shortly after USC announced it was closing its campuses in response to the pandemic, Emily T. Sandoval EdD '18, associate vice provost of student affairs and student engagement, found herself with only a few days to come up with a plan that would leave no students unhoused.

Sixteen hundred students had asked for permission to remain in USC housing, including many who said they were homeless, were left stranded by COVID-19 travel restrictions or had other reasons they could not live at home. Developing a process to decide who could stay was just one of many urgent tasks Sandoval faced, including ensuring that her staff was safe and able to work virtually.

"There was nothing that could have prepared us for this," she reflected recently.

Sandoval was not alone in discovering that 2020's challenges tested education leaders like never before. Some found that to be effective leaders, they had to break away from traditional approaches, listen more to their gut and pay closer attention to relationship building and other soft skills, all while upholding their organization's core values. Leading with equity in mind also became more urgent as the pandemic and the anti-racism movement heightened awareness of long-standing social, economic and educational disparities.

"Our education leaders are on the front lines of addressing many complex challenges that they typically did not learn how to address from their courses in grad school," said Pedro A. Noguera, the Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean of the USC Rossier School of Education.

To help break through those challenges, Noguera asserted, today's leaders "must be resourceful and creative, they must be capable of articulating a clear and compelling vision to lead and inspire their staff, and they must possess a high level of emotional and social intelligence to maintain positive relationships with the school board and community."

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Superintendent Cuauhtémoc Avila EdD '11, who heads the 25,000-student Rialto Unified School District in San

Bernardino County, California, said if he were to design a course on what education leaders needed to know to survive the past year and a half, he would focus on fundamental human virtues.

"There was no greater need for kindness than through this pandemic," Avila said.

As one example, Avila pointed to the free food-distribution program Rialto ran during its lockdown, which lasted from March 2020 until its reopening in August 2021. District personnel went so far as to make home deliveries to families who were unable to travel to the meal-distribution sites.

"These were situations we didn't have any experience in," Avila recalled. "It wasn't in the manual that we were now in the business of home delivery of meals.

"You can't manage a pandemic; you can't control the conditions that have been placed in front of you. But I believe that with the agency of human decency, you can overcome these challenging circumstances."

For Avila, that often meant personally addressing the needs of families. He recalled a parent who sought his help: "She called for direction, for clarification, when her kids did not want to log on to class and she just did not know what to do. When she came down with COVID and had to isolate from her kids and could not pick up their meals, I did what I needed to do to make sure her needs and the needs of her kids continued to be served."

Avila has made kindness, honesty and other moral virtues the focus of efforts to change the culture of a district that had been beset by scandals before he became superintendent in 2015. Those efforts have included "restorative circles" and "courageous" sessions to help staff members "let go of our traumas that keep us from being happy with ourselves and kind towards others," he said. He attributes improvements in graduation rates and staff morale at least partly to the shifting culture.



He also has flattened Rialto's management hierarchy and removed traditional titles that perpetuate what he regards as an outmoded, corporate education model. Instead of deputy, associate or assistant superintendents, the top central-office administrators are called agents (as in agent of change) with titles such as lead strategic agent, lead academic agent and lead innovation agent.

"We are simply encouraging everyone to be on an equal playing field with respect to ideas and how we can improve as an organization," Avila explained. As an example, he pointed to the district's award-winning environmental literacy program, inspired and led by a former member of the groundskeeping staff.

Avila believes most education schools reinforce the corporate model of education, which he said is resistant to change and suppresses good ideas. "We have to blow up the system and create something new," he said. "Understanding human needs will go further than simply knowing how to plan and hold people accountable."

Halfway around the world in Uganda, COVID-19 upended education as much as it did in the United States. Jane Frances Nakato EdD '20, who founded and runs five

"One of my deep beliefs is that leadership is about relationships."

—Ryan Cornner EdD '10, vice chancellor at Los Angeles Community College District

private elementary schools in Kampala, went through two shutdowns and saw her enrollment of 350 pupils plummet by half after switching to online learning. The resulting financial hit led to a reduction in salaries, which caused some teachers to quit.

Her toughest challenge was trying to renegotiate rent with her landlords. When all but one agreed to new terms, she made the painful decision to close one campus about six months into the pandemic.

Nakato says she wishes that she had been better at financial planning and that she had acted before the pandemic to open a fully online school, the focus of one of her projects in the Global Executive EdD program. But what helped her the most as a leader was discussing spiritual books with her book club and practicing mindfulness.

“I have learned to be calm for the sake of the people I lead,” she wrote in an email. “I deliberately refuse to be dragged into negative space. This has helped me encourage my workmates to keep positive, and in the process, I have kept my lead team,” including her head teachers, education directors and other administrators. Enrollment has also improved, and the online attendance rate is nearly 100 percent.

For Ryan Cornner EdD ’10, vice chancellor for educational programs and institutional effectiveness in the Los Angeles Community College District, the key was fostering strong relationships within the 230,000-student district and with the diverse communities it serves.

“One of my deep beliefs is that leadership is about relationships,” Cornner said recently. “Part of that is people understanding that your commitment is to be where they’re at and make sure we’re working together.”

He demonstrated that commitment on the most challenging days of the pandemic, which came soon after the nation’s largest community college system went remote. Only 17 percent of its classes were online before the shutdown, so quick action was needed. The district postponed spring break and scheduled three days of intensive training for 5,500 faculty members.

Instructors could access in-person training and other resources they would need to teach remotely at any of the district’s nine campuses. “You saw everyone there working as hard as they could for the benefit of students,” Cornner recalled. “There was nobody phoning it in.”

Within 10 days the district converted 10,000 courses from brick-and-mortar to online delivery.

Cornner’s keystone, building relationships, extends to the community beyond the college campuses. Through partnerships and private donors, the district distributed 30,000 free laptops and 6,200 \$50 Kroger gift cards to students in need.

“In addition to how to be a leader in academia, future training needs to teach how to be a leader in the community and an understanding that the two are inseparable,” Cornner said. “The only way we will truly achieve our equity goals, our student success goals, is by collaborating with other entities in the community to make sure students’ needs are addressed.”

If there was one lesson he could impart to future education leaders, he said, it would be to set a vision that is

“broader than the institution itself and focus on the impact the institution has when people leave its doors. That is going to be more and more important in leadership training.”

THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP TRAINING AT USC ROSSIER

USC Rossier Associate Professor of Education Tatiana Melguizo agrees that education leaders, particularly in community colleges, need a more expansive view of their responsibilities.

“The reality is these community colleges have become places where you have to make sure there are no issues with food insecurity, access for child care, access to mental health,” she noted. “That is tricky, but the job description has changed and leaders have to adapt.”

To help leaders address challenges and improve learning, this fall USC Rossier will launch Breakthrough Leaders (p. 18), a continuing education program for alumni and other professionals working in prekindergarten through higher education. It will feature weeklong summer institutes, online courses, weekend immersion programs and short-term consultancies on topics including strategic planning, data-based decision-making, labor-management partnerships,

“You can’t manage a pandemic; you can’t control the conditions that have been placed in front of you. But I believe that with the agency of human decency, you can overcome these challenging circumstances.”

—Cuahtémoc Avila EdD ’11, superintendent of Rialto Unified School District

and diversity, equity and inclusion.

Developing equity-minded leaders has been central to a USC Rossier education since the school revised its mission statement in 2017. For faculty that has meant wrestling with ways to evolve their teaching to make classes more inclusive.

Like many of his colleagues, Professor Mark Power Robison, chair of the Global Executive Doctor of Education program, has participated in workshops to hone his equity

acumen, including enhancing his ability to facilitate difficult conversations. He retooled the course he teaches in the program, Framing Educational Leadership, replacing about half of the content with material that reflects the school’s core mission. So, when his students returned to campus last summer, they discussed topics such as Indigenous education and the impact of globalization on educational equity in a variety of societies.

“For all of us who are teaching ... the last year and a half has challenged us to find ways to help people talk about really difficult issues,” said Robison. “It’s challenged all of us to do everything we can to facilitate those discussions and help our students who are education leaders be as prepared as possible to lead those discussions in their organizations.”

That focus attracted students such as Kate Rogers, who enrolled in the Global EdD program last December. Recently named executive director of the San Antonio-based preservation nonprofit Alamo Trust, she has been grappling with a controversy over how to portray the role of slavery in the 1836 Battle of the Alamo (see sidebar).

Professor of Clinical Education Julie Slayton, who chairs the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership program concentration on leading instructional change, makes sure her students are able to reflect on the ways their own identities shape how they teach and lead.

She begins her class and dissertation groups with an exercise called “I Am From,” which asks participants to write down answers to questions about personal characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, occupation and religion. To model the critical reflection she believes is vital for leaders, Slayton discusses her own responses—“I’m a White woman, I’m Jewish, I’m upper-middle class ...”—and how those factors shape her worldview. Then, several students share how they answered the questions.

The process often elicits deeply emotional responses. “This exercise took the veil off who we are,” said Ava Gilani Jacobs EdD ’21, a fifth-grade teacher in the Las Virgenes Unified School District who is aiming to become a teacher educator.

“It creates a moment of real vulnerability, which is an incredibly important thing for leaders to have,” Slayton observed. “If we want to see teachers and schools take up anti-racist or culturally relevant approaches to working in classrooms, we need leaders with a skill set for creating conditions where people can grapple in very scary ways with how their identity matters and shapes the way they act.”

Bold thinking about what today’s leaders need is coming from USC Rossier researchers like Adrianna Kezar, Dean’s Professor of Leadership and director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education, whose recent work explores such concepts as love, personal journeys and liberation.

She has collaborated with USC Rossier PhD student Jordan Harper on “Leadership for Liberation,” a guide to developing leaders with the imagination and commitment to upend systems of oppression. Noting that 85 percent of

Leading the Alamo

As executive director of the Alamo Trust in San Antonio, Texas, USC Rossier doctoral candidate Kate Rogers, leads the nonprofit’s \$450 million plan to redevelop the Alamo, the site of a 1836 battle that was pivotal in Texas’ fight for independence from Mexican rule. Questions about what the rebels were fighting for have stoked polarizing debate, pitting traditionalists who hold as sacred the heroic narrative taught to generations of Texans against scholars who argue for a more complete view that includes the site’s Indigenous history and the role of slavery in the Texas Revolution.

The renovation plan includes constructing a world-class visitor center and museum. Rogers’ work dovetails with her doctoral research, which delves into the role of museums and historic sites as educational institutions.

“The American social studies classroom was designed to be a place for productive discourse ... where we could debate the challenges faced by our democracy, but we’ve lost that,” Rogers said. “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if museums could play a role in bringing that back to life?”

USC Rossier has helped her make valuable connections. Professor Mark Power Robison introduced her to a colleague known for his work on reconciling conflicting historical narratives at some of the world’s most contested sites, including the Robert E. Lee statue in Charlottesville, Virginia. Rogers plans to visit the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg when her cohort travels there next year.

“Dr. Robison’s class set a strong foundation for realizing that we all have different worldviews ... and they change over time,” Rogers said. “At the Alamo ... it means working very hard to build bridges, to bring people together, to find common ground, to work on compromise.”

Breakthrough Leaders

Recognizing that extraordinary crises demand extraordinarily nimble leaders, USC Rossier is marshaling the knowledge and skills of urban-education experts to help leaders “break through” today’s steep challenges to work more effectively with their communities and improve student learning.

Called Breakthrough Leaders, the professional development program will be open to USC Rossier alumni and others working in prekindergarten to higher education, with a special focus on leadership of large urban school systems.

“We want Rossier to be the place that our alumni and other educational leaders turn to for training and support in addressing the problems, perils and opportunities facing our schools,” said USC Rossier Dean Pedro A. Noguera.

Topics to be addressed include how to: recognize and value diversity and inclusion, identify future trends and develop strategic plans, use research to guide decisions on allocating resources, and build productive relationships with teacher and employee organizations.

The program also will address collaborations with government and private agencies, the use and protection of data to improve education outcomes, and ways to improve communications with staff and community stakeholders.

Faculty from USC Rossier and other USC professional schools, as well as corporate, nonprofit and government leaders, will also share their expertise with participants. “Our intent is to identify a core group of school districts that choose to participate over multiple years to develop their own pipelines of leaders for the future,” said USC Rossier Associate Dean Lawrence O. Picus.

The first planned offering is a 2022 summer institute.

leadership educators are White, the guide offers exercises that seek to expand awareness of the structures and cultural norms that uphold whiteness and White supremacy.

Harper has given presentations on the framework to student leaders at the University of Massachusetts at Boston and San Jose State University but would like to introduce it to other types of leaders. “I’m interested in calling out White supremacy,” said Harper, who was compelled to create the liberation model in part because of his work on leadership-development curricula for college students. “We’re very good talking about equity, but we still get cold feet talking about whiteness.”

Kezar was also the lead researcher on a study for the American Council on Education on shared equity leadership, a model for scaling up equity work by making it a collective effort instead of the responsibility of a lone office or unit. The study was based on interviews with 63 campus leaders conducted amid last year’s upheavals over the pandemic and racism.

The leaders, who included college presidents, provosts, faculty, staff and chief diversity officers, approached equity as a team effort so that advancing equity “becomes widespread and institutional rather than limited and localized to one individual,” the report says. Central to the team’s effectiveness was that its members had undergone a personal journey, such as an experience or close observation of discrimination, that cemented their commitment to equity.

The leaders also shared certain practices—foremost, putting students’ needs at the center of decision-making—as well as core values such as courage, transparency, being comfortable with being uncomfortable, and love for those they work with and for.

“Love is not something we talk about in our classroom spaces very often,” Kezar noted recently. “We tend to talk about the analytic skills that are required and not so much about some of these other really important skill sets that fall outside of what’s comfortable in academic settings, and yet they are so important for leading around equity. I would like to see us push on these harder, more delicate spaces.”

For USC’s Sandoval, the responsibility of leaders to show care was a major lesson of last year.

“We were all stressed out and a little overwhelmed,” she said, recalling those long days when she and her team were making crucial housing decisions for thousands of students. She got through the crisis by staying calm and being an agile decision-maker but also by “realizing that I wasn’t just a supervisor managing people who oversee departments but having conversations like, ‘What’s going on with you? How is home life going? How are you balancing being a teacher to your children at home while trying to lead a department?’”

“I just had to think bigger because we all had a lot more going on in our lives.” —R

A DAY IN THE LIFE



Alumni leaders share the details of their waking hours—from their morning routines to the ways they wind down from their busy working days.

Essays:
Shawn Smith EdD '05
Deborah Elder EdD '20
Summer Salomonsen EdD '19
and Diontre Thompson EdD '18

Illustration: Sonia Pulido



"By 8 a.m., I feel a pretty strong sense of accomplishment."

**Shawn Smith EdD '05,
Chief Innovation Officer at McGraw Hill Education**

Shawn Smith EdD '05 is an author, a former classroom teacher and education administrator, and an expert on digital education. Currently, he is the chief innovation officer at McGraw Hill Education. He lives in East Hampton, New York, with his partner.

TYPICAL DAY IN 2021

5:45 A.M.: I wake up between 5:45 and 6 a.m. I've never used an alarm clock—that seems like an unnatural way to start the day. Admittedly, I am a morning person.

6 A.M.: By 6 a.m., coffee has been brewed, the local news plays quietly in the background and I snuggle onto my couch with my laptop. Typically, this hour is used to check email, review my calendar and prep for the day. My partner, an executive for a large U.S. health care company, sits at the other end of the couch, same routine. We don't have kids, so it's a quiet way to start the day.

7 A.M.: I'm a Gayle King fan, so the hour starts with *CBS Mornings*. I pour a second cup of coffee and weave in and out of creative tasks. It might be writing an article, editing a manuscript, developing branding or marketing concepts

for a product, or reviewing visual designs to explain a concept about the classroom of the future.

8 A.M.: By 8 a.m., I feel a strong sense of accomplishment. If it's my turn, I prep lunch and dinner. Two days a week, I head out for a run to Georgica Beach. It's the perfect respite after two hours on the couch and computer. I'll be showered and ready for my first Zoom meeting within the hour.

9 A.M.–NOON: 9 a.m. is the official transition from the couch to my pandemic office. During the past year, we've hunkered down at our 145-year-old farmhouse. My makeshift office consists of a card table set up in our living room on Mondays and taken down on Fridays so our weekends appear work-free. We put bookshelves in our living room so I have a Zoom backdrop that looks like I'm in an office. I spend the next several hours jumping between meetings: executive-leadership meetings, direct-report 1:1s, product-road-

map meetings, engineering/technology meetings, data-science meetings. It's also when I eat breakfast, typically a power bar and a banana.

NOON: Three days a week, I get out of the house to lift weights with a trainer. It's a nice screen-time break. I typically have a salad for lunch; after weight training, I'll also have a smoothie.

1:15 P.M.: By 1:15 p.m., my afternoons pick back up with meetings. My work at McGraw is about making the digital workflow of teachers easier. I'm working on a project that connects fragmented data across our programs and combines it with nonacademic data that we know affects learning. Taken together, this learner profile creates a more holistic picture of a student: their academic data, their background, daily social-emotional learning information and executive functioning (cognition) strengths.

6 P.M.: By 6 p.m. it's time to finish dinner prep. During the summer, I'll wind down with a quick swim in the pool. Then dinner will be cooked on the grill or in our rustic wood-burning oven—one of my favorite hobbies. Dinner is served around 7 and capped off with a Russian River pinot noir or a pinot grigio.

9 P.M.: It's early to bed. 5:45 a.m. will come quick, and the process will begin again. —R

**Deborah Elder EdD '20,
Chief Academic Officer at Los Lunas Schools**

After beginning her education career as an elementary school teacher, Deborah Elder EdD '20 transitioned to administrative roles where she provided leadership and teacher development in a range of positions, including as an elementary school principal and executive director in Albuquerque Public Schools' Office of Innovation and School Choice. In March, she was named chief academic officer at Los Lunas Schools, where she works to improve student outcomes for the 8,500-plus students in the school district located south of the state capital. Additionally, she is an adjunct professor for USC Rossier's Master of Arts in Teaching program. She lives in Albuquerque with her husband, Scott Elder, superintendent of Albuquerque Public Schools.

AUG. 4, 2021

5:40 A.M.: Alarm clock goes off. Much to the annoyance of my husband, I hit snooze twice. I scan the news apps on the phone.

6:30 A.M.: Power breakfast: two eggs, chopped spinach, New Mexico green chile and a bit of cheese. Washed down with two cups of coffee. While I eat, I skim the local newspaper.

7 A.M.: Hit the road. My 40-minute commute takes me

through Albuquerque, across the Rio Grande, through Isleta Pueblo land and to the village of Los Lunas. I get the full range of New Mexican scenery, from mountains to mesa. My new job is 100 percent in person. I do not miss my home office from the COVID-19 lockdown one bit.

8 A.M.–2 P.M.: First school visits of the new year with the superintendent and my colleagues on cabinet. This is my 28th year experiencing the first day of school, and there's nothing like it. There's a shared sense of promise and hope.

We visit six schools, and I'm overcome with gratitude. Talking with students gives the best insight. I speak with Catherine, a fourth grader new to the district and not enjoying her first day; Abel, a freshman struggling to find his classroom and relieved to find an assistant principal to help him; Evan, a third grader looking forward to having his socially distanced lunch on the field instead of in the cafeteria.

Each family trusts us with their youngest members. It's the highest honor, and I feel the responsibility to be worthy of that trust every single day, in every classroom, on every campus.

2–5 P.M.: Back to the office to catch up with my team of directors. Then I start on the other work: preparing professional development for principals, coaches and teachers; matching principals with performance coaches; reading literature on critical race theory; collaborating with colleagues to ensure services for our new Digital Academy; and working on strategy to engage the community for input on the use of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds.

5 P.M.: Commute. I enjoy having the time to reflect on the day. My best planning happens in the car.

5:45 P.M.: Workout! I prefer to work out in the morning, but I don't love getting up super early. A stop at the gym on the way home works for me.

7 P.M.: Home. Usually, my husband is already there. Our sons moved to a rental house close to the University of New Mexico a year ago so they could be near campus while they attended class from their rooms. I miss them terribly. My husband and I have learned to enjoy a byproduct of empty-nesting: no meal-planning. We figure out what we want and either make a simple dinner or support our local restaurants.

I spend another hour or so on my laptop. My favorite place to work at home is my back porch so I can enjoy the flowers my grandmother planted when she moved to this house in the 1970s. I've never been much of a TV watcher, but since the boys are out of the house, my husband and I watch a few episodes of *Schitt's Creek*. We might be the last people in the country (or at least our social circle) to see it.

10 P.M.: I try to follow the steps that magazines recommend—I take a warm shower and give myself time to unwind. I read before I fall asleep but never make it more than a few pages.

"Each family trusts us with their youngest members every day. It's the highest honor."



Summer Salomonsen EdD '19,
VP of Content Product at Cornerstone OnDemand

Summer Salomonsen EdD '19 started her career in education as a classroom teacher. After years in corporate learning and development, consulting, and strategic development and education technology, she now works as the vice president of content product at Cornerstone OnDemand, a software provider and learning technology company that helps organizations recruit, train and manage their staff. In her role, she leads the strategy, development and execution of all content offerings, built to improve the working lives of Cornerstone's 75 million global users. She lives in Colorado with her husband and two daughters.

JULY 30, 2021

7 A.M.: Yes, I sleep a lot. Usually nine hours a night. Sleep restores your body and your balance. Today, I awoke to the sounds of my two girls (4 and 8) pretending to be monkeys. Their laughter pulls me out of bed as I do a quick pass of core work apps on my phone: Slack, Workplace, Outlook, LinkedIn. So far, so expected.

7:30 A.M.: Espresso first. Obviously. My eldest makes it for me—my “go-juice” she says. Two shots do the trick, plus a quick bowl of granola. I’ve worked remotely for 10 years



"MEETINGS HAVE OVERT AND COVERT GOALS. I SHOULD UNDERSTAND BOTH BEFORE I HIT JOIN."

across three jobs, so our home routines are pretty baked. Breakfast together—me, my husband and our girls. We read magazines and talk about things. Golden time that will make beautiful memories one day.

8:30 A.M.: At my desk, surveying the scene. I manage multiple teams across the U.S.—and this requires clear operating expectations. First things first: How are my people? I send a quick Slack message to each of my directs—bridging the distance with a personal “Hiya!” Second, triage the day. Just 10 (known) meetings—a lighter day—though each for distinct purposes. Basic principle: Every meeting has both overt and covert goals. I should understand both by the time I hit join. Third shot of espresso it is.

8:35 A.M.–12:45 P.M.: Back to back to back. You get it. Webcams are on for my team—so important to see people and be human in this way. This time includes two project check-ins (one on track, the other not so much), two 1:1s with direct reports, one unscheduled meeting with leadership, one snappy-fast working session to outline the flow for an upcoming focus group, one tech check for an upcoming webinar, and one meeting with Talent. I take notes constantly, yet discretely, using OneNote. I color-code tabs for key projects and people and capture dialogue, expectations, next steps. This practice empowers me to track the meeting flow and be intelligent about those meetings afterward.

12:45–1:15 P.M.: My husband is a gifted stay-at-home dad, caring for our girls with patience and empathy. While our youngest naps, he rides in the garage (Zwift, anyone?), and my eldest learns to code on her iPad. “Let’s go,” I say—and we take our ancient Chihuahua out for a walk. “How’s your meetings, Mama?” she queries. I scarf a quick lunch of chicken salad, chips and snap peas before my 1:15 call.

1:15–5:30 P.M.: A bit of a blur, really. But my notes keep me homed in. More unplanned meetings and deep work to finish a deck, an email and a proposal. Building compelling learning content for Cornerstone’s global customer base is multifaceted work, but these days my focus is on building our partner network, extensive R&D for new learning series, and liaising with product and engineering on platform enhancements. Digital sticky notes populate my desktop, color-coded with OneNote, keeping me focused.

5:35 P.M.: Sign-off time today. My girls come quietly to my office door and mouth, “You done?” “Yes, babies. All done.” We head outside to play and ride bikes. Later, we watch the Olympics, eat pizza and talk about our day. I discretely check my phone for new messages or emails from the West Coast until 7:30 p.m., when we tuck in the girls.

8–10 P.M.: Post-kids-in-bed time is precious. On this day, time spent reading (*The Bird Way* by Jennifer Ackerman) and a glass of single malt unwinds me beautifully. Lights out at 10 p.m.



Diontre Thompson EdD '18,
Senior Director of Strategy,
Culture and Belonging at Genentech

After eight years working at Stanford University, where he rose to the position of associate dean and executive director, Diontre Thompson EdD '18 now works for Genentech, an international biotechnology company. He helps ensure inclusive experiences for Genentech staff, leads the company's diversity and inclusion (D&I) development program and advises senior business leaders on strategies to embed D&I principles throughout the organization. He lives in Oakland, California, with his partner.

JULY 13, 2021

6 A.M.: I wake up to that traditional buzzing alarm sound. I’m a hard sleeper, so I need something to jolt me out of bed. Today, I’m going into the office for a Chief Diversity Office leadership-team meeting. I dress and am on the road by 7 a.m.

7 A.M.: My commute is about 45 minutes. If you’ve ever been to San Francisco, you know traffic on the bridge is always terrible. Usually, I listen to R&B to set the tone for the day,

but today I hop on a call for department leads. Genentech is a global company, and we have “golden hours” from 6 to 8 a.m. PT.

8 A.M.: It’s my first time returning to campus since we went remote. I grab my brown-bag breakfast (yogurt, fruit, French toast and sparkling water) and set up at a small one-person office. I comb through emails and prep for my meeting, readying my slides and talking points.

9:30 A.M.–NOON: The meeting starts with an icebreaker. We’re a new team, and it’s the first time a lot of us are meeting one another in person. The agenda is focused on our health-equity work. We discuss: our efforts to make clinical trials accessible to communities of color, the project we’re implementing that will allow leaders from other departments to sit on our diversity and inclusion (D&I) leadership team for a rotation, and an education and action plan for officers across the company so they can learn how to better align with our D&I strategy.

NOON–1 P.M.: The six of us go to lunch, furthering our connections and enjoying each other’s company. Genentech provides our meals. I was nervous because I’m a pescatarian but, luckily, they have a vegetarian jambalaya. Our cafeteria is right along the water, and there’s a nice breeze coming through.

1–1:45 P.M.: After lunch, I spend some time thinking about our D&I training. All too often D&I training is a one-and-done kind of thing—“I went to unconscious-bias training, and I am now unbiased.” I want to reframe that conversation. This should be a journey where we are constantly learning and growing.

1:45–4 P.M.: Next up, I have 1:1 Zoom meetings with two of my direct reports. They catch me up on their projects, and we discuss next steps.

4–5 P.M.: I end the day hosting a dialogue circle for our Asian American and Pacific Islander community to discuss microaggressions and recent Asian hate crimes. About 15 staff members join in on Zoom. I check in to see how they’re feeling, how they’re engaging and if they need more support.

5–8 P.M.: Traffic is terrible, so I stick around and meet up with a friend who works in South City. We go for dinner at Red Lobster.

8–8:30 P.M.: Getting across the Bay Bridge is a breeze. I’ve been on a H.E.R. kick, so I put on the new album.

8:30–10:30 P.M.: I get home, light my strawberry poundcake candle and shower. My partner and I like to chill and watch television in the evenings. We’ve been watching *Love, Victor*. It’s a coming-out story of a young man as he goes through high school. Cute and super emotional.

10:30 P.M.: By 10:30, I’m in bed. I make a point not to look at email after work—the job is not going to hug you at night—but I check my calendar to figure out the next day. My motto: Whatever I didn’t finish today, I get another chance to do the next day.

“WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?”

That’s the question Thomas Tan EDD ’09 asked when COVID-19 forced Hacienda La Puente Unified School District (HLPUSD) to switch to distance learning in March 2020. As HLPUSD’s director of network and computer services, Tan had the responsibility of ensuring that the nearly 18,000 students in his San Gabriel Valley school district had laptops, Wi-Fi hotspots and the know-how to attend classes remotely.

The shift in his job when classes went online “was almost night and day,” says Tan, who began his career in Ontario-Montclair School District’s Instructional Services Division in 1992. Before the pandemic, Tan spent his time working to acquire laptops for each youth in the district, helping school faculty use technology to improve teaching methods and supporting district initiatives such as New Pedagogies for Deep Learning, which draws on technology to implement academic goals. After the coronavirus crisis, he worked closely with HLPUSD’s business, human resources and instructional divisions to provide distance learning for students.

But first, he took a moment to recover from the initial shock of the lockdown. “You turn on the news ... and it doesn’t look very good; it doesn’t look like there’s a way out,” Tan recalls. “Meanwhile, kids are all at home, so parents are wondering what’s going on.”

Tan and his 28-member team rallied quickly, surveying families shortly after school closed in mid-March 2020 to determine which households lacked laptops and hotspots. In addition to communicating with families via social media and a website that answered common questions about distance learning, Tan established a help desk they could call for direct technological support. Just before summer 2020, he streamlined the remote-learning experience for students by creating a single sign-on to access various instructional programs and classroom tools.

“A big challenge for people who are trying to manage technology for a district or a school site is that they’re now having to take into account the varying resources and situations in students’ homes,” says Corinne Hyde, an associate (teaching) professor of clinical education at USC Rossier. “You’re now dealing with a lot of inequity, potentially, in terms of whether students even have high-speed internet access to be able to use these devices in their own spaces.”

For his efforts to narrow the digital divide in his district, Tan won the 2021 Technology Administrator of the Year award from the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) in April. He calls the honor a surprise and stresses that his colleagues deserve the honor as much as he does for helping to bring his ideas to fruition.

“In education, we are dealers in hope,” Tan says. “The principals, the bus drivers, the food-services people, the finance people—it sounds cliché, but we’re all in this

together. It helps give you strength [when you’re considering that] thousands of children and families are depending on us. That’s a pretty noble purpose. So, we relied on each other to have that central vision of hope, and then just got in there and took action one day at a time.”

School technology leaders such as Tan and Jennifer Burks EDD ’18, associate superintendent of technology and innovation at Poway Unified School District, never predicted that a pandemic would uproot students from classrooms. But well before COVID-19, these administrators spent years building up their technology programs, allowing them to quickly respond to students’ needs and implement new services when the crisis moved school online. In fact, some of the resources students received during quarantine, including access to hotspots, laptops and virtual classes, will remain options beyond the pandemic. As the coronavirus ushers in a new era, school technology leaders are adapting education with the goal of making it equitable, accessible and family-oriented.

A VIRTUAL EDGE

Tan may not have predicted the pandemic, but when the lockdown began, his school district already had a distinct edge over others: laptops for every student.

“We had one-to-one equipment that we could deploy, so we were in much better shape than other places, because overnight there was an instant shortage of computer laptops,” he says.

In 2019, the district acquired the laptops, which Tan says are as important for students to have today as pencils once were. Much of the curriculum requires students to go online. “It was the next natural thing,” Tan says. “We had computer labs, but that’s not the same as a child in the classroom having their own laptop that they can use.”

As distance learning began, district staff set up times each weekday when families could pick up a laptop. Tan also arranged for 3,500 hotspots to be distributed to households without internet connections. A partnership between the Los Angeles County Office of Education and Verizon to offer hotspots, wireless internet service and filtering software at steep discounts enabled Tan to purchase the technology. Families also received user instructions and tech assistance. Parents quickly inundated the help desk, which used remote software to help walk them through problems.

“Overnight, to have thousands of parents [contacting us] and then to train them to be able to use a computer, which for some of them was a new thing—that was challenging,” Tan says. “It points to one of the needs going forward: We need to have parents become more technologically savvy or at least know how to use the computer with their kids.”

Hyde says that opening up schools to the public could foster more technology literacy among community



↑ Thomas Tan EDD ’09, Hacienda La Puente Unified School District’s director of network and computer services, reviews notes on his office whiteboard in August 2021.

The Pandemic Changed Their Jobs Overnight. How Did Education Technology Leaders Manage?

Story:
Nadra Kareem Nittle

Photos:
Rebecca Aranda

USC Rossier alumni share how they led their districts out of crisis and into a brighter, more plugged-in future.



members—from parents to senior citizens. “If we can figure out what is needed by the community, maybe some supplemental classes for parents on how to access information online for their kids, then that’s what we do,” she says. “We just have to stop thinking about schools as these isolated sites that just happen to sit within a community. The school is part of a community.”

The help desk gave Tan’s team a crash course in the tech skills families lacked. Just four people in the department fielded help-desk calls, which led to lengthy wait times. (The others managed the school district’s network, prepped student laptops or worked as programmers and technicians.) After families got better acquainted with the technology, the team phased out the helpline and provided as much technological support and information as it could online, Tan says. Meanwhile, teachers had access to a special hotline they could call to ensure they got timely assistance for any tech problems.

The hotline and help desk weren’t the only vital resources for the HLPUSD community. By loading more than 10,000 student laptops with a universal sign-on for instructional programs, the network and computer-services

department made the digital resources required for remote learning more accessible.

“One of the things I discovered a few years ago walking through classrooms was, ‘Oh, my goodness, the children have to know four, five, six different passwords and log-ins,’” Tan says. “That’s a lot even for adults. So, instead of having to know a password and login for each program, each website, we have a single sign-on. Once they’re logged in to the single sign-on system, then they can access all the different programs. It’s made life easier for folks, and students get the material faster.”

Under Tan’s leadership, the district also ramped up its communication efforts, using social media platforms and Parent Square, a districtwide communication phone system, to send out messages to families. And Superintendent Alfonso Jimenez held virtual town halls during which parents could submit questions and express concerns. Going forward, Tan says, it’s imperative that the district prioritize the digital connection it established with the community during the pandemic.

“We want to leverage digital,” he says. “We’ve got this connectivity piece now, and we’re definitely not going back.

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In 2020 Jennifer Burks EdD ’18, associate superintendent of technology and innovation at Poway Unified School District, was named the 2020 Technology Administrator of the Year by the Association of California School Administrators.

“We just have to stop thinking about schools as these isolated sites that just happen to sit within a community. The school is part of a community.”

—Corinne Hyde, USC Rossier associate (teaching) professor of clinical education

The benefits are too great. We looked at our data, and it showed that teachers and students were working at night and ... on the weekends. That’s huge. That tells us how to restructure delivery of instruction and where to provide support.”

The heavy use of devices during non-school hours indicates that students might need a helpline on days off, Tan says. It also underscores the importance of training families to give children the tech support needed to complete classwork from home.

Now that school is back in session, each classroom has one set of laptops available for students, and those who need laptops at home can access them from the district by request, Tan says. Students and teachers are using the cloud-based Canvas Learning Management System for creating lesson plans, submitting assignments and organizing classwork. Tan is also helping the district’s community leverage digital technology through methods such as personalizing learning, connecting and collaborating

with others, real-time assessment, and connecting families with children’s learning.

“The sky’s the limit for us to offer opportunities that expand the classroom, expand learning, connect to others and collaborate,” Tan says. “It’s a really exciting time to be around as we climb out of this COVID black hole. I think the best is yet to come. We’re just warming up here.”

PREPPING TEACHERS AND PARENTS

When COVID-19 led Poway Unified School District (PUSD) to suspend instruction, Jennifer Burks, associate superintendent of technology and innovation and ACSA’s 2020 Technology Administrator of the Year, knew that her district was primed to make the shift.

“We had been rethinking today’s classroom and generation of students and their access to technology,” explains the 20-year education veteran who joined PUSD in 2017. “So, when we got word that we were shutting down in the pandemic and moving towards distance learning, fortunately, we had been already moving in that direction in terms of the integration and implementation of technology for our students across schools, as well as professional development and support for teachers around the purposeful integration of technology.”

But PUSD still had to make sure all students had access to technology at home. Before the pandemic, the technology team focused on offering in-class support to students, coaching teachers and increasing grant-writing to secure technology, Burks says. When the coronavirus crisis struck, acquiring the devices needed for distance

Jennifer Burks EdD ’18 on the New Skills Today’s EdTech Leaders Need

EdTech leaders need to take an innovative approach to instruction. They should be adaptable, meaning that they can identify what is or isn’t working and quickly adjust, and they’re unafraid to ask others what’s going well and what’s going poorly, explains Jennifer Burks EdD ’18 of Poway Unified School District.

EdTech leaders don’t necessarily know about all of the latest gadgets, but they’re willing to ask students which devices or programs they enjoy and why. “We need to empower our students to advocate for themselves and to have agency,” says Burks. “We don’t have to have all the answers. We can say, ‘Hey, there’s this new program we’re really interested in learning more about. Tell me what you learned from this.’ I can set kids on a path and allow their interests and passions to drive their learning.”

EdTech leaders understand that teachers facilitate learning, Burks says. Teachers are learning guides who set children off on a learning path and “empower [students] to go find answers and seek answers,” Burks says.

EdTech leaders would also be well-served if graduate programs prepared them for what the future might look like. To that end, Burks wants these programs to emphasize collaboration, critical thinking, assertiveness and flexibility.

learning rapidly became the top priority. With more than 35,000 students, the San Diego-area school district is nearly twice the size of Hacienda La Puente, so every child did not start out with their own Google Chromebook. Parent surveys ultimately helped PUSD's technology and innovation staff identify which families needed this equipment and prioritize providing it for them. By summer, the district had secured one Chromebook for each student in the district, whether or not the child already owned a personal device. The staff also helped families gain internet access by directing them to providers offering low- or no-cost Wi-Fi and providing hotspots. The district didn't stop there. By prepping parents and teachers to use unfamiliar technology, the staff helped to improve the remote-learning experience for students.

Connect Academy

Connect Academy is a virtual school in the Poway Unified School District (PUSD) that blends online education with elements of the traditional on-campus experience. Students, for example, still have the ability to interact with their teachers and peers and to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports and band. They can also explore the traditional curriculum while focusing on their favorite subject areas for a customized learning experience. Both synchronous and asynchronous learning options are available to students in the program.

Children don't need to meet special criteria to enroll in the virtual school. The ideal student for Connect Academy prefers a remote-learning environment, wants a school experience that offers flexibility, enjoys collaboration and is self-motivated. Students who struggle in the online academy can return to a traditional classroom setting. While the school serves students in grades K-8, Associate Superintendent Jennifer Burks EdD '18 points out that through independent study, high school students currently have the opportunity to learn remotely. Connect Academy will likely expand to include older students in the future, Burks says.

Full-time teachers with the same credentials and qualifications as those at traditional PUSD schools make up the Connect Academy faculty. The school's core curriculum includes computer science and digital arts, giving students opportunities to study career fields such as coding, digital photography, graphic design and video production.

“In education, we are dealers in hope. The principals, the bus drivers, the food-services people, the finance people—it sounds cliché, but we're all in this together.”

—Thomas Tan, EdD '09, Hacienda La Puente Unified School District director of network and computer services

“We had educational technology and innovation coaches—teachers who've moved outside of the classroom but have a passion for the integration of technology—provide professional development,” Burks says. “So that we could quickly train staff, we offered a large variety of professional development to teachers around the integration of technology and the use of our learning management system, or LMS.”

The professional development sessions took place shortly after schools closed in mid-March 2020. To reinforce these trainings, the district's tech staff held office hours with teachers who had follow-up questions. Faculty members who missed any of the professional development trainings, or who simply wanted to revisit the material, had the option of watching recorded webinars. By summer 2020, PUSD had purchased laptops for teachers and offered up to 15 hours of optional professional development for faculty on software tools, educational technology (EdTech) tools and virtual teaching.

The 60 tech and innovation staffers put in just as much effort in their parent outreach, setting up a tech hotline for families to call and, this year, organizing virtual academies for them. “Those were short videos for families that basically said, ‘This is how you get on to our learning management system. This is how you get on to our online portal,’” Burks says. “We provided these short how-to videos for families so that they themselves felt more comfortable assisting their children.” Short videos suit busy parents and guardians and quickly give them the information they need, Burks explains. Often, they eliminate the need for families to wait for a district staffer to return their call about a technology problem.

The innovative teaching, professional development support, parent videos, tech hotline and other district efforts led a number of students to flourish as distance learners, so much so that PUSD is launching its first all-virtual school this fall (see sidebar).

THRIVING DIGITALLY

Giving students in grades K-8 the option to attend school remotely is a way for the district to meet the needs of a wide range of learners and to offer an alternative usually seen in



charter schools and other nontraditional academic settings, Burks points out.

“We're really excited about that,” she says. “We have about 500 students from our district enrolled in our new virtual school, which is called Connect Academy. [It] will be part of independent study, but we are building it as a virtual school. So, it's about having students and staff build a school community and a culture and providing opportunities in a virtual way for peers to connect. That's something that's come from the pandemic, and I do think it's... here to stay” (p. 28).

Although some highly publicized studies have highlighted the disadvantages of remote schooling during the pandemic, such as rising rates of learning loss and declining youth mental health, other research indicates that a statistically significant group of students prefer learning from home.

“My hypothesis, based on the data that I've observed, is that there's going to be much more increased demand for different kinds of flexible school modalities,” says Morgan Polikoff, associate professor of education at USC Rossier. “While certainly not a majority of parents, it is a nontrivial minority of parents who really do feel like their kids had better experiences online.”

Concerns over the coronavirus, gun violence and bullying all factor into parental preference for online educa-

tion, according to Polikoff. A survey called “Understanding America” conducted by the USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research over April and May 2021, found that 22 percent of parents (from a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults) reported that their children were just as happy learning online as they were offline, while 25 percent reported that their children were happier and doing better academically as remote students. Moreover, 10 percent of adults surveyed said that online instruction allowed them to be more involved in their children's education.

These findings indicate that the pandemic likely ushered in a new normal, one in which online education remains a long-term option for public school students, Polikoff contends. School tech leaders like Burks and Tan say they are prepared to deliver education to students in ways that help them thrive.

“We want the best for each and every learner, and we have to provide that opportunity,” Burks says.

As the pandemic put intense pressure on technology administrators, Tan says he stayed focused by centering the rapidly evolving needs of students.

“We couldn't just abandon the kids out there,” he says. “We knew that we had something important to do, and we all believed in what we're doing. So, I think that carries us through, and has made us stronger.” —R

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For the second year in a row, a USC Rossier graduate was named Technology Administrator of the Year by the Association of California School Administrators. 2021 honors went to Thomas Tan EdD '09.



Interview: Kianoosh Hashemzadeh Illustration: Heather Monahan

‘Having a Place at the Table Is Not Enough’

Tracy Poon Tambascia EdD '07, newly elected president of the USC Academic Senate and USC Rossier professor of clinical education, on the importance of leaders amplifying alternative perspectives.

This fall, Tracy Poon Tambascia EdD '07, USC Rossier professor of clinical education, takes the helm as president of the USC Academic Senate, the first woman of color to hold the position. Tambascia joins a growing list of USC Rossier faculty members who serve in leadership roles at USC, including Alan G. Green, faculty athletics representative; Julie Posselt, associate dean, USC Graduate School; Ginger Clark, associate vice provost for academic and faculty affairs and director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching; and Julie Slayton, director of the Office for the protection of Research Subjects. Here, Tambascia discusses the role of the president, her goals for her term and why she has no heroes.

What is the importance of the Academic Senate, and what is your role as president?

The Academic Senate occupies a unique role within higher education. It's essentially a way in which the faculty can engage in shared governance and work closely with the administration, offering them guidance, perspective and feedback as they make decisions on things related to policy, strategic planning, budgeting or the way in which an administration is run. There's a central Senate, an executive board and a vast network of faculty volunteers who serve on committees, which is where a lot of the work gets done.

As president, I work closely on a weekly basis with an executive board. We make sure committees are staffed and have charges, and that we're communicating. But then there are things that pop up. Is there an issue that has surfaced that's affecting our faculty? Do we need to be anticipating a problem on the horizon? We work closely with the Provost's Office and regularly communicate with President Carol Folt. It's important that I listen, that I'm hearing from people and that they reach out to me so I'm able to coalesce that into priorities for the Senate.

Why is it important to have diversity in these leadership roles?

Even though many of us at USC work on equity and inclusion, the reality is that representation in race and gender, language abilities, religion and other identities really matters. Having people at the table from those various perspectives to challenge, to question, to uplift ideas, to emphasize and to advocate—all of that matters. Having said that, that's not enough. Having a place at the

table is not enough. It's also important for individuals within the community to listen and to amplify positions that are not their own. It's important that I'm at the table advocating for identities different from mine, and only in that way can we, collectively, ensure inclusion and explore the vast range of ideas and issues out there. Otherwise, it's an echo

“If we place so much stock in just one individual, as opposed to our collective responsibility, then we're not building capacity.”

chamber. I think that my election—which was the first by the faculty assembly with the faculty-at-large—reflects a changing and diverse faculty.

What issues would you like to focus on during your term?

One is this concept of building capacity for faculty leadership to strengthen our shared governance. That idea is centered on the fact that faculty are experts within our disciplines, but we don't necessarily know a lot about how universities function and we may not understand how policies are formed, how fundraising happens or what happens in athletics. One of the things I'd like to do is support the development of structured programs to allow faculty who want to be involved, to gain access and meet with individuals who form policies, manage budgets and forecast fundraising goals, [so they can] have a better sense of how the university works. That way we can be better leaders, and shared-governance conversations can happen at a higher level.

Related to that, we have a rising generation of junior faculty who are assuming leadership positions, but there's little known

about how these faculty are different from those who are retiring. But we know they are—there is more education debt, the higher ed job market and job security looks different. Through one of the committees, we intend to pilot a study that asks junior faculty: What are your hopes, aspirations and concerns? What would motivate you to become a department chair or to co-chair a committee? What would support their ability to serve in these roles so that we can prepare them as they develop in their career?

What are the qualities of a good leaders?

I can only honestly speak on good leadership from me. I'm a listener; I observe. I'm a friendly, positive person. I tend to see the glass more than half-full. I think sometimes people mistake that for softness, but I'm not. I know when to be firm. Oftentimes, individuals conform their ideas of what leadership is to this concept of rigidity and loudness, and perhaps masculine traits. I feel that I can be successful deploying my own approach. I can often be effective in communicating the way I normally do, with a smile, but that's not going to work with all individuals. Sometimes I may have to be a little tougher.

Who are some leaders you look up to?

A few years back, I would have identified some political leaders who I admired. But then they do something wrong—that happens in politics—and their name is sullied. There are people I admire, but I also believe that people are human and they're not perfect. We have superhuman expectations of individuals, so we're often disappointed when they fail, when they act human. I could say Barack Obama. I do really admire him, but he's not perfect. There are things that he did not handle well. So, I just hedge when I'm asked.

I don't like to regard my role as being at the center. To me, that's hero worship. It's the idea that you're at the center, and you're the only one who's accountable. That's such a fallacy. No individual can accomplish everything. If we place so much stock in just one individual, as opposed to our collective responsibility, then we're not building capacity. We're not engaging as many as we can. —R

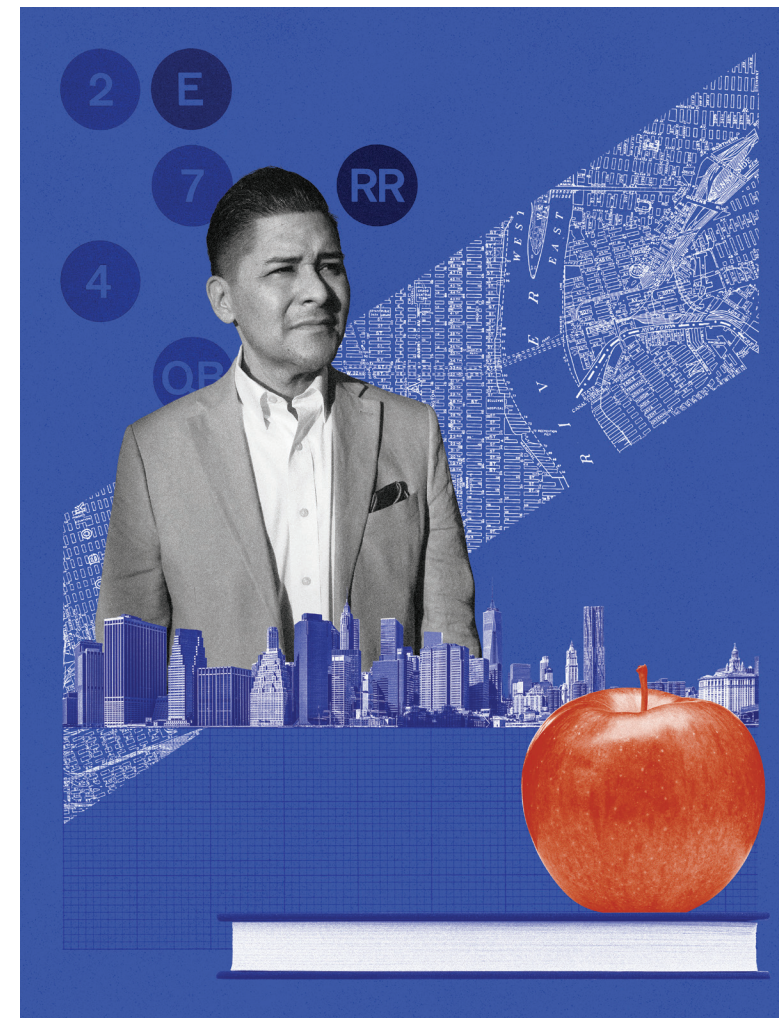
☞ *This interview has been edited for length and clarity. For the extended interview, please visit rossier.usc.edu.*

After a Harrowing Year, Superintendents From the Nation's Three Largest Urban Districts Step Down

Austin Beutner, Richard Carranza and Janice Jackson look back on leading schools during the pandemic.

Interviews: Kianoosh Hashemzadeh
Illustration: Edmon de Haro

The past year and a half has taken its toll on all of us—especially superintendents. There is no step-by-step plan for leading schools through a global pandemic. The stress of the office is immense, and the stakes—keeping millions of schoolchildren safe while ensuring these students have access to a high-quality education—are high. Three superintendents from the largest urban school districts in the U.S. resigned in 2021: Janice Jackson, former chief executive of Chicago Public Schools; Richard Carranza, former chancellor of the New York City Department of Education; and Austin Beutner, former superintendent of Los Angeles Unified School District. While each are moving on to the next chapter of their careers, education—and helping to prepare existing and future leaders—will still be a focus. Here, the three reflect on their time at the helm of the country's largest urban districts, looking back on their triumphs, the difficulties they faced and the skills they believe today's education leaders need to succeed.



Richard Carranza was born in Tucson, Arizona, where he attended school and began his education career as a social studies and music teacher. He went on to serve as superintendent of San Francisco Unified School District and Houston Independent School District. In 2018, he was appointed chancellor of the New York City Department of Education. He earned his BA from the University of Arizona and MA from Northern Arizona University. He also completed doctoral coursework in educational leadership through Northern Arizona University and Nova Southeastern University.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW YORK MAGAZINE / TANIA FRANCO KLEIN.

What do you know now that you wish you had known when you started your position?

Janice Jackson: I had spent the prior three-and-a-half years as [Chicago's] chief education officer, so I had the privilege of working closely with the superintendent. It's always different when you're the principal of an organization, because the stress and the responsibility is obviously greater. I wish I had known about the pandemic—I think everyone feels that way. I didn't anticipate how politicized people would make a health crisis.

Richard Carranza: I wish I had known just how deeply entrenched the inequity and segregation is in the New York City public school system. It's almost something people don't

think about. When I first went to New York City, I thought, here's [this] bastion of liberalism. Surely this progressive city would not stand for this? I wish I would have known how deeply entrenched it is, because we would have had some tactical changes.

Austin Beutner: Many things. There is no substitute for lived experience in almost any leadership position or almost anything you do in life. You can observe a situation, study the data, listen to anecdotes, but the journey of a superintendent in a large urban school district serving predominantly families who are struggling to get by—you have to live it to know it.

What unique challenges do superintendents from large urban districts face?

JJ: Superintendents are at the center of everything. I don't know if people fully appreciated that prior to the pandemic. With the wave of resignations, I'm personally focused on support and advocacy for superintendents. This [wave] is in line with resignations happening across the country, but it's more concerning in [large urban districts] because the [superintendent] skill set is very specialized.

RC: Many [urban districts] are larger than city municipalities. You have all the challenges that any large municipality would have. You have constituency groups, advocacy groups, your students, their parents. You have unions and union relations. Are buses delivering the children on time? What are students learning? Are the facilities in shape? Those challenges exist in all school systems, but they are heightened in large systems because of the sheer size and the complexity.

There's about 324 million people living in the U.S. [and] 1.1 million students [are served by] the New York City Department of Education. That means 1-out-of-300 Americans were sitting in one of our classrooms. Couple that with the fact that the budget is \$33.5 billion and the 152,000-person workforce—the size and the magnitude of the operation becomes a uniquely challenging issue.

AB: Los Angeles Unified serves the needs of about 650,000, students from families who are struggling to get by. Many of the challenges facing society—poverty and income inequality, lack of access to health care, the digital divide, racial inequities, housing and food insecurity—are the lived experiences of children when they come to school. The job of an urban superintendent is making sure schools provide the best possible education, but it's also running a health department, running a community support network, running a public safety effort. In Los Angeles Unified, under my auspices and continuing, we're running the largest COVID-testing program in the nation, the largest food-relief effort in our nation's history and making sure half a million students have a computer and internet access. A superintendent is the job of someone responsible for schools, wrapped up also with a bit of mayor, a little bit of governor, and a little bit of health department, all into one.

Two other superintendents from the nation's largest districts also stepped down this year. What particular challenges do you think contributed to these resignations?

JJ: I would characterize myself as someone who can roll with the punches, and COVID packed quite the punch. It's a combination of a few things. One, the fatigue from the past year. There were a few key people in school systems who worked throughout this pandemic. Superintendents, nutrition-support staff and many of our school leaders, for the most part, reported to buildings. Anyone who actively showed up to a building during this pandemic, that took a lot out of them. A lot of people had to reflect on whether they have the gas to do what's needed to recover. I've been with Chicago Public Schools my entire life, so I also hope that people see the totality of service. We've been through a lot: multiple strikes, a financial crisis, a sex-abuse scandal. I've been privileged to be in this role. I felt like it was time to hand it over to someone else, and I would imagine a lot of people who made similar decisions felt that way.

RC: Anybody in a leadership position got the snot beat out of them this last year and a half. There was a lot of conflicting and even contradictory guidance from the federal and local governments. State and local municipalities were caught in the middle. We're superintendents. None of us went to school to be virologists, epidemiologists or subject-matter experts in personal protective equipment. All of us were thrust into these very difficult situations with constituents. Some wanted us to open quicker than we did; some don't want us to open

“Normal never served all children. The new normal is going to be characterized by meeting the individual needs of students.”

—Richard Carranza, former chancellor of New York City Schools

until this virus is eradicated. People in positions of authority were just trying to do the right thing, [and] in many cases, without sufficient guidance.

AB: It is a demanding job, no question about it. I was granted emergency authority early on, so I was the face not only the face of the organization, but responsible for what we did—no passing the buck. The work schedule was 6 in the morning to 9 o'clock at night, seven days a week. There were protests from people who did want to be vaccinated and those who didn't want to be vaccinated. You're in the crucible. But I am

proud of what my 86,000 colleagues and I accomplished. I think we led the nation in many respects.

As we emerge from the pandemic what new skills and tools do today's education leaders need to succeed?

JJ: Crisis management. And you definitely have to be savvy and more skilled in communications (p. 37). Preparation programs should be paying attention to those two areas, particularly in regard to racial justice. Some have been fearful about how to respond. In Chicago, you can talk about equity—we've been teaching racial justice and talking about Freddie Gray and reparations for people who have been brutalized by the police here in Chicago because of the history we have. We live in a space where we can speak openly about those things, which, honestly, is only phase one of doing something about it. For other superintendents, it's a delicate balance.

And, of course, union relations. Big unions in major cities have gone beyond bread-and-butter issues to negotiate [for] quality-of-life indicators and policies, which obviously are important and make our communities better. I think they're inappropriate to bring into discussions as you're negotiating public education. If I'm being honest, that only happens in large urban school systems. People wouldn't stand for that in affluent, White districts.

RC: We faced three pandemics: COVID-19, the economic pandemic and then the social-justice and racial-equity reckoning. We cannot go to back to normal. Normal never served all children. The new normal is going to be characterized by meeting the individual needs of students. We've decried the technological divide for decades, [but the pandemic] forced us to reckon with [it]. School districts have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in getting devices to students. Teachers now have the opportunity to use technology to truly individualize what students need to learn. I would never advocate for replacing caring, well-trained teachers in front of students, but the ability to individualize is more relevant and prevalent than it's ever been in my 30 years as an educator.

If you look at the three largest school systems in America—New York, Los Angeles and Chicago—and you overlay where historically underserved communities are in each of our cities, and then you overlay which communities were the hardest hit by the pandemic, they align perfectly. People can't deny the inequity. Investing in historically underserved communities is something [we] have to do because we've seen the results of not having done that. It's going to be important for leaders to be cognizant that the trauma these communities have faced is real, and it's not going away. Future leaders are going to have to be resolute about calling out equity issues. They're going to have to have tough skin. I can tell you firsthand, when you start pointing this out and start moving resources and dismantling systems that are oppressing children, people will come out of the woodwork to keep the status quo.

resources the federal government provided to be able to do it. Our first cohort in August 2020 was 2,500 first graders. Of the 2,500 kids, 9 percent were proficient at the start of the school year; by midyear, 42 percent. Big gains continued

“The future of Los Angeles is in our public schools today, and the community better recognize that.”

—Austin Beutner, former superintendent of Los Angeles Unified School District

continued through the school year, so we expanded to 6,700 K-3 students. This year, it'll be 14,000 students. The groups that showed the most dramatic increases are Black students and English learners, ahead of their peers.

If we are providing our Black students with a foundation in literacy, math and critical thinking skills at a young age, that is an important start of what racial equity looks like in a school.

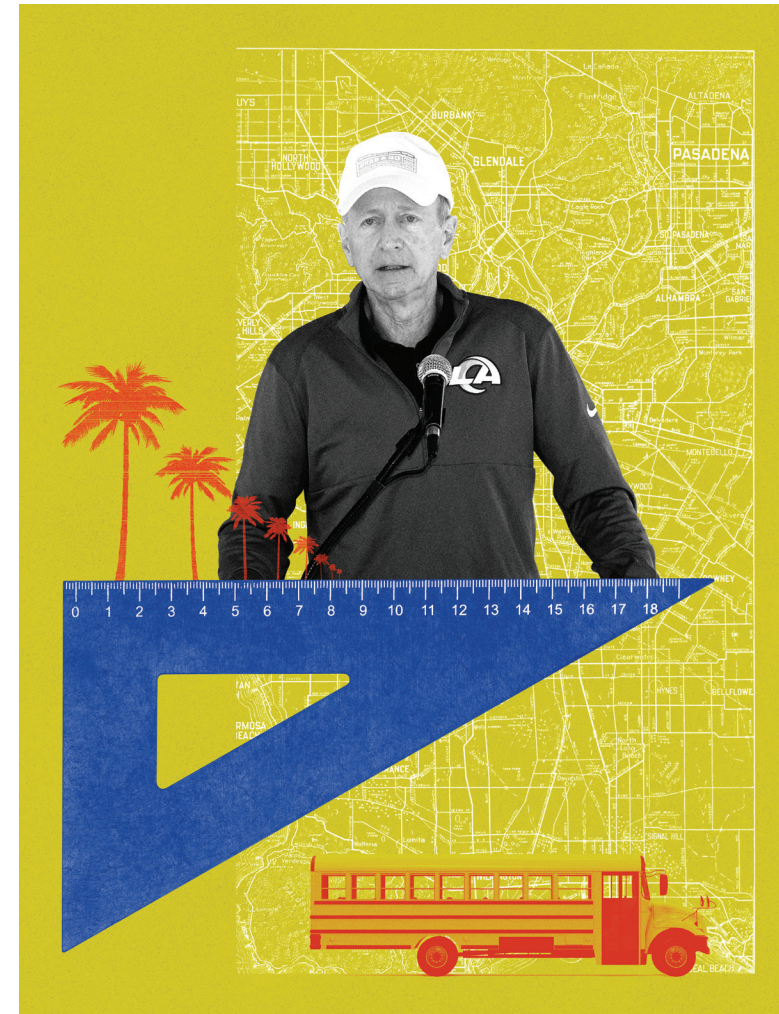
What do you consider your greatest accomplishment in the role?

JJ: The creation of the equity office and the equity work that we've done in Chicago not only has benefited our district, but it has served as a national model. There have been a few major initiatives that impact the entire district: our universal enrollment plan, which created greater access and equity to programming across the city, and Skyline, our pre-K-12 curriculum.

There are so many indicators pointing in the right direction: increases in graduation rates, test scores, college enrollment and college graduation. These are not isolated areas of success. What that says is that it is possible. It lays the foundation for the next generation of leaders and educators to take it to the next level.

RC: I don't think my colleagues in New York City had ever heard a chancellor [be] so plainspoken about the inequity that exists in our system. I think that empowered individuals who felt the same way to be OK in saying there is structural and institutional racism that disenfranchises large swaths of our student body, and it's not in line with our best thinking. In the future, it's going to be impossible for any mayor, city councilperson or assembly member not to have a position on the inequity and segregation of the city. I'm proud that I raised that issue and didn't back off, even under withering attack.

The other thing I'm really proud of is that New York has had a long tradition of being a decentralized system. At 1,800 schools, you had 500 curriculums. [Now], we have



Austin Beutner's path to the superintendency was not a traditional one. Born in New York and raised in Michigan, Beutner was an entrepreneur and founded a public company. He served in the Clinton Administration working on international economic development and served as the first deputy mayor of Los Angeles. In addition, he was the CEO and publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* and *The San Diego Union Tribune*. In 2018, he was elected superintendent of Los Angeles Unified School District. He received his BA from Dartmouth College.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ASSOCIATED PRESS / BRITTANY MURRAY.

AB: Our leadership team talked a lot about how we need to take a COVID mindset to everything we do. The emergency authority that I was granted allowed us to act quickly. One example is Primary Promise, a program we launched to help elementary school children build foundational literacy, math and critical thinking skills. At most urban school districts, roughly half of kids are at grade level and half aren't. If you can make a difference in early reading, you're going to see dramatically better life outcomes for children.

In January 2020, we announced an effort to do something different, with Dean Pedro Noguera when he was still at UCLA. We said, let's put a reading specialist into each classroom. When COVID came, we expanded the effort tenfold as we knew students just learning to read would be among those most impacted. We used the extraordinary [COVID]

three or four, and it allows us to maximize our instruction and professional learning. We're not trying to put everybody on the same page on the same day at the same hour, but this is really what's good for kids.

AB: We have gone a fair way towards restoring confidence in public schools in Los Angeles. We did a bunch of surveys

“Being a champion for equity in its truest form means you have to disrupt systems and practices.”

—Janice Jackson, former chief executive officer of Chicago Public Schools

[addressing] not only our COVID response, but what people thought of schools more broadly. [Around] three-quarters thought we're doing the right thing. That's an extraordinary change.

We provided meals, COVID tests and vaccinations, computers and internet access. We kept people safe. We upgraded the air-filtration systems. We delivered on the promise. That leads to something which will bear more fruit down the road, bringing everyone in Los Angeles into the conversation about public education. We brought community partners into schools and set up a not-for-profit to support our relief efforts, which raised over \$40 million. The future of Los Angeles is in our public schools today, and the community better recognize that.

What was your greatest challenge?

JJ: When you do this work—even if you do it well—you expend a lot of energy, resources and other capital to get it done, [yet] sometimes we can feel like there's still so much more work to do. That spirit of continuous improvement and being able to push for higher expectations, but also taking stock of the progress that has been made, was always a delicate dance. It's critical to make people feel like the work is worthwhile. I know [Chicago Public Schools] is in a better place as a result of my leadership, but I can't help but think we could have done more.

RC: One of the big challenges in New York City was this perception for people that didn't like what I was saying, because it has mayoral control [and] when a new mayor comes, there's probably a new chancellor. So [they think], let's wait this guy out. One challenge was making headway while “the lifers” wait you out.

AB: Convincing the haves, the cynics, the skeptics and people who care but have given up hope that we can do better and that we all have a stake in the success of kids in public schools.



Born and raised in Chicago and a graduate of Chicago Public Schools, Janice Jackson began her career in education as a social studies teacher and debate team coach in the Chicago school district. She went on to serve as a high school principal, district network chief and chief education officer, and in 2017 she was appointed CEO. Jackson earned a BA and MA from Chicago State University as well as an MA and EdD from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

How would you describe your leadership style?

JJ: I am extremely serious about the work, and I have an unrelenting focus on students. I believe in shared leadership, collective impact and responsibility. But I do believe once the decision is made that people must implement it with fidelity. The trade-off is allowing for diverse ideas, multiple viewpoints and engaging as many people as possible in the decision-making process. You can have 10 people doing great work, but you're not going to get the same impact that you will get if you have 10 people all working on a common mission with common language and practices.

RC: I'm inclusive and participatory. I'm unapologetic in terms of what we stand for, and we stand for kids—all kids. I'm not a micromanager, but I set a vision and expect everybody on the team to be moving towards that vision.

AB: Inclusive. I'm a good listener. There's a multiplier where you bring others in, and one and one becomes five. Whether it's bringing in Microsoft, Johns Hopkins or UCLA to help us think about our COVID challenges or gathering internal folks to look at the challenge of early literacy. I'm a fan of the Socrates approach—the responsibility of a leader is to ask questions, to get to the root cause of a problem and find the best solution.

What advice do you give to your successor?

JJ: Keep student needs at the center. Being a champion for equity in its truest form means you have to disrupt systems and practices, even [those] that seem [they're] the right thing to do, because we've always done it [that way]. Principal leadership is critically important, especially in large school systems. Good principals hire the right folks in schools and create the right conditions.

RC: Before I left, I said [to my successor], do you. Don't apologize or take responsibility for any mistakes that I may have made. But then again, don't try to be me—be you. And be very cognizant that there are a lot of constituencies, and the more you engage with all constituencies, the better.

AB: Start with the kids and families. If it's right for the kids, then find a way to make it happen. In public education, [the majority] of public comment and the newspaper articles I read don't start with [what's] in the best interest of children.

What's next for you?

JJ: I am leading a new non-profit called Hope Chicago. The mission is to create pathways to success for multiple generations of Chicagoans through equitable access to higher education by offering students and their parents scholarships, and wrap-around services to go to college or a professional trade program.

RC: I'm chief of strategy and global development at IXL Learning. There are various facets to my role. One is working on strategy for growing the business in the United States but also internationally—Latin America, in particular. My other role is kind of “superintendent in residence”: What would I want to see? What would add value to a school system? The third role is being the prognosticator: Where are we going in the future?

AB: I will keep trying to find a way to make a difference for others. I didn't take the traditional path to become superintendent. I've had many chapters in my life and there will be another. Most immediately, I'm focused on a not-for-profit I started called Vision To Learn, which provides free eye-glasses to children at schools in low-income communities. It's now in more than 500 cities across the country, from Hollywood to Baltimore. —R

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Urban Superintendents Academy Offers Timely Training for Education Leaders

For the seventh year in a row, USC Rossier, in partnership with AASA, The School Superintendents Association, is offering superintendents a unique professional development opportunity via the Urban Superintendents Academy. The yearlong program, which is specifically geared toward education leaders working in urban districts, consists of a two-day virtual retreat, biweekly online classes and an in-person session at the annual AASA National Conference on Education.

At this year's kickoff retreat, which took place in September, participants discussed strategies to tackle some of the problems unique to urban districts, including crisis communication. In a session led by Stephen Nichols, chief executive officer of Nichols Strategies who specializes in helping school districts communicate effectively during times of crisis, participants discussed situational communications and how to best handle various scenarios, from wildfires to sexual misconduct crises. Nichols also provided an overview of how communications function in a school district and strategies for building messaging within the context of protecting a district's reputation.

The session also gave education leaders an opportunity to assess their own communications skills. Participants broke into groups, were assigned roles in a superintendent's leadership team and were asked to prepare for a press conference addressing a particular crisis scenario. Together, they brainstormed anticipated questions and crafted a public statement to be read at the beginning of a press conference. The groups then recorded their simulated press conferences and workshopped these recordings with Nichols and the rest of the participants, getting real time feedback and strategies for improving their approaches.

Nichols also offered participants what he calls a “get out of jail free card,” which gives them access to a complimentary consultation with him in the event of a communication crisis.

For more information about the AASA-USC Urban Superintendents Academy, please visit rossier.usc.edu/programs/pd/urban-superintendents-academy.

Leading With Questions Rather Than Answers

By **Adrian Donato EdD '16**
Assistant Professor of Education



LEADING ANY ORGANIZATION, whether governmental, nonprofit or for-profit, is really about leading people to adopt new behaviors in response to challenges that arise. Getting from the current state to the ideal state is ultimately the goal of every problem we face.

However, when people do not know the ideal state they are working toward, they will not discover what attitudes and behaviors to adopt in order to get there. Rather than jumping to a quick solution for problem resolution, leaders first must ask if the goal is framed to lead from the “Why?”

Not only does the goal need to take into account the stakeholders most essential to implementing the changes needed to reach the ideal state, it also needs to be framed and defined in a way that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely while determining who will do what, by when and to what degree for ongoing evaluation and review. This process involves collaborating with others, promoting transparency, challenging existing assumptions, encouraging dissent, promoting curiosity and—most controversial to some—reframing existing but misdirected goals. After setting and framing the goal properly, the leader can then determine how best to strengthen and empower those who will help the organization reach the goal.

Leaders must first determine what their stakeholders actually know: Do they know the facts and strategies necessary to achieve the given goal? Do they know what procedures to follow? Once new behaviors are adopted, are stakeholders improving on their behaviors in new and novel ways as they plan their approach and monitor their own progress toward goal achievement? Unfortunately, leaders tend to assume there are knowledge deficiencies and resort to expensive trainings. However, it could very well be that stakeholders possess the skill but not the will to engage in goal-directed behaviors.

It is critical that leaders observe stakeholders to understand what motivates them and what might be hindering their motivation to adopt new behaviors. Leaders



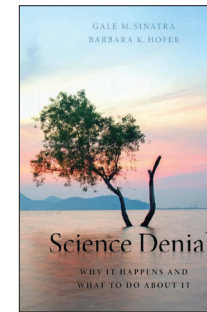
must ask: Do stakeholders value the changes needed to reach the goal? Are they able to see how the changes relate to their own interests, usefulness, benefit and/or importance? Do they have an adequate level of confidence to perform new behaviors, and will they be supported through on-the-job instruction, practice and feedback? Addressing these motivation factors is generally the cheapest solution to jump-start the goal-directed behavior of stakeholders. Leaders tend to assume a correlation between motivation and money—“If we pay them more, they will do better”—but this is generally not the case.

Leaders also must examine the organization’s beliefs and habits that support or prevent stakeholders’ adoption of goal-directed behaviors. An organization is inert until people give it life. Collectively held attitudes and beliefs such as lack of trust, helplessness, hopelessness, fear of failure, social loafing and unwillingness to change manifest in workplaces marred by unclear goals, prejudicial feedback, lack of autonomy, ineffective communication and misaligned workloads. Unfortunately, organizational leaders tend to assume that altering a policy, a procedure or a budgetary item line will alter people, but people are much more complex.

“What are the right answers for implementation?” should be the last question, not the first. Leaders need to discover these answers in two ways: through a survey of peer-reviewed literature aligned to the goal and through qualitative evidence obtained from internal interviews, observations, document analysis and/or surveys. Though it may seem slow and tedious to lead with questions rather than answers, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. As people are different and goals are different, every package of solutions will also be different. —R

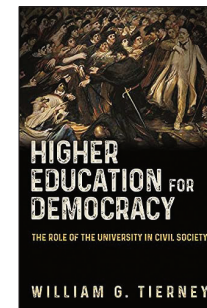
ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS GASH

Faculty publications



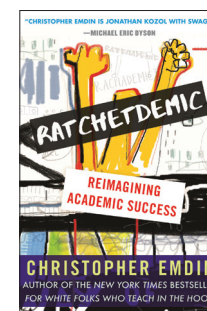
Science Denial: Why It Happens and What to Do About It by **GALE SINATRA** (Stephen H. Crocker Chair and professor of education and psychology at USC Rossier) and **BARBARA HOFER** (professor of psychology at Middlebury College)
July 2021 / Oxford University Press

In *Science Denial*, the authors grapple with some of the most pressing questions of our time: how individuals decide whether to accept human causes of climate change, vaccinate their children against childhood diseases or practice social distancing during a pandemic. *Science Denial* offers psychological explanations for why people deny science; provides solutions for individuals, educators, science communicators and policy makers; and allows individuals to examine their own thinking as well as that of others and to become more vigilant about these pitfalls.



Higher Education for Democracy: The Role of the University in Civil Society by **WILLIAM TIERNEY** (University Professor Emeritus at USC Rossier)
July 2021 / SUNY Press

Democracy and higher education are inextricably linked: universities not only have the ability to be key arbiters of how democracy is advanced, but they also need to reflect democratic values. Framed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing crisis of structural racism, *Higher Education for Democracy* explores academe’s role in advancing democracy by using a cross-national comparison of Los Angeles, New Delhi and Hong Kong to develop strategies that universities can employ to strengthen democracy and resist fascism. Taking a comparative approach and drawing on scholarly literature, archival research and interviews, *Higher Education for Democracy* aims to position higher education in defense of democracy in a globalized economy framed by fascism.



Ratchetdemic: Reimagining Academic Success edited by **CHRISTOPHER EMDIN** (incoming Robert A. Naslund Chair in Curriculum Theory at USC Rossier)
August 2021 / Beacon Press

Building on the ideas introduced in his *New York Times* best-selling book, *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood*, Christopher Emdin introduces an alternative educational model that will help students (and teachers) celebrate ratchet identity in the classroom. *Ratchetdemic* advocates for a new kind of student identity—one that bridges the seemingly disparate worlds of the ivory tower and the urban classroom. Emdin argues that being “ratchetdemic,” or both ratchet and academic (like having rap battles about science, for example), can empower students to embrace themselves, their backgrounds and their education as parts of a whole, not disparate identities. This means celebrating protest, disrupting the status quo and reclaiming the genius of youth in the classroom.

What are you reading?

Recommendations from Leadership Month speakers



Radical Candor: Be a Kickass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity by **Kim Scott**

Recommended by Michael McAlister EdD '18, education leadership executive, Apple Inc.



Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action by **Simon Sinek**

Recommended by Darnise Williams, EdD '09, superintendent, Sequoia Union High School District



The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together by **Heather McGhee**

Recommended by Stefanie Phillips, EdD '05, chief executive director, Chamberlain Education Foundation

This year’s Leadership Month, which was held virtually in July, featured 10 sessions with more than 40 USC Rossier graduates and faculty members sharing their leadership experiences across a multitude of institutions, from the Smithsonian to Apple Inc.

To access the online archive of this year’s panel discussions, please visit rossiercareers.usc.edu/leadership-month-2021.



Leading By Example, From Example

Women leaders in her distinctly male-dominated workplace have deeply inspired Kristine Poblete EdD '17.

Story:
Wendy Shattuck

RELENTLESS AND PASSIONATE ADVOCATE are words that superiors have used to describe Air Force Maj. Kristine Poblete EdD '17. One such superior was four-star Gen. Timothy Ray, former commander of the U.S. Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC) at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, the elite organization responsible for two legs of the nuclear triad and strategic deterrence support. As legislative liaison, Poblete coordinated the general's interactions with Congress, including his "Nuclear Force Posture statement" before the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces.

The high praise came along with the Air Force Diversity and Inclusion Recognition Program award, conferred in 2019 for Poblete's "innovative ideas or concepts in diversity and inclusion." She had directed AFGSC's Women's Leadership Symposium, featuring female leaders, including generals. Its success led to a conference series at other Air Force commands.

Today, Poblete is in demand. This spring, while juggling duties at the Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs office, she moderated panels on diversity, inclusion and intersectionality at the Department of the Air Force Women's Air and Space Power Symposium and was a panelist in this spring's USC Women's Conference "Women and Power Dynamics in the Workplace" session.

← Air Force Maj. Kristine Poblete is executive officer for the director of staff at Air Force headquarters and a USC Alumni Veterans Network board member. She recently led a session for USC's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Week.

Diversity, equity and inclusion issues—particularly the professional experiences of women in the military—have been a careerlong focus. Today, just 19 percent of the officer ranks are represented by women, according to data from the Council on Foreign Relations.

"Particularly in male-dominated fields," Poblete reflects, "your actions are so magnified. You feel like you have to hide your true self ... make yourself a little more palatable and prove your value. You're essentially representing the entire female population just by being there, [yet] you know you're worth a seat at the table. You can't have innovation without inclusivity, and leaders have to create that."

Poblete's awareness of these challenges began in high school Air Force Junior ROTC, with the example of one very strong, supportive leader.

Retired Chief Master Sgt. Gayle Wesolowski was the sole female instructor. "I identified with her because we had similar personalities—quiet, reserved, observant, introverted," Poblete says. "She was extremely intelligent, very insightful, caring. She was one of the first women to break through and make it to her rank. It was pretty astounding at the time, being a senior enlisted woman. Her example was that I could be myself and a good leader. I saw what I could become."

Wesolowski's example and those early experiences had set the stage for Poblete's academic and professional achievements. At Washington State University, she was ROTC vice wing commander, which provided scholarship support while she completed her bachelor's degree in communication. She went on to earn a master's in leadership studies from Duquesne University and eventually her EdD from USC Rossier—both while on full-time active duty, through several relocations and raising two kids.

Along the way, Poblete learned that she enjoyed leading a team and was good at it. Using her voice and seeking platforms to make a difference became passions. Her first assignment after her commission nearly killed that passion, but another strong woman leader changed her mind and the course of her career.

Poblete was a missile and operations officer in an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launch-control center, working mostly in underground bunkers—on duty in case a missile strike was launched. She experienced misogyny and lack of support, and she planned to quit when her service obligation was complete. Her female supervisor saw she was struggling, but also saw who Poblete was—and what she could become. She offered the young lieutenant a post that would appeal to her strengths and interests and allow her to learn in an appreciative environment.

That job—operations support squadron instructor, which required her to train and lead others—proved pivotal, boosting Poblete's confidence and career prospects. It led to her selection as missile systems flight commander and assistant director of operations for Vandenberg Air Force Base's ICBM flight-test squadron in California and then to the job at AFGSC.

Motivated to study leadership further while at Vandenberg and Barksdale, Poblete chose USC Rossier's Organizational Change and Leadership online program. "I was inspired by my cohort," she says. "I felt extreme impostor syndrome due to my limited experience in education. [My peers] were working with underserved communities, [some] in law enforcement. ... But they always made me feel my perspective was valued."

Professor of Clinical Education and Engineering Anthony Maddox also inspired her. "His compassion toward his advisees and interest in me as a student in the military were crucial," Poblete says. Maddox saw the importance of her research and gave her confidence to pursue it. Her dissertation was titled "Knowledge, Motivation, and Organization Influences on Persisting Leadership Demographics in a Military Organization: Perspectives on Diversity and Inclusion from Minority Female Officers." She brought her family to Commencement.

Poblete's family roots span education and the military. Before they immigrated to the U.S. in the 1970s, her parents were educators in the Philippines. Her father came to join the Army, while her mom continued in education. Kristine was born at the now-deactivated Fort Ord, California, before the family was posted to Fort Lewis, Washington. "My mother had been a guidance counselor for the University of Santo Tomas, Philippines, and my father taught for a private school," she says, "so I grew up seeing their educational leadership and care for their students. In hindsight, I feel like that had a lot to do with what I ended up pursuing at USC."

Poblete's wins have only multiplied. She was named Nuclear and Missile Operations Field Grade Officer of the Year, was given the Brig. Gen. Wilma Vaught Visionary Leadership Award and has excelled in roles at the Pentagon.

"I wanted to broaden my professional expertise and was selected to work in strategic communications for the Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs Office," she says. "That gave me the opportunity to work on strategic planning, identify key engagements for senior leaders and identify the messages they wanted to [get out] about their priorities. I got a broader, big-picture understanding of what we're doing within the Air Force—modernization, strategic competition."

Then, in June, she was selected as an executive officer for the director of staff for Air Force headquarters at the Pentagon. She is about to be promoted to lieutenant colonel.

Poblete credits USC Rossier and her role models—Wesolowski died in 2007, but the supervisor (now base wing commander) who "saved" her career back at the ICBM bunker continued as a mentor—for giving her the "cred" to lead discussions about women navigating power structures. "I've been fortunate to work with a few very self-assured, intelligent and strong women," she says. "The scrutiny is so intense. They always came prepared. They helped me [develop] the mantra that my work speaks for itself. It's better to be respected for your ideas and intellect than for trying to assimilate. I've seen women claw and climb in the most difficult circumstances but move forward despite it all. I'm here because of their example, and I'll continue to move forward." —R

PHOTO COURTESY OF U.S. AIR FORCE / TECH. SGT. MIKE MEARES.

Highlights From Class Notes

Class Notes are compiled and written by Matt DeGrushe ME '04, USC Rossier's director of alumni engagement. For additional Class Notes, please visit rossier.usc.edu/alumni/class-notes. To submit updates for consideration for future magazine issues, please email alumni@rossier.usc.edu.

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1970s

PETER CHANG PhD '71 has retired and is enjoying it immensely.

DANIEL HARRIS EdD '74 is retired and living in Nashville, Tennessee, where he raises chickens and sells eggs to his friends and neighbors.

MICHAEL MCCABE MS '74, a high school teacher, had a whimsical article, "I Had Brought My Phone With Me," published in the February 2021 issue of the *Virginia Journal of Education*.

GARY PETERSON BA '72, MS '74 earned his EdD in leadership and continuous improvement from Concordia University Wisconsin in May.

KAREN POPOVICH LEVYN BS '72, MS '74 is serving as a human relations commissioner in Beverly Hills, Calif., where she helps to advise, recommend and encourage activities and programs to be undertaken to promote positive human relations in all aspects of community life.

BARBARA GREGSON MS '76 received an Emmy Award as archival producer for the Netflix series *ReMastered*. It was her fourth nomination and first win.

TODD DEMITCHELL EdD '79 retired after 18 years in public schools and 30 years at the University of New Hampshire. While at UNH, he held an endowed professorship in education and an endowed professorship in justice studies and received the University Distinguished Professor Award in 2010.

1980s

JUDITH CARL PhD '88 retired in February after 33 years as a psychologist. She moved from California to Oregon to be closer to her brother and his family.

1990s

ANN KWINN PhD '90 is the manager of instructional design and quality control at the University of California, Riverside, University Extension. She oversees the online-learning function, providing direction, processes and training. During the pandemic, the school implemented the Canvas learning management system and converted all face-to-face courses to online. UC Riverside is Ann's undergraduate alma mater.

RIYE PARK MS '99 earned an MA in educational research and intercultural competency from Durham University in England in 2012 and an EdD in educational leadership from California State University, Fullerton, in 2018.

2000s

RITA BISHOP EdD '02 retired in June 2020 after 12 years as superintendent of the Roanoke City Public Schools in Virginia. Rita was named the 2014 Virginia Superintendent of the Year and is proud to have led major equity achievements during her tenure. She is writing a novel.

GABRIELA MAFI EdD '02, superintendent of Garden Grove Unified School District, has mentored a group of around 100 students through the district's College and Career Mentoring Program since they were in sixth grade. One of those students, Sebastian Lozano, is now headed to Harvard University. The co-valedictorian of Los Amigos High School first set his sights on the prestigious school when he was in elementary school. He credits the mentoring program with helping him discover a love for math and helping him to reach his collegiate goal. The program received the 2020 Golden Bell Award from the California School Boards Association.

SUE SORENSEN MS '02 published a new book, *Four Simple Rules of Personal Finance: Wise Up to Rise Up*, a good primer for average- to low-income individuals struggling with financial problems, as well as for young people, particularly those from disadvantaged homes.

CAMILLE FILARDO-KRAFT EdD '03 was selected by the leadership of the Women's National Football Conference to be the league's next commissioner. Her experience in sports leadership has spanned junior college, four-year college, the graduate level and the NFL. Over the past 20 years, she has served as an associate athletic director, senior woman administrator, Title IX deputy and college dean. Most recently, Camille served as the administrator of the NFL Substance Abuse Program.

JOHN PURCELL ME '03, EdD '06 is co-author of the book *SchoolArts Collection: Early Childhood*, which centers on art education for young students using child-centered approaches.

KEVIN BAXTER EdD '04, the chief innovation officer at the National Catholic Educational Association and past senior (continued on p. 44)



Confronting Stigma

Elana Glaserberg EdD '21 brings students with disabilities out of the shadows in Ukraine

IN 2018, SWITZERLAND-BASED EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT Elana Glaserberg EdD '21, now a member of USC Rossier's Board of Councilors, was observing and evaluating schools in Ukraine when she made a chilling discovery. "I asked why I never saw a disabled child in the schools we visited," recalled Glaserberg. She learned that nearly 100,000 disabled children were institutionalized in Ukraine.

On the same trip, when parents in Kiev expressed the need for a school to house 1,000 students, Glaserberg saw an opportunity. She had traveled to Ukraine as a consultant for U21, an educational foundation based in Zurich. Upon returning to Switzerland, Glaserberg proposed that U21 support the creation of an "inclusive school," one that would bring students with disabilities into the general population. The foundation agreed.

Drawing on her expertise in special and gifted education, Glaserberg initiated plans for a school in which young people of varied physical and cognitive abilities would learn together in a fully accessible new building. Instruction would be conducted in Russian through the London-based educational training company Inclusion Expert. In September, the

Story:
Margaret
Crane

ILLUSTRATION BY SONIA PULIDO

inclusive school opened its doors. Funded and administered by U21, it now employs 97 teachers and serves 1,200 students in the first through 12th grades.

"Sometimes, things fall together in ways you don't expect," Glaserberg notes. Even before her life-altering trip to Ukraine, she had been admitted to USC Rossier's EdD program in Organizational Change and Leadership (OCL). Her work in Ukraine became the focus of her dissertation, "Implementing Inclusive Education in Ukraine: Developing Teachers and Partnerships for Change." She received her degree in June. "I couldn't have done what we've accomplished in Ukraine without the knowledge I acquired at Rossier," she says.

Glaserberg received her first BA in education in her native South Africa, where she met Ivan Glaserberg MBA '83. After a long-distance courtship while Ivan attended the USC Marshall School of Business, they married in 1984. The couple moved to Australia, where she earned a BEd in special education. Following a sojourn in Hong Kong, they settled in Switzerland, where they raised their two children. For 22 years, Glaserberg worked at the Zurich International School as a teacher, counselor, learning specialist and administrator, always focusing on students with learning challenges. Along the way, the lifelong student earned a college counseling certificate from UCLA. Most recently, her husband's positive experience at USC Marshall led her to enroll in the OCL program.

The design and curriculum of the inclusive school reflects Glaserberg's academic background and hands-on skills. "Elevators, ramps, textured pathways for children who can't see—the building is phenomenal," she says. "Everybody in the classroom is accepted, regardless of their difficulties. If they're in a wheelchair or have dyslexia, ADHD or autism, we are there to support all students and involve them in the learning environment."

Today, Glaserberg is in constant contact with teachers, administrators and teacher trainers. "I keep the whole project going, but I'm not on the ground because I can't get into Ukraine due to COVID," she says. Looking forward, three of Glaserberg's USC Rossier professors will attend the inclusive school's first graduation ceremony in May 2022, and she envisions exchange programs between the two institutions..

USC Rossier also sought to continue its relationship with Glaserberg and her work. In June, she was named to the Board of Councilors. "Elana embodies the spirit of the Organizational Change and Leadership program," Dean Pedro A. Noguera says. "She overcame entrenched prejudices to effect deeply needed change for children in Ukraine and created a model for others to follow. Her vision and expertise will be a great addition to the board."

Glaserberg continues to consult for U21. "I've taken on the cause of inclusion," she says. "This school will hopefully be a model for other countries. The situation in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Moldova is the same as in Ukraine. Very little is done for children with disabilities. I hope to help develop inclusive schools and contribute something to these countries that wasn't there before." —R



ALLYSON FELIX '08 BECOMES USA'S ALL-TIME TRACK LEADER IN OLYMPIC MEDALS

ALLYSON FELIX '08 became America's all-time leader in track and field Olympic medals at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics when she helped Team USA's women's 4x400m relay team win gold.

Felix now has 11 Olympic medals, the most ever by an American track and field athlete. She has seven gold medals, three silver and one bronze. Her performance in Tokyo also extends her record for most Olympic medals ever won in track and field by a female track and field athlete. —**R**

the SDCCE; assures that the district is administered in accordance with policies adopted by the Board of Trustees and state and federal regulations; and maintains a close working relationship with the community and K-12 and local higher education systems, as well as with local, state and federal officials.

MARINE AVAGYAN EdD '08 rejoined Glendale Unified School District as the director of equity, access and family engagement, leading the newly renamed categorical department.

THOMAS TAN EdD '09 was selected as the recipient of the Association of California School Administrators' 2021 State Technology Administrator of the Year award (p. 24). He serves as director of network and computer services at Hacienda La Puente Unified School District.

2010s

CRAIG BARTHOLIO EdD '10 was promoted to associate professor at Azusa Pacific University.

JIM MOSS EdD '10 was elected to a four-year term on the Utah State Board of Education, where he serves as vice chair of the Finance Committee, after serving for three years on the Utah State Charter School Board.

BONNIE ALGER MAT '11 completed her doctor of musical arts in orchestral conducting in 2018 at the University of Maryland, College Park, and then was commissioned as an officer in the Army. She was promoted to the rank of first lieutenant and serves as the executive officer of the 1st Cavalry Division Band at Fort Hood, Texas. Last fall, Bonnie was a guest lecturer and panelist for music courses at Randolph-Macon College, Humboldt State University and the University of Maryland.

DARIN GRAY MAT '11 earned his master's degree in cybersecurity from California State University, San Marcos, in May. Darin was also the recipient of the James E. Ballinger Engineer of the Year award, which honors exceptional engineers renowned in their fields.

JAME'L HODGES EdD '11 accepted an appointment as vice president for student success and engagement at Edward Waters College (EWC) in Tampa, Florida. Jame'l provides direct leadership as the institution's chief student success and engagement officer charged with bringing the dynamism, energy, innovation

and progressive leadership necessary to efficaciously shape the future of EWC student success and engagement.

WENLI JEN EdD '11 was awarded the 2020 Outstanding Youth Award for her civic-engagement work in the community. Wenli also earned a certificate in data science from the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley.

LAUREN FORD ME '12 earned her doctor of education in educational leadership degree from San Francisco State University in May 2020. Acknowledged by faculty for her leadership within the program, combined with the support of her dissertation committee, Lauren was named the 2020 EdD program Distinguished Scholar. Through her dissertation research, coupled with her previous fellowship with the Biden Foundation, Lauren was tapped to contribute to a national series of reports dedicated to inform practitioners on how best to support under-resourced students through national College Promise initiatives. The team Lauren works with will specifically focus on foster youth in higher education.

FRANCES KELLAR EdD '12 launched her independent consultancy, Tri-Ed Learning Collaborative, specializing in applied research and consultation for individuals and K-12 organizational teams seeking to improve professional practice through intentional inquiry, targeted professional learning and conscientious coaching for equity.

MATT RUTLEDGE MAT '12 was selected for the 2020-21 cohort of the Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms Program.

CECILIA SANTIAGO-GONZALEZ EdD '12 was featured in a *Los Angeles Times* article, "College Students Pour Out Emotions Amid Pandemic to Bots," about the use of artificial intelligence chatbots to connect with students, especially during the pandemic.

PATRICIA BECKMANN WELLS MFA '96, EdD '13 is the chief academic officer at Emile Cohl Atelier, which was launched as an experiment in disrupting the education industry. The institution provides full-scholarship art education for media careers to deserving students who show promising artistic talent but are unable to afford increasingly high tuition rates.

ROBERT MIJARES MAT '13 moved from Seoul, South Korea, to Singapore to continue working on the international scene developing applied learning math programs in middle school. As a teacher at the Singapore American School, he brings math to life through practical applications from gardening to designing new exhibits at the zoo.

MARCO NAVA EdD '13 published an article, "Trauma-Informed Social-Emotional Leadership, Teaching, and Learning," co-authored with Delia Estrada and Susan Ward Roncalli. The article appears in the February 2021 issue of *Principal Leadership* magazine, a publication from the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

JANNA BERNSTEIN ME '14 earned her PhD in curriculum and teaching with an emphasis in cultural studies, international education and multicultural education from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, in December 2020. She received the Graduate College Medallion honoring exceptionally involved and high-achieving students.

SHI CHEN MAT '14 completed a PhD in applied linguistics from Northern Arizona University in July.

DAISY JAUREGUI MAT '14 was nominated for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

OSCAR MACIAS EdD '14 is the principal at Luther Burbank Middle School. The school was one of about 100 schools in the state selected as a California Distinguished School.

ELISABETH ROCHE MAT '14 founded EdLight, an edTech startup, after 10 years in the classroom. EdLight helps schools with solutions for remote learning and with tutoring that supports schools in focusing on authentic student work.

SHAHEED SABRIN BA '11, MAT-TESTOL '14 completed an English-language specialist assignment for the U.S. Department of State for teachers in Egypt.

BRIAN GUERRERO EdD '15 has been elected the next president of the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the leading association that connects talent-acquisition professionals with college career-services practitioners. Brian serves as assistant dean of the Center for Career and Professional Success at The Ohio State University.

CATALINA LARA MPA '96, EdD '15 transitioned from 20 years in Los Angeles independent schools to taking a position with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2019. For the 2021 season, Catalina became senior manager of education and learning for the Dodgers' minor league system in the U.S. and internationally.

MADELEINE MEJIA EdD '15 is an assistant professor at the College of Education at California State University, Fullerton. As an expert in language and literacy instruction, she teaches online and in-person courses that focus on issues of diagnosis and remediation of reading and writing needs, critical literacy, racial-equity pedagogy, diversity and critical self-reflective practices to improve the delivery of instruction.

SHINDALE SEALE MAT-TESTOL '15, EdD '18 was selected as chair of the University of California, Santa Cruz, Extension Diversity Program.

MERARI WEBER EdD '15 was recognized, in honor of Women's History Month, by Rancho Santiago Community College District's board for helping shape America's future through public service, leadership and professional achievements in the district. Merari serves as an associate professor of English as a second language (ESL), guided pathways coordinator and chair of the ESL Department at Santa Ana College's School of Continuing Education.

TRISTA BEARD EdD '16 was awarded the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' top prize in student affairs programs and services, the 2021 Grand Gold Award, for leading the USC Topping Scholars Program. The Topping Scholars Program supports low-income students at USC who also demonstrate extraordinary community awareness. Trista and her team were also honored with the Gold Award for First-generation Student Success Initiatives.

CRISTIAN BIVIANO ME '16 is a human resources analytics specialist at IBM. He sits on the engagement and diversity and inclusion analytics teams, where he designs and manages employee surveys. He also supports recruiting efforts by providing data and statistics for trends and patterns. He recently earned a master's of human resources and industrial relations with a concentration in diversity and inclusion from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.



PRESIDENT BIDEN NOMINATES CINDY MCCAIN '76, MS '78 FOR U.N. FOOD AGENCY AMBASSADORSHIP

CINDY MCCAIN '76, MS '78, a member of the USC Rossier Board of Councilors, has been nominated by President Joe Biden to serve as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture. McCain, whose decades of humanitarian work has focused on ending human trafficking, said in a tweet that she is "deeply honored and looks forward to the work ahead." The World Food Program is based in Rome and is the world's largest humanitarian organization. —**R**

DANIEL CHATHAM EdD '16 is a visiting professor at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, Calif., teaching in the International Education Management program. He was also the editor of the recently published book *Advancing Online Course Design and Pedagogy for the 21st Century Learning Environment*.

MICHAEL DAVIS EdD '17 is president pro tem of the City of Los Angeles Board of Public Works and was named the chief racial equity officer for the commission.

SIX TROJANS APPOINTED SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS



MATHEW NEAL EdD '18
Superintendent, Woodland Park School District, Woodland Park, Colo.



DARNISE WILLIAMS EdD '09
Superintendent, Sequoia Union High School District, Redwood City, Calif.



ANDREW SCHWAB EdD CANDIDATE
Superintendent, Santa Ynez Valley Union High School District, Santa Ynez, Calif.



RYAN SMITH EdD '10
Superintendent, Monrovia Unified School District, Monrovia, Calif.



WESLEY SMITH EdD '05
Superintendent, Newport-Mesa Unified School District, Costa Mesa, Calif.



JEFF DAVIS EdD '07
Superintendent, Oak Park Unified School District, Oak Park, Calif.

MARIA MARTINEZ-POULIN EdD '17 was named deputy superintendent for the Los Angeles County Office of Education.

NATASHA NEUMANN EdD '17 is part of the Educational Leadership and Administration Program faculty in the School of Education at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. She works with graduate students seeking a master's in educational leadership and also students seeking the preliminary administrative services credential in addition to their master's. Natasha was hired as a tenure-track faculty member in fall 2019.

SCOTT BRADLEY ME '18 joined the technology and data company Splunk as the program specialist for onboarding and employee development in Brooklyn, NY.

ALANA BURTON EdD '18 is creator and founder of Infinity Flow LLC, which helps organizations become stronger, better and more profitable.

JOSEPH CORTEZ EdD '18 was named to lead the International Association of Chiefs of Police Research Advisory Committee (RAC). The mission of the RAC is to provide input, advice and direction to the association, law enforcement practitioners, law enforcement researchers, Department of Justice leaders and the entire criminal justice system on all aspects of law enforcement policy research and evaluation.

VANESSA GONZALEZ EdD '18 and her partner, Edgardo Vaquerano, welcomed Eva Isabel Vaquerano on Oct. 24, 2020, in Downey, Calif.

STACEY VYE EdD '18 was promoted from associate professor to professor at Saitama University in Japan. She coordinates the English academic writing program and the self-access center specializing in motivation, proficiency, reflection and formatting from fundamental to advanced literacy.

EMILY WEISBERG EdD '18 was elected to the Burbank Unified School Board with the highest number of votes of any citywide official in the history of Burbank.

AERIAL ELLIS EdD '19 was elected to serve as president by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Foundation's board of directors following her appointment by the organization's nominating committee. The PRSA Foundation is

a charitable organization dedicated to advancing diversity and inclusion within the communications profession.

THERESA HASKINS EdD '19 is one of the newest faculty members for the master of science human resources program at USC Bovard College, joining as an adjunct associate professor.

LAUREN LEAHY EdD '19 was named coordinator of student services for the Solano Beach Unified School District.

MJ MARGGRAFF EdD '19 cofounded a startup company that has developed an application and device with an initial focus on providing a new way to connect older family members with young children. The startup grew out of her dissertation, which was an innovation study related to social isolation. The application addressed how to mitigate the isolation astronauts experience when on extended and distant missions. Her research translated to societal social isolation issues and served as inspiration for the startup. Called Kinoo Inc., the startup includes a team of child-development and technology experts. As a result of the unique innovation, first suggested in her dissertation and then developed thereafter, MJ has been awarded two U.S. patents, for the artificial intelligence and the time-sharing methods (an application useful for long-duration flights). She has continued to develop this technology to help our astronauts' behavioral health when returning to the moon and then on to Mars.

DEE MASIELLO EdD '19 is the founding director of the Center for Continuing and Professional Education at Suffolk University in Boston.

2020S

CHRISTIANA COBB-DOZIER ME '20 is a school counselor at Resolute Academy, a Los Angeles charter school serving students in grades 5-8. In addition, she is the author of a new children's book, *Racing for the People*, which was created in partnership with fellow USC graduate Kimiyo Brown ME '20 as illustrator.

CARLOS CRUZ EdD '20 was appointed dean, student care network and basic needs, at Dallas College. Carlos provides guidance and leadership in developing wraparound services at Dallas College, which serves more than 90,000 students.

DEBORAH ELDER EdD '20 is chief academic officer for instruction, accountability and

innovation at Los Lunas Schools in New Mexico (p. 21).

CECILIA JEREZ MAT-TESOL '20 is a virtual English language fellow at the U.S. Department of State.

MICHELLE JUAREZ EdD '20 is the founding director of academic support and advising at the new Kaiser Permanente Bernard J. Tyson School of Medicine in Pasadena.

CASSONDRA KOETT EdD '20 is a high school principal at Lexington Christian Academy in Kentucky.

JOSEPH KOTARSKI EdD '20 was named superintendent of the inaugural Dubai Schools, a

public-private partnership between the Dubai government and the private schools provider Taaleem Education.

JENNIFER QUEZADA EdD '20 was elected to serve as a governing board member for Fontana Unified School District. The school district serves more than 36,000 students.

ALEKSANDR VONINSKI EdD '20 is associate director, client relations, for Education Testing Service in Sydney, Australia. In his role, Aleksandr manages government and institutional client relations across Australia, New Zealand and the greater Pacific Islands region, improving accessibility and equity for test-takers in urban and remote locations.

I N M E M O R I A M

JACK MCCLELLAN BS '42, MA '50, PhD '56 passed away peacefully at 102 years of age on May 3, 2021. Born on Dec. 16, 1918, in Los Angeles, Jack graduated from Belmont High School in 1936. In 1942 he was called to serve in the U.S. Army Air Forces and was stationed in England, France and Germany. His education career began in 1946 as an elementary teacher with LAUSD. He completed his master's and his doctorate at USC with assistance from the GI Bill. As a principal, he opened Calvert Elementary School and, in 1960, was appointed assistant superintendent of LAUSD. He was also an adjunct professor at USC Rossier, president of the Education Alumni Association, and a member of Phi Delta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi. Jack is survived by a large extended family, including seven godchildren.

RONALD G. BENNETT EdD '90 passed away on March 14, 2021, age 78, due to complications from Alzheimer's disease. Ronald received his EdD in educational leadership from USC Rossier. His career in public education spanned more than 40 years. Spending his first 20 years as a classroom teacher and site administrator, Ron went on to serve as assistant superintendent, deputy superintendent and superintendent in five different Southern California school districts. After retirement, he served as Saddleback Church's grief ministry director for 12 years. He dearly loved his family, profession, faith and all things USC. He is survived by his wife, Linda, son Brandon and daughter Lauren BFA '09.

THERESA (TERRI) LYNN THOMAS EdD '21 passed away of natural causes after a short, but serious illness on July 27, 2021. Terri was born on Oct. 22, 1979, at March Air Force Base in California. After her father passed in 1982, the family moved to Minnesota where Terri graduated co-valedictorian from New York Mills High School. She earned a bachelor's in mass communications with honors from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, and completed her MS in Public Service Management at DePaul University in Illinois. At the time of her death, she was a doctoral candidate and director of the EdD in Educational Leadership Program at USC Rossier. Terri was awarded her EdD posthumously. She is survived by her mother, Vicki Leaderbrand; brother, John Leaderbrand; sisters, Angela Thomas and Dr. Katherine Leaderbrand; nephew, Francis Corcoran; grandmother, Helen Leaderbrand, and a large extended family and dear friends.



Paying It Forward

The Andrew Nikou Foundation backs a crowdsourcing model that seeks solutions to education problems.

By Diane Krieger

FINANCIER ANDREW NIKOU '00 (USC Marshall School of Business) was looking to take a long-headed position with one of his foundation's first major grants. Something meaningful, substantive, with good return on investment. His own life experience had taught him that education is at the root of nearly all progress.

A mutual friend introduced Nikou to USC Rossier Professor Alan Arkatov in 2019. As the two were exploring philanthropic options, the pandemic landed. COVID-19 was thrashing the education ecosystem, and fresh ideas were desperately needed. Backed by a grant from the Andrew Nikou Foundation, less than a year later, the Education (Re)Open was born.

Arkatov is founding director of the Center for Engagement-Driven Global Education. The Education (Re)Open is its newest initiative and its successor, the Education Solutions Exchange, address old and new problems in K-12 schools by "crowdsourcing" solutions from teachers, parents and students. (p. 8)

Arkatov appreciates how Nikou brings a "business aesthetic to his philanthropy." "Andrew peppered me with a lot of hard questions: 'Tell me what your assets are. What are the fundamental problems we need to address to make this a better asset? Let me really look under the hood,'" Arkatov says, recalling their early conversations.

Nikou was looking for a different kind of return—one not measured in financial gains but in true innovation and measurable impact. "There was a clear expectation that we'd better deliver," Arkatov says. "Andrew doesn't like to focus on anything that can't scale or is unsustainable."

Nikou is CEO of OpenGate Capital, an \$8 billion, global private equity firm with headquarters in Los Angeles and Paris. He founded the company in 2005.

Born in Vancouver, British Columbia, to Iranian immigrants, Nikou, 44, grew up in Woodland Hills, California. As a boy, he was the target of harsh bullying because he was

shorter than most of the other children. His father, who worked for the city's Department of Water and Power, taught Nikou to "be scrappy and smart, to use my brain rather than my muscles," he told *Entrepreneur* in 2016. Nikou credits his dad's single-minded focus on education with saving his life, after friends were gunned down in a drive-by shooting at a movie theater. Nikou wasn't with them because his father had made him stay home and study that night.

Both Nikou and his brother, Cyrus, are proud Trojans. After earning his bachelor's in finance from USC Marshall, Nikou shot to the top of the private equity world. He commends a USC career counselor for setting his feet on the path to success. "Her advice changed the trajectory of my life," he says.

Twenty years later, he now has his sights set on tackling some of the world's biggest problems through philanthropic work. Nikou, who also sits on the boards of the Hammer Museum and musician Pharrell Williams' non-profit YELLOW, founded the Andrew Nikou Foundation to provide young people—particularly those with the odds stacked against them—with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Nikou firmly believes that "education is the centerpiece—there's no problem that cannot be solved by it," but he sees the current education system as outdated, built around methods from the Industrial Revolution. He knows this having spent the past year closely observing his three children, ages 6, 5 and 2, as they thrived while homeschooled by their mom, Odelia, and a private teacher.

"COVID has been the ring of fire we had to step through to really see, understand, hear, feel and confront the longstanding inadequacies and inequities of the current educational structure," says Jules Ho, executive director at the Andrew Nikou Foundation.

If so, then Education (Re)Open and the Education Solutions Exchange might be the community-powered fire brigade we've been waiting for. —R

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ANDREW NIKOU FOUNDATION

Our goal is to ensure that every talented student can attend USC Rossier and pursue their dream of becoming an educator. Your support for student scholarships expands opportunities for future leaders, increases the diversity of the field and paves the way to solving education's greatest challenges.

"Your support of lifelong public educators like myself strengthens our city and our country by best preparing our citizens with a quality education and a sense of self-worth."

—Angela Dillman EdD '22

"As someone who has dreamed about attending USC her entire life, I cannot express how deeply grateful I am for your generous contribution."

—Kaytlin Abad ME '21

This year, USC Rossier students were able to attend commencement in person. The event took place on Sunday, May 16, 2021, and was held outdoors at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

PHOTO BY USC PHOTO/MICHAEL BAKER

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Doctoral graduates
Mercy Willard EdD '21,
Maria-Romero Morales
EdD '21 and Isabel Brenes
EdD '21, from left, arrive
for the USC Rossier
School of Education
Commencement, Sunday,
May 16, 2021, at the
Los Angeles Memorial
Coliseum.