

# USC Rossier

M A G A Z I N E

## A New Vision for Schools

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A second grader attends online school from her socially distanced desk at the Delano Recreation Center, which is a part of the Safer at Parks: Alternative Learning Centers and After School Program in Los Angeles.



## DEAN'S BYLINE

### Dear Friends,



As we go to press, COVID-19 has infected 3.6 million Californians. On a more profound scale, due to our state's sheer size and deep income inequality, the pandemic has shuttered businesses, triggered mass evictions, thrown millions into unemployment and forced teachers and families to rely on virtual instruction.

California's governor, its teachers unions and the massive Los Angeles Unified School District—80 percent of whose students live in poverty—struggled to agree on when to reopen schools safely.

The pressure to reopen has been great, and not only due to economic urgency. Although schools tried valiantly to keep students connected to learning, millions of kids have had limited access to online classes. USC Rossier Professor Stephen J. Aguilar's research in Los Angeles County (p. 5) found that close to a third of students fall into this category. It's not surprising that a recent study from Policy Analysis for California Education found substantial evidence of learning loss among low-income students. Inequities in educational opportunity that were pervasive before the pandemic have been exacerbated.

As vaccines are rolled out, political agreements are forged, plans activated and schools reopened, how will we address these impacts? And is there any chance that schools can perform better than before—for *all* students, equally?

Hugh Vazquez of the National Equity Project writes, "Disturbance is required for change and there is no doubt that disturbance is happening ... the question is, *are we willing to use this opportunity to create the kind of educational system we want?* ... To change a system, we ... first have to SEE what the system is producing, then we have to ENGAGE with others to design something different, and finally we have to ACT."

When we do look closely and "see" our educational system, it's clear we can do better. We can provide students with an education that expands opportunity, builds character and inspires them to excel. If we invite teachers to prioritize their relationships with students—to get kids excited about learning by tapping into their natural curiosity—and if we work together, across political differences, to ensure that schools have the resources to support all students, we can create the schools we need for a better, more equitable future.

In this issue, you will read about USC Rossier initiatives designed to do just that—our *New Vision for Schools*. Our faculty, alumni and students "see" the system in question. Together with teachers, counselors, administrators and families on the front lines of the educational challenges in this country, we are ready to devise innovative, aggressive, *permanent* strategies for change.

Fight On!

*Pedro Noguera*

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

**Dean**  
Pedro A. Noguera

**Executive Director, Communications**  
Wendy Shattuck

**Editor & Director of Publications**  
Kianoosh Hashemzadeh

**Director of Alumni Engagement**  
Matt DeGrushe ME '04

**Design & Art Direction**  
Laura Grey

**Copy Editor**  
Elizabeth Slocum

**Proofreader**  
Anne Burke

**Production Manager**  
Nina Crum

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Shaun R. Harper**  
Provost Professor of Education and Business

**Ross Brenneman**  
Director of Media Relations

**Arwen Duffy**  
Assistant Vice President, Development

**Brian Soika**  
Digital Content Writer

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**Shamya Ullah**, Portfolio Manager, First Vice President, RBC Capital

**Peter Weil**, Co-Managing Partner, Glascr, Weil, Fink, Jacobs, Howard & Shapiro, LLP

## EDITOR'S NOTE



### A New Vision for Schools

In the Fall/Winter 2020 issue of *USC Rossier Magazine* we explored how both the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement exposed existing inequities in schools, resulting in an urgent need to reconsider how we educate. Our findings were clear: We can't simply go back to normal after the pandemic is over. Instead, we must use this opportunity to help bring lasting change to the field of education. In this issue, you will read about how the USC Rossier community is considering the ways education can be re-envisioned and how these transformations can help us work toward our mission of achieving educational equity.

Our webinar series, *A New Vision for Schools (and Why Now Is the Time)*, which brings together thought leaders in many sectors to discuss pressing problems in education, launched in February (p. 4). In partnership with LAUSD, a new Teacher Preparation Residency program to support the next generation of educators will kick off this fall (p. 10). Our faculty, staff, students and alumni are reimagining how science is taught (p. 14), how classrooms and schoolyards can be reconfigured to promote the social and emotional well-being of students (p. 20), how to reform college admissions (p. 36), and how educators are using digital tools in their virtual classrooms (p. 28). The pandemic, in fact, has shown us in many ways that the things we thought could never change, actually can.

Kianoosh Hashemzadeh, Editor



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### STORY IDEAS? FEEDBACK?

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ILLUSTRATION BY EDMON DE HARO

PHOTO BY APRIL WONG



## New vision for schools takes shape through webinar series

By Wendy Shattuck

**HELPING TO REIMAGINE AND REMAKE** K-12 education is one of Dean Pedro A. Noguera’s imperatives for USC Rossier, as vaccines roll out and we contemplate the return of tens of millions of U.S. schoolchildren to in-person learning. In February, the school launched a series of virtual conversations on the topic. *A New Vision for Schools (and Why Now Is the Time)* gathers experts from education, public policy, the media, technology, philanthropy and other sectors to explore how our educational system can do better for students after the pandemic. At the heart of the series is an exploration of how we can use the unprecedented disruption wrought by COVID-19 as an opportunity to create a more engaging, more equitable and more effective learning environment for children than they experienced before the prolonged school shutdown.

Hundreds tuned in for the inaugural webinar in the series, “The School Safety Net in the COVID Age,” which examined the worrisome effects we are seeing in students of all ages whom the pandemic forced online. From lack of access and learning loss to social-emotional impacts, and from deepened racial and socioeconomic inequities to mental health issues, many students are struggling, and the situation has magnified issues that affected students’ learning and

outcomes before the pandemic. “Can we make it happen already? We’ve got to be brave!” exclaimed Professor Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, one of four experts who agreed the time is indeed now to chart a new course for education in this country.

The series’ second webinar in March explored further the inequities in educational opportunity that have been worsened by the pandemic and how we might improve outcomes. Future webinars will tackle how to redesign teaching and learning, engage young learners digitally and innovate in policymaking. The conversations all focus on three key areas: advancing equity, educating the whole child and fostering engagement.

Audience members, including teachers, students, families and advocates, will be invited to help develop and implement plans that emerge from these dialogues. “This pandemic presents an opportunity like none we’ve had before to disrupt the entrenched modes and mindsets of the educational structure in our nation and rebuild from it something better,” Noguera said. —R

To view the webinars, please visit [rsoe.in/newvision](https://rsoe.in/newvision).

↑ Joining host Pedro A. Noguera were, from left to right, moderator Elizabeth Green, CEO, Chalkbeat; Bror Saxberg, vice president, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative; José Muñoz, director, Coalition for Community Schools; Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, professor, USC Rossier

#11

FOR THE FIFTH YEAR IN A ROW, *U.S. News & World Report* named USC Rossier one of the 15 best graduate schools of education in the country. This year we’re #11, and have ranked in the top 20 in nine of the past 10 years.

Two USC Rossier programs also ranked in the top 30 within their respective areas: Higher Education Administration (#5) and Education Policy (#17).



## SURVEY: LOW-INCOME FAMILIES STRAINED BY DISTANCE LEARNING

By Ross Brenneman

**WHEN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC** closed schools across the country last spring, districts turned to emergency online instruction, distributing tens of thousands of internet hot spot devices and learning equipment like laptops and tablets.

But a survey of low-income families in Los Angeles shows that many students became disengaged, especially when home technology was lacking or unreliable. The research shows that continued school support for internet access and devices—as well as live instruction and teacher feedback—will be critical for improving remote learning for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year.

“If we want the future of Los Angeles to be less characterized by profound inequality, we must do more to guarantee high-quality learning opportunities for all children,” said Pedro A. Noguera, dean of USC Rossier. “This report reminds us of how far we must go to deliver a well-rounded education.”

The report shows the many ways the pandemic is making it difficult for schools to provide high-quality learning opportunities for all children. For example, many models

of remote instruction rely in part on parents acting as educators, when in fact many parents—especially low-income parents—are required to work outside the home or have limited technological proficiency to support students’ needs. And only about 1 in 3 families report that students always have a place free of distraction for remote learning.

“Every room in the household is now a classroom,” said Stephen J. Aguilar, an assistant professor of education at USC Rossier. “Bedrooms, living rooms and kitchens are not set up for uninterrupted, focused instruction.”

Aguilar produced the report with Hernan Galperin, an associate professor of communication at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. —R

*The survey was conducted online and by phone, and sampled 1,971 families with children in K-12 schools administered by the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, Vaughn Next Century Learning Center and STEM-Prep Charter Schools. The California-based nonprofit Great Public Schools Now provided funding for the study.*

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS GASH



## Gregory Franklin '83, EdD '97 inducted into DSAG Hall of Fame; four EdD students awarded scholarships

By Kianoosh Hashemzadeh

**THIS YEAR'S AWARDS CEREMONY** FOR the Dean's Superintendent Advisory Group (DSAG), which took place virtually in January, awarded four DSAG scholarships and inducted Gregory Franklin '83, EdD '97 into the DSAG Hall of Fame.

Franklin, the chair of DSAG and superintendent of Tustin Unified School District, began his career as a social studies teacher at Saddleback High School in Santa Anna, California, where he also coached football and track. Rudy M. Castruita '82 EdD, USC Rossier professor of clinical education and Irving R. and Virginia Archer Melbo Chair in Education Administration, hired Franklin at Saddleback High and described him as "one of the best hires I've ever made." Franklin went on to become assistant principal at Saddleback High as well as principal at Fullerton Union High School and Bonita High School. His path to the Tustin superintendency included appointments as assistant superintendent of human resources in the Fullerton Joint Union High School District, assistant superintendent of educational services for the Glendale Unified School District and superintendent of the Los Alamitos Unified School District. In 2014, Franklin was named California and Orange County superintendent of the year. "Known

for his service, for his generosity and for his integrity as a leader, [Franklin] is so deserving of this recognition," USC Rossier Dean Pedro A. Noguera noted in his opening remarks.

For Franklin, "changing the lives of kids" has always been paramount, and students' success in school permeates other aspects of their lives. "Every part of their lives—every measurable part and many parts that aren't measurable—will be better if we're doing our job well," Franklin said in his acceptance speech.

The DSAG Endowed Scholarships were awarded to Christopher Brown, assistant superintendent in the Office of Research, Planning, Evaluation and School Improvement at Long Beach Unified School District; William Gideon Jr., assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for the Los Nietos School District; Lita Mallett, founding principal of Milwaukee Excellence High School; and Karen Mercado, an administrator of instruction in LAUSD Local District West. Mercado's scholarship was awarded through a partnership with TELACU, whose mission is to equip Latino/Latina scholars with the tools they need to effect positive change in their communities. —R

↑ Gregory Franklin emceeds the DSAG awards dinner in 2020.

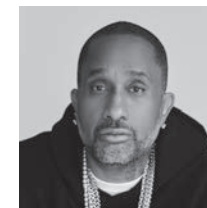
→ From left to right, Christopher Brown, Karen Mercado, Lita Mallett, and William Gideon Jr.



GREGORY FRANKLIN PHOTO BY BRIAN MORRI / 211 PHOTOGRAPHY

## Three philanthropists with backgrounds in social justice and activism join Board of Councilors

By Ross Brenneman



**KENYA BARRIS** is the award-winning writer, producer and director behind projects such as the Netflix original comedy *#blackAF*; the Peabody Award-

winning sitcom *black-ish* at ABC; two successful *black-ish* spin-offs, *grown-ish* on Freeform and *mixed-ish* at ABC; as well as a recently green-lit, third spin-off, *old-ish*, in the works.

Barris has aimed to make an impact through his personal philanthropic endeavors, as well. In 2018, he donated \$1 million to establish the Kenya and Rainbow Barris Annual Scholarship Award at his alma matter, Clark Atlanta University; half of the donation will support mass media arts majors, with the remaining half serving as an annual scholarship for biology students.



**MELANIE LUNDQUIST** is one of Southern California's foremost philanthropists, along with her husband, Richard. Their transformative gifts have created the

Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, a turnaround model for underserved noncharter K-12 public schools. Lundquist serves as vice chair of the organization's board of directors. The Lundquists are signatories of the Giving Pledge and have appeared four times on "The Philanthropy 50," the annual list of America's 50 most generous philanthropists.

Lundquist is also a double Trojan, holding undergraduate and graduate degrees from USC in communicative disorders/speech pathology and audiology, as well as a credential as a specialist in special education.



**SHAMYIA ULLAH** is a social justice activist and pioneer in the field of impact investing, focusing on the use of private capital for social good. She began her career on

Wall Street in 1997 at Goldman Sachs. In 2017, she joined RBC Capital Markets as portfolio manager in Los Angeles. From developing strategies for fossil fuel, firearms and private prison divestment to the newly launched U.N. Sustainable Development Goals investment portfolio, Ullah has directed more than \$500 million in capital toward impact strategies.

Ullah is also a frequent speaker on impact investing, having presented or lectured at the Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment, the United Nations, Columbia University, USC, UCLA, UC San Diego and the Ebell of Los Angeles.

## What we're watching

A new PBS documentary, *A Trusted Space*—which features USC Rossier Dean Pedro A. Noguera and professors Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Alan Arkatov alongside other experts, educators, parents and teachers—premiered in November. The film explores social and emotional learning principles and also has an accompanying curriculum guide that provides tools to assist students and teachers in dealing with anxiety, grief and trauma in a year in which school and daily life have been disrupted.

📶 To view *A Trusted Space* and access the curriculum guide, please visit [allittakes.org/a-trusted-space/](http://allittakes.org/a-trusted-space/).



# Leaders in Education Reflect on a Year of Upheaval

Alumni from Hawai'i to Minnesota share their experiences and hopes for the future

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE OVER a year has passed since the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a global lockdown. In this time of unknowns, the importance of our educational system has been brought into sharp focus, and we've turned to educators time and time again to help us find answers to the tough questions the pandemic has forced us to reckon with. Here, we've asked six USC Rossier alumni in leadership positions across the educational spectrum how they've navigated the pandemic, how it's changed their views on education and the adaptations they've made.

## What is one thing you know now that you wish you'd known at the start of the pandemic?

**PAUL GOTHOLD EdD '17, superintendent of schools, San Diego County Office of Education:** I wish I'd known how politicized health science and reopening would become and that these lightning rod issues would not be beneficial for children.

**SCOTT PARKER EdD '14, head of school, Kamehameha Schools Maui:** How to ensure that our teachers were better positioned to leverage digital learning. We've been a 1:1 campus using iPads and MacBooks for years, but we failed to adequately leverage this technology to deliver learning through more robust digital platforms and in ways that meet our students' needs in more meaningful ways. We've made progress but it didn't come without significant sacrifice.

**VIVIAN EKCHIAN EdD '19, superintendent, Glendale Unified School District:** The transition to distance learning has had an enormous impact on our students' social-emotional well-being. We continue to create opportunities for students to engage online, but the inability to have in-person interactions such as athletic competitions and extracurricular activities has taken away a critical element of the school experience. Our district is committed to offering additional social-emotional support for students and families during this time, including providing online counseling through telehealth, expanding access to digital resources and hosting virtual mental health forums and support groups.

**MERRILL IRVING JR. EdD '07, president, Hennepin Technical College:** We have seen historic levels of social unrest over the results of the U.S. presidential election and the death of George Floyd and others like him who have been disenfranchised and discriminated against. I am reminded daily of my call to action to help remedy social injustice by intentionally helping our student population, 62 percent of whom come from underrepresented populations. It is critically important that we continue to educate everyone on cultural competency and advance social justice with positive action within our communities and across the country.

**KENECHUKWU MMEJE EdD '12, vice president for student affairs, Southern Methodist University:** The COVID crisis challenged me and my colleagues in unimaginable ways—we were attempting to respond to an unprecedented pandemic, which affected every aspect of our operations. The uncertainty caused fear, frustration and doubt among my staff. In retrospect, I should have been more confident in my team's ability to rise to the occasion and adapt as needed to devise innovative solutions to the challenges resulting from the pandemic.

**ROXANE FUENTES BA '94, EdD '15, superintendent, Berryessa Union School District:** I wish I would have known when we closed our schools on March 13, 2020, that we wouldn't be returning in a few weeks. At the onset we believed that school operations would be interrupted temporarily, leading us to a first set of strategies. As time went on, we pivoted to a longer-view approach. Overall, this has been a transformational time for educators as we have had to reinvent and reimagine our long-ingrained approaches.

## How has the pandemic changed your views on the education system?

**GOTHOLD:** The pandemic has made it clear that we must do better for our most vulnerable students. It has also reinforced the importance of county offices of education. Throughout the pandemic—in consultation with school district and charter school leaders, bargaining association and parent representatives, and experts in topics such as food service and special education—the San Diego County Office of Education has created materials to support districts and schools in reopening.

**PARKER:** A September 2020 Brookings Institution report said it best: "It is hard to imagine there will be another moment in history when the central role of education in the economic, social, and political prosperity and stability of nations is so obvious and well understood by the general population." What we must do now, however, is to ensure that support for education does not regress but remains strong and constantly front of mind for community leaders, policymakers and government going forward.

## "Pre-pandemic, 'normal' didn't mean success for every child, and that has to change."

—Paul Gothold EdD '17, San Diego County Superintendent of Schools

**EKCHIAN:** The pandemic and our transition to distance learning further exposed existing equity gaps in our communities and our educational system. We had to mobilize immediately to provide children, employees and families with access to technology devices and rethink how students are taught, evaluated and supported. Moving forward, we must place a greater emphasis on closing the digital divide and ensuring students have equitable access to the resources and support they need to be successful.

**IRVING:** Who would have imagined that a technical college could be successful in educating and supporting students remotely and through online learning? We spend our time preparing students for the workforce, and the pandemic

reminded us we need to continually expand our efforts on how we are able to educate and support our students. We were forced to reach students in unique ways and to engage within our personal space via Zoom to expand our supportive efforts with our students.

**MMEJE:** The pandemic has highlighted the inequities that exist among our students—some have the privilege of focusing exclusively on their academic and co-curricular pursuits, while others are burdened by school and the need to work, some serving as caregivers to younger siblings or aging parents. It has reinforced my strong belief in the advantages of an in-person, residential experience—students are more likely to thrive when they are able to fully engage in the collegiate experience.

**FUENTES:** The pandemic is magnifying the important role school districts have in providing support services to students and their families. While addressing the needs for digital access and quality online instruction, school districts have also had to simultaneously address issues with food insecurity and social-emotional wellness. Trying to meet these critical needs has also emphasized the inadequate funding of public education in California.

## Are there any adaptations you've made that will become permanent?

**GOTHOLD:** I hope that the increased awareness and interest in doing better for our underserved students will become a permanent change. Pre-pandemic, "normal" didn't mean success for every child, and that has to change. I believe it is a moral imperative to prepare every child for college. If they choose not to go, let that be their choice, not the system's. It's imperative we help our schools deconstruct those systems that do not support or that actively harm children, so all kids have access to learning opportunities and all the supports they require in order to be the best version of themselves.

**PARKER:** We cannot go back to the way things were. Allowing our students access to courses and programs through digital platforms truly created personalized experiences that cater to their needs and individual situations. We also know that digital tools can increase access to learning for those who might not have been able to otherwise access our campus and our educational experiences.



**PAUL GOTHOLD EdD '17,** superintendent of schools, San Diego County Office of Education San Diego, California



**SCOTT PARKER EdD '14,** head of school, Kamehameha Schools, Island of Maui, Hawai'i



**VIVIAN EKCHIAN EdD '19,** superintendent of the Glendale Unified School District, Glendale, California



**MERRILL IRVING JR. EdD '07,** president, Hennepin Technical College, Brooklyn Park, Minnesota



**KENECHUKWU MMEJE EdD '12,** vice president for student affairs, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas



**ROXANE FUENTES BA '94, EdD '15,** superintendent, Berryessa Union School District, San Jose, California

**EKCHIAN:** Even after students return to more traditional instruction, our district will continue to offer a full-time virtual high school for students who thrived in a distance-learning environment. We are providing teacher leaders with comprehensive professional development on blended learning to bridge distance learning to in-person instruction. The virtual setting has also enabled us to significantly increase family engagement in meetings and events.

**IRVING:** Students can choose whether they prefer a meeting in person, via Zoom or by phone for all student affairs services. Offering this flexibility has proven to meet students where they are, and this will continue post-pandemic. Our Student Life & Career Development team stands out—they launched the first virtual career fair in the Minnesota State system, and it was a huge success.

**MMEJE:** The pandemic has accelerated higher education's embrace of technologies that enabled many campuses to transition quickly to hybrid or fully remote learning modalities, and also expand the provision of critical academic support services. Practices such as streaming course lectures online or making

lecture recordings available for asynchronous learners, providing virtual tutoring, telemedicine and virtual co-curricular programming should be embraced permanently going forward. Modifications to learning modality and support-service delivery will be critical to making the collegiate experience more accessible and accommodating of students' ever-changing needs.

**FUENTES:** I believe we are going to create a better system than we had before the pandemic. We were working toward becoming 1:1 across all of our school sites. Technology and bridging the digital divide instantly became a must as we moved into distance learning. I told our team our 1:1 launch was here! We quickly activated hot spots, Wi-Fi partnerships, Chromebook and iPad distributions, teacher training and more. As we plan for next year, we intend to continue with our 1:1 initiative. We know that this has changed how our teachers teach and engage students, and that it will have positive long-term impacts.

For an extended version of this article, please visit [rsoe.in/educationleaders](https://rsoe.in/educationleaders).

## In the Media

“Even if [college applicants] haven’t had the opportunity to have great extracurriculars, they can demonstrate worth on a different dimension that I think will have more value when we’re on the other side of the pandemic.”

—**JULIE POSSELT**, associate professor of higher education, in LAist

“I have been teaching about Whiteness, White fragility, White entitlement and White privilege over the entirety of my 18-year faculty career. Never once have I argued that all White people are evil. There are productive ways to teach about these issues without having White students feel attacked. In my experience, they have appreciated being told the truth about how other racial groups experience America.”

—**SHAUN R. HARPER**, Provost Professor of education and business, in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“In my mind, the significance of the election is very much tied to the pandemic. Whoever gets elected will be helping to determine the very consequential decisions around the health and well-being of students, staff and faculty in LAUSD.”

—**JULIE MARSH**, professor of education, in *EdSource*

“I am troubled, however, that social institutions that claim their raison d’être is about the search for truth have largely sat on the sidelines while truth—about both the virus and our democracy—has been under attack. ... A successful future, however, rests on a clear articulation of the centrality of American higher education in discerning and speaking the truth and in supporting democracy.”

—**WILLIAM TIERNEY**, University Professor Emeritus, in *Inside Higher Ed*

## USC Rossier and LAUSD announce teacher-preparation residency

By Brian Soika

**USC ROSSIER HAS PARTNERED** with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to offer a teacher-preparation program designed to support urban schools in Los Angeles while advancing the careers of teachers.

The Teacher Preparation Residency is available to eligible students from USC Rossier’s Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program who embody the school’s mission to advance educational equity and reflect the diversity of the communities of LAUSD. Selected candidates will receive a \$42,000 scholarship from USC Rossier and a 20,000 living stipend from LAUSD. The combination of the scholarship and the living stipend is equivalent to the entire cost of tuition for the MAT program.

“We are committed to addressing long-standing inequities in schools,” USC Rossier Dean Pedro A. Noguera said. “The Teacher Preparation Residency allows us to partner with the nation’s second-largest school district to target some of

**“The Teacher Preparation Residency allows us to partner with the nation’s second-largest school district to target some of the most underserved areas of education.”**

—**Pedro A. Noguera**, USC Rossier Dean

the most underserved areas of education. Our goal is to draw on the talent and diversity of our Master of Arts in Teaching students to support the needs of our K-12 community.”

The MAT is a 28-unit teacher-preparation program in which students simultaneously obtain their master’s and California teaching credential in their chosen area of interest. Additionally, students have the opportunity to complete an Education Specialist Credential and Bilingual Authorization for Spanish Certificate within the 28-unit program.

The Teacher Preparation Residency is one of three initiatives established by Noguera when he was installed as dean in 2020. In addition to the residency, Noguera is leading *A New Vision for Schools (and Why Now Is the Time)*, an ongoing project and webinar series focused on making learning more stimulating, engaging and equitable after the pandemic (p. 4). A third initiative, The Democracy Project, seeks to improve civic education and engagement among students (pp. 34-35). —**R**

## MEDICAL SCHOOLING

How this USC Rossier LDT student is improving continuing education for health care professionals

By Elaine Woo

**KIA HILL DIDN’T KNOW IT AT THE TIME**, but she has been preparing for her career in instructional design since she was a homeschooler in Indianapolis more than a dozen years ago.

The fourth oldest of 11 children, she regularly found herself helping her younger siblings learn difficult concepts, whether by drawing diagrams to explain lipids’ connection to cholesterol or building toy cars to demonstrate momentum and velocity. And if the computer needed debugging, she was the tech-savvy one first in line to assist.

Hill entered Indianapolis’ public school system in ninth grade, attending Crispus Attucks High School, a medical magnet where Hill was exposed to career paths in science and technology. At Purdue University, where she had a full-ride scholarship, Hill initially pursued a premed track. But after flirting with becoming a forensic pathologist—the result of scientific research and watching many episodes of TV’s *Forensic Files* in high school—Hill came to regard “looking in a magnifying glass all day a tad boring.”

Yet she still felt passionate about working in health care. After noticing a job posting in medical education, her career plans fell into place.

“I said, ‘This is perfect for me,’” she recalled. “This is a way I can help improve patient outcomes by providing high-quality continuing medical education to providers so they can practice at the top of their licensure.” Armed with a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary biology, she went to work for a health network in Indianapolis before moving to California in 2018.

Since 2019, she has balanced her job as the continuing medical education (CME) coordinator for Los Angeles-based AltaMed Health Services with her studies at USC Rossier, where she will complete the online Master of Education in Learning Design and Technology program in May.

The LDT program is aimed at people who want to start or advance careers in educational program design, whether in K-12, higher education, corporate training or other environments. Hill was drawn to the flexibility afforded by the program’s online approach and its balance of instructional design, learning theory and technology.

The program has been conducted entirely online since its launch in 2014, so when the pandemic struck, Hill and her fellow students kept up with classes without disruption. Because the program emphasizes online-learning design, course content didn’t have to change, but many students adjusted their capstone projects to reflect COVID-19 reality.

PHOTO BY REBECCA ARANDA



“At the minimum,” LDT faculty chair Helena Seli noted, “students are designing hybrid experiences with reduced in-person interactions,” but some are reorienting their projects to 100 percent virtual learning.

For her capstone project, Hill is helping to implement a learning-management system with Jazz Hands for Autism, a nonprofit founded by USC alumna Ifunanya Nweke ’16 that helps musicians on the autism spectrum find and succeed in music-related jobs. Hill feels an affinity for Jazz Hands’ students, who face obstacles in landing paid positions as performers, composers, music teachers and audio technicians. As a first-generation college student from a low-income family, she has faced challenges related to access to opportunities.

“Being a trailblazer is not always easy,” she said. “There were a lot of things I had to learn on my own, like finding a network of people to support me with guidance and recommendations.”

At the same time, she noted, growing up in her extra-large, bustling household helped her develop the initiative, patience and organizational skills that have proved advantageous in her career. The support she has received from USC Rossier faculty has also been crucial as she generates more online learning opportunities at work. “I have been applying everything I learn into practice,” she said. She has concentrated on curating online resources and designing short, impactful virtual learning sessions for AltaMed’s busy providers.

Hill said her long-term goal is to become a CME director. She would eventually like to create a consulting business to help educational organizations manage online-learning systems and implement education technology.

“The pandemic solidified for me that technology is evolving and more important than ever,” Hill said. “My challenge is, how do I leverage technology to keep everyone together, especially during these unprecedented times.” —**R**

The **USC CENTER FOR RACE AND EQUITY** created the Estela Mara Bensimon Society and the Bensimon Prize for Equity-Minded Leadership in Higher Education.

The **USC CENTER FOR ENROLLMENT RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE (CERPP)** was awarded an 18-month, \$477,574 grant by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the research project “COVID-19: Understanding Changes to Postsecondary Student Enrollment Patterns.” CERPP was also awarded a \$65,000, one-year grant from the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation for its USC College Advising Corps program.

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

**ADAM KHO**, assistant professor of education, received the Emerging Scholar Award from the American Educational Research Association’s School Turnaround and Reform Special Interest Group. Kho was also awarded a RAND American Educator Panels (AEP) Scholarship in the amount of \$5,000, funded by the Gates Foundation. This scholarship is for early-career researchers from underrepresented groups to use RAND’s AEP survey data for research to examine the priorities of different school sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**MORE THAN 100 USC ROSSIER STUDENTS** were inducted into the Kappa Delta Pi Education Honor Society in a virtual ceremony in November.

**SHAUN R. HARPER**, Provost Professor and director of the USC Race and Equity Center, received \$1 million from the College Futures Foundation for the California Racial Equity Research and Resource Hub. In addition, Harper was elected to membership of the National Academy of Education.

**MORGAN POLIKOFF**, associate professor of education, (Center on Educational Policy, Equity and Governance) (co-principal investigator) and Anna Saavedera (principal investigator) were awarded a grant for \$198,148 from the National Science Foundation for their research study titled, “RAPID: The Impact of COVID on American Education in 2021: Continued Evidence from the Understanding America Study.”

**SHAUN R. HARPER** (10), **PEDRO A. NOGUERA**, USC Rossier Dean (11), **ESTELA MARA BENSIMON**, University Professor Emerita, (55), **WILLIAM G. TIERNEY**, University Professor Emeritus, (61), **MORGAN POLIKOFF** (148), and **JULIE MARSH**, professor of education, (164) were featured in the 2021 “Rick Hess Straight Up” Edu-Scholar Public Influence Rankings, ranking the university-based scholars in the U.S. who did the most last year to shape educational practice and policy.



**ADRIAN HUERTA**, assistant professor of education, secured a service contract with the California State University Student Success Network for \$38,500.

**ARTINEH SAMKIAN**, associate professor of clinical education, received a 2021 Associates Award for Excellence in Teaching, the highest honor the USC university faculty bestows on its members for outstanding teaching.

**JOHN BROOKS SLAUGHTER** was named a Deans’ Professor of Education and Engineering for his exceptional contributions at USC and nationwide and as an accomplished leader in both fields.

**ZOË CORWIN**, research professor, and colleagues earned the Provost New Strategic Directions for Research Award for further exploration of skateboarding culture.

## TEACHING ABOUT THE INESCAPABLE RACIAL REALITIES OF THE CAPITOL INSURRECTION

By **Shaun R. Harper**  
Provost Professor of Education and Business, Clifford and Betty Allen Chair in Urban Leadership and executive director of the USC Race and Equity Center

**THOUSANDS OF AMERICANS** gathered in our nation’s capital on Jan. 6, 2021, for a rally to support now-former President Donald Trump’s unfounded claims that the 2020 election was stolen from him. They were there to “Save America.” The overwhelming majority of attendees were White. Most were White men.

I sat in shock as I watched televised news coverage of so many people storming into and overtaking the Capitol. They boldly flooded one of the highest-security buildings in Washington, D.C. It baffled me that some were able to make it onto the U.S. Senate floor and remain there long enough to be photographed. How one man somehow made his way into House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s office, sat in her chair and left her a handwritten note was all so mystifying to me. And then there were the protestors dangling off sides of the building. “How could this be happening?” I repeatedly asked myself. I also wondered why so little was being done to stop them, and why protestors were so visibly unafraid of the consequences of their actions. I pondered one additional question: What would have happened had these been Black people?

I know the answer—so, too, do most other Black Americans, including those who attend and are employed by our nation’s schools, colleges and universities.

There would have been a massacre. Outraged Black demonstrators attempting to come within steps of the Capitol while a joint session of Congress was being held would have been swiftly assassinated. There would have been a much heavier police presence and a far

more militarized response. Snipers would have gunned down every Black protester scaling the Capitol building. Surely, more than one person would have been shot and killed. There also would have been a significantly higher number of arrests. The threat posed to congresspeople by a large mob of angry Black Americans would have been used to justify deadly use of force. Their killers would have been dubbed heroes.

Students deserve to know these truths.

The Capitol insurrection is a useful case study to teach students in K-12 schools and higher education institutions about the multifarious nature of White privilege. People of color cannot take over a federal building largely without consequence. A mob of White protesters violently occupying the Capitol is the latest exposure of America’s racialized double standard, in this instance as it pertains to law enforcement. In the aftermath of the tragic murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, millions of demonstrators flooded America’s streets to march for Black lives. A heavy police presence often awaited them. Students should be afforded opportunities to juxtapose photos and videos from Jan. 6, 2021 with images from mostly peaceful protests that occurred throughout June 2020.

Hundreds of news stories and op-eds have been published about the racialized aspects of the Capitol insurrection. Furthermore, numerous clips of Black Americans and others talking

about this are available on YouTube. Educators should use these digital resources to stimulate productive discussions in their classrooms. Without expecting them to speak on behalf of all Black people, first make space to hear Black students’ reactions to racial commentary about the insurrection. Ask how it made them feel. Then, ask students across all racial groups in the class why so many outraged White Americans were allowed to threaten members of Congress, storm into one of the nation’s most heavily secured facilities, destroy things and break laws largely without consequence. Why were so many of the insurrectionists White? Why were some carrying Confederate flags? And what should have been done to hold them accountable?

Law enforcement officials knew that hundreds, perhaps thousands of people were coming to Washington for the “Save America” rally. It was widely known that they were angry about ridiculous claims of election fraud. Teachers and professors should ask students to explain why more was not done in anticipation of chaos and violence, and what preparatory actions would have been taken had there been advance notice that thousands of angry Black people were showing up to a protest. Students should be invited to name other manifestations of White privilege, identify ways to raise public consciousness about it and ultimately eradicate racialized double standards in our democracy. —R



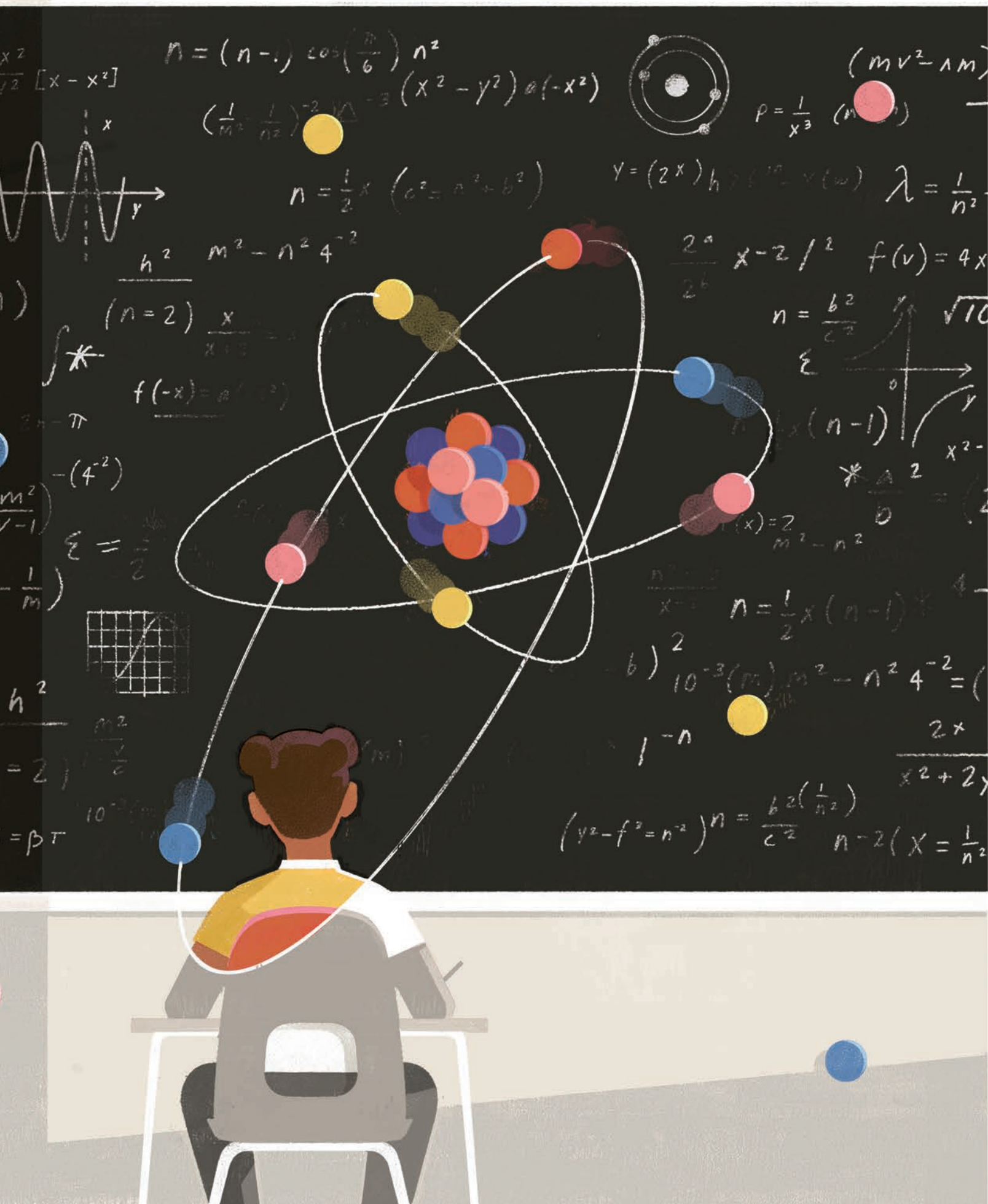
PHOTO COURTESY OF ASSOCIATED PRESS / JEREMY HOGAN

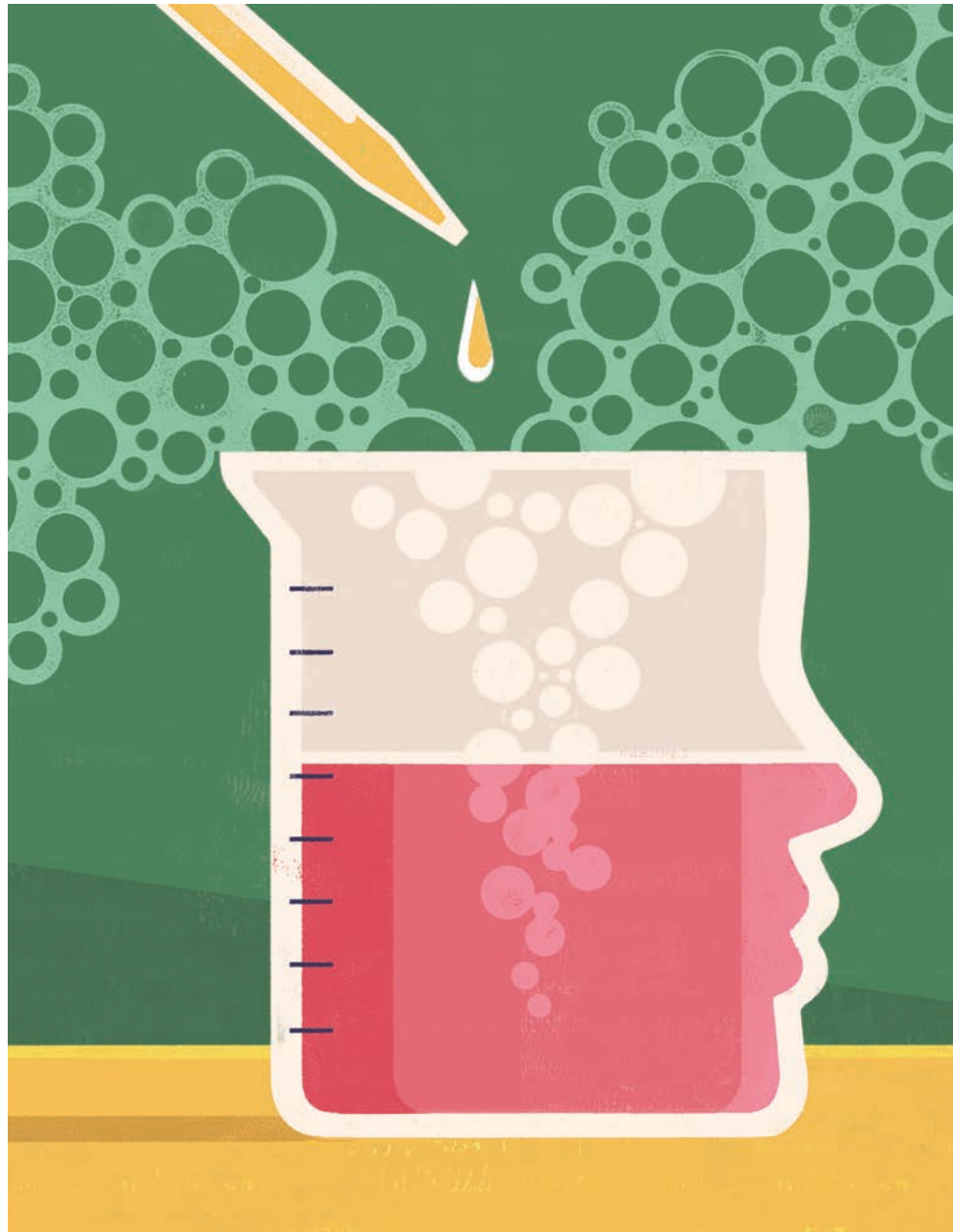


SCIENTIFIC  
INTUITION  
EXISTS  
IN  
**ALL**  
CHILDREN

*But how can STEM instruction tap into this natural curiosity as kids grow up?*

Story: Katharine Gammon  
Illustration: Chris Gash





**When Mckenna Kleinmaier MAT '20 teaches her environmental science class at Alexander Hamilton High School in Los Angeles, she dives right into challenging and complex topics:**

A recent discussion included how the human population is connected to global poverty and hunger. “We looked at demography, and the students can see very clearly there are issues—and they’re coming up with their own solu-

tions,” Kleinmaier explains. In her classes, there is a focus on doing, not just repeating what the teacher says. “We are practicing developing models, constructing explanations: This is the future of science education.”

Kleinmaier, a Knowles fellow, is part of a movement of science teachers seeking to reinvigorate the field. The stakes are high: Even as women and minorities have increasingly entered careers in science, technology, engineering and math since 1990, they are still underrepresented overall. In the United States, kids are three times more likely to say they want to be a YouTube star than to be an astronaut when they grow up. This, coupled with an increasing distrust of science that has manifested itself in the fear of vaccinations and a reluctance to accept the dangers of COVID-19, has made it acutely necessary for there to be changes in how science is taught in schools.

At USC Rossier, two innovations are taking hold: making students into scientists themselves, and increasing access to STEM for everyone.

### TEACHING SCIENCE BY DOING SCIENCE

For Kleinmaier, teaching science means STEM becomes an action word: Scientists are doers. “It’s not watching the teacher do it and doing the same exact thing,” she says. She tries to build curiosity in her students by looking at relatable phenomena. For example, it rained this morning—but now it’s sunny. “So a teacher might say, OK, I can give you the steps of the water cycle,” she explains. But instead, she tells her students to be doers of science. It rained, but the rain is gone off the sidewalk. Why did it start, where did it go? “From there, you can start to explore and investigate that phenomenon by running experiments, building models and constructing explanations. It naturally encourages curiosity and confidence in their learning.”

Following students’ questions can lead to a cascade of new lines of inquiry—and the doing of science does not need to be limited to students. Associate Professor of Clinical Education Angela Laila Hasan’s recent research focus involves looking at the cross section of family, teacher and student engagement in the experiential learning of mathematics. Hasan, who started her career as a middle school math and science teacher, has found in her research and teaching experience that parent engagement is one ticket to keeping kids interested and engaged in challenging topics.

It doesn’t mean that parents know as much as the teacher knows, but engaging them in experiential learning in STEM has direct benefits. Hasan watched as parents would do a physics experiment themselves, charting the path of a car down a ramp. The excitement of the parents was palpable to their kids. “I learned that if the family values what I am doing, it is more likely that the child is going to fall in line,” Hasan says. “Parent involvement is just the key to so much potential change. When we leave them out of the equation, as opposed to engaged in the process, we’re doing a disservice—and it does not take degrees in order to value science.”

Professor of Clinical Education Frederick W. Freking, who taught high school science and eventually combined his research background with science teaching instruction, says there are some straightforward improvements to science education that teachers tend not to do—like keeping kids talking to each other, he says. “The amount of time is just not what it should be in terms of teacher talk versus student talk in the classroom,” he says, “Sharing ideas is a key part of science learning.”

It all has to do with how science is something that is done actively, not something to be passively acquired. “How can you be creative when all you do is sit there and listen?” Freking asks. “As a scientist, they need to ask questions, come up with ways to collect data and answer those questions.”

Freking’s focus is on elementary teachers, who instruct a little bit in science but also have to teach language arts, social studies and math—the whole gamut. He works on something called the “5E” model of instruction: engage,

explore, explain, elaborate, evaluate. The method isn’t brand new: It came out in the early ’80s, but it helps teachers implement what they know is important.

He explains that within the framework, the STEM lesson always starts with an engaging activity—something cool to connect to students’ culture or what they care about. “It should be something that hooks them, and then let them ask questions about that phenomenon,” he says. “Then they’re exploring it, letting the data lead to the finding, not because the teacher told them something.”

Teachers can then layer in the academic language, coming from context and understanding. After that there’s an elaboration phase, which allows students to ask additional questions and do different experiments and then share with one another. “It really helps kids see what science really is: It’s a way of knowing, not just a list of facts,” Freking says, adding that teachers can take the 5E model to any context they want to teach. One of the ways that he helps teachers sharpen their STEM teaching skills is through video review:

**“How can you be creative when all you do is sit there and listen? As a scientist, students need to ask questions, come up with ways to collect data and answer those questions.”**

—Frederick W. Freking, USC Rossier  
Professor of Clinical Education

Just as a coach would do for a sports team, the teachers gather and watch each other’s actions on video, giving criticism and advice on how to improve.

For Anthony Maddox, a professor of clinical education and engineering, one way to approach STEM is to focus on the notion of practice—the practice of constructing an environment where learning takes place. “I try to co-construct the learning space with the students, so it’s learning-centered and not necessarily content-centered,” he says, adding that he wants students to know that he, as a teacher, is also learning. “One of the roles I have in my position is not to suggest that I am some fount of knowledge, but I am here learning and I mediate the learning.”

Often that means working in smaller groups, where students are talking more and experiencing more. “As human beings, we are experience-based in some kind of way, and

we're acknowledging the fact that student experience is important," Maddox says. "I'm taking a bet: While they may drift off topic, while they are free to express, when they land on topic they will be engaged."

When it comes to mathematics, Maddox endorses an approach that links math to other sets of symbols that describe or manipulate real things in the world—like computer code that creates software to schedule meetings, or a foreign language that lets you find a train going to your

**“Cultural connections work in terms of getting students to engage with rigorous and complicated stuff. . . . We need to think within the system and change the system to allow for more access.”**

—**Suneal Kolluri PhD '19, San Diego State University School of Teacher Education Assistant Professor**

destination. “My perspective is that if you master a symbol set in the world, you have strong opportunities to do things you want to do,” he says. In his view, there are five symbol sets that can describe different parts of the world: natural or spoken languages, artificial languages like computer code, music, mathematics and currency. Deep knowledge of any of those sets of symbols gives a student access to good jobs and opportunities, he says. And all of these sets can be an original tool in the hands of students making creative decisions—moving currency around, or composing a musical score.

Maddox tries to infuse every teaching endeavor with the six engineering habits of mind identified by the National Academy of Engineering: systems thinking, creativity, optimism, collaboration, communication and ethical consideration. “I can take any content and make sure that any of those six ideas prompt students to think about the content of that course, so for me that's engineering,” he says. “Another view of engineering is leveraging technology for useful purposes. And that ties into teaching, because teachers leverage learning phenomena for useful purposes.”

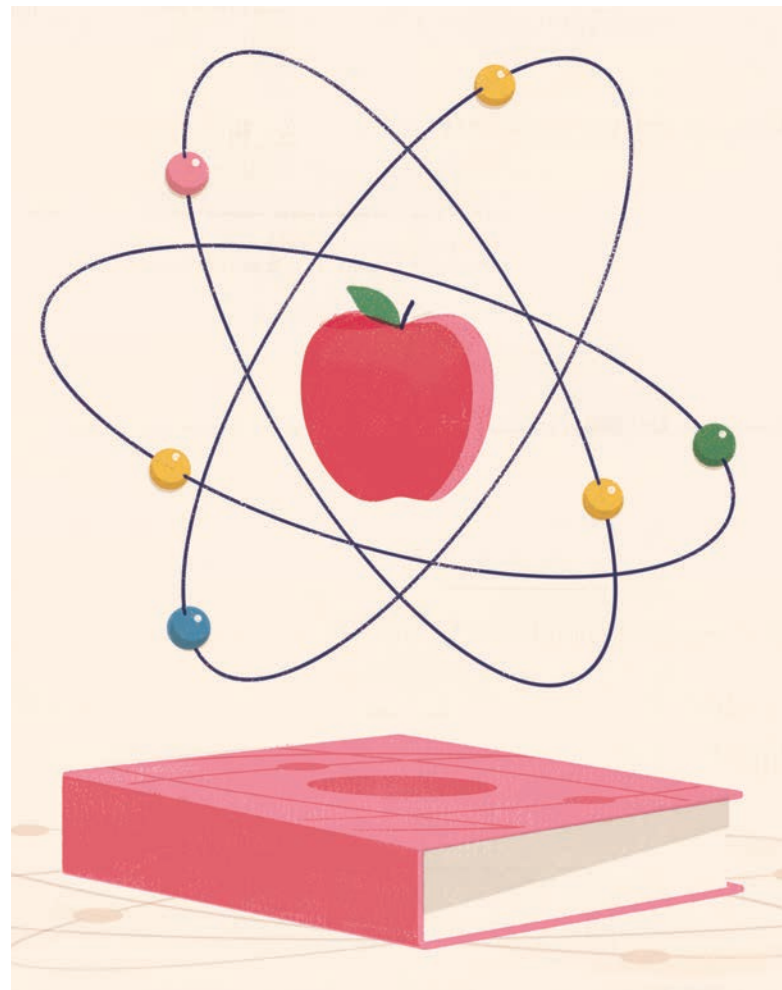
He's particularly excited about the fusion of education, engineering and entrepreneurship in hackathons and maker spaces—places where students really get to design their own

ideas and make them come to life. But ultimately, his view of STEM education comes down to students' own aspirations. “We shouldn't lose sight—all these things should work together to create hope,” Maddox says. “I see every student as an individual who needs their hope reaffirmed. And my role is to give them the space and freedom to learn.”

### INCREASING ACCESS TO STEM

For students to fully absorb all the benefits that STEM has to offer, they need to have access and encouragement to grab opportunities. Historically, minorities, girls and women have been excluded in STEM—but that is slowly changing.

Mentoring can be a key way for students to see themselves in future STEM careers, says Associate Professor of Education Darnell Cole, who co-directs USC Rossier's Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice. He and the center's co-director Shafiqah Ahmadi, associate professor of clinical education, are working to create a mentoring



program called Black Seeds. The program would form mentoring relationships between professors and college students with middle schoolers—with a focus on under-represented students. The hope is that these multilevel mentorships will build strong foundations for students to enter STEM fields in the future.

Why start so early in mentoring students? “Research shows that in order to cultivate interest toward college and cumulative-content subject areas like math and science, you have to start as far back as sixth grade for them to have courses they need to be competitive,” Cole says. “We also recognize that middle school is an incredible area of social-emotional development, and students develop the social capital in ways that are congruent with their community background.”

When students get fired up about STEM opportunities, they still need coursework that can support their advancement in specific content areas, like math and science. Expanding access to STEM classes and maintaining a high level of content may seem at odds—but it doesn't have to be. Suneal Kolluri PhD '19, an assistant professor at San Diego State University School of Teacher Education, has researched Advanced Placement tests. He says AP classes have been expanding rapidly with the goal of including students from marginalized backgrounds, to ensure that students are readying themselves for college.

Kolluri used data from the state of California on AP performance across the state, and looked at schools beating the odds. He focused on two schools succeeding at an unlikely task: increasing their AP access—so more were taking the courses, predominantly Latino/Latina students—and increasing their scores. He spent more than 100 hours at the schools, talking to students, watching classrooms, interviewing teachers and principals.

The schools were succeeding in very different ways. One school adopted a no-excuses mindset, where the principal believed strongly that all teachers could teach at a high level, and all kids could succeed in taking college-level classes.

The other school focused on being culturally relevant, communal and encouraging to students to explore cultural strengths through the curriculum. Those students also did exceedingly well, increasing access and performance. For example, a biology teacher centered her instruction on folk medicine in Mexican culture, and how many traditional healing methods were actually grounded in biology. “I think those connections work in terms of getting students to engage with rigorous and complicated stuff,” Kolluri says. “We need to rethink and reframe and re-envision because what we have been doing has not eliminated the opportunity gaps. We need to think within the system and change the system to allow for more access.”

In K–12 and higher education, teaching science goes a lot deeper than just creating future scientists, says Gale Sinatra, the Stephen H. Crocker Professor of Education. It's to have a future architect think scientifically and criti-

## Incorporating the 6 Engineering Habits of Mind in the Classroom

Engineers often make things work, or work better—and they have certain habits that can help them do that. Anthony Maddox says he tries to integrate the six engineering habits of mind (first identified by the National Academy of Engineering)—systems thinking, creativity, optimism, collaboration, communication and ethical consideration—into every teaching endeavor.

### FOR EDUCATORS

Here are some resources for integrating those habits of mind into a K–12 classroom:

Royal Academy of Engineering's “Thinking Like an Engineer: Implications for the Educational System”

Chapter 5, “Teaching and Learning Core Engineering Concepts and Skills in Grades K–12” in *Engineering in K–12 Education*

Anthony Maddox on Engineering “Habits of Mind,” YouTube

### MORE

Visit [rsos.in/engineeringhabitsofmind](https://www.rsos.in/engineeringhabitsofmind) for links to these and additional resources.

cally about what type of building to create, or why an artist would use a certain type of paint mixture, she says. And the critical thinking and questioning that happens in these foundational years will follow through to help the students of today tackle all kinds of misinformation—from climate skepticism to unbased vaccine fears. “Scientific thinking and reasoning permeates every field,” she says. —R

# The Pandemic Forced Us Outside, and Oak Park Unified Shows How Schools Can Benefit

Led by Anthony Knight EdD '06, this Ventura County district provides a model for outdoor education and environmental literacy

Story: Kianoosh Hashemzadeh  
Photos: April Wong

IT'S A WINTER MORNING IN CALIFORNIA, but it feels like spring is coming in Oak Park, an unincorporated community in Ventura County, just north of Agoura Hills along the Los Angeles County border. Bok choy seedlings are pushing through the soil in the greenhouse at Oak Hills Elementary School; at Medea Creek Middle School, sunshine and fresh air are filtering through the large, open glass doors of the shipping container-classrooms; and tidy rows of student lockers line the walls of outdoor shade structures at Oak Park High School. The only thing missing: the kids.

→ GREEN CAMPUSES

Knight checks on seedlings in the greenhouse at Oak Hills Elementary School. Photo by April Wong / aprilwongphotography.com / @aprilwongphoto





## Gratitude Garden

### ↑ A PLACE FOR MATH

Students at Gratitude Garden tend to plants in the school garden.

School gardens have grown in popularity over the past few decades, and these green patches are continuing to pop up in schoolyards across the United States. California, in particular, with its mild climate and abundant sunshine, is an especially good place for projects like these.

At the Gratitude Garden in San Clemente, California, a pre-K and full-day kindergarten school founded by Dustine Rey EdD '09, students toggle between outdoor and indoor learning areas throughout the day. On a typical, pre-COVID-19 school day, students spent 90 minutes outside—in the garden, the chicken coop or the designated “wet play” area—and then 90 minutes inside.

The garden is a perfect place to teach kids math, Rey explains. “Our children are using different forms of measurement to plot out areas to plant seeds,” she says. “They’re also ... [looking] at how tall something is, and then they go back, look in their journal, see how tall it was previously and look at the difference. So, what we’re really teaching them, indirectly, is math.” The efforts of their labors are not only better math skills: Students also harvest the crops and prepare recipes using the herbs, vegetables and fruits they grow.

Gratitude Garden closed for a few weeks in mid-March 2020, but the school was able to reopen the following month after some adjustments. Now, in order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and ensure the safety of staff and kids, classes are almost entirely outside.

## FEATURE

Oak Park Unified Superintendent and former USC Rossier adjunct professor of education Anthony Knight EdD '06 is surveying several of the schools in the district, largely rendered vacant due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to remote learning. Knight, who recently announced his retirement, has a visible joy for and intimate familiarity with the school grounds he’s worked on for nearly 40 years—as a teacher, principal, director of curriculum and instruction, and, for the last 17 years, superintendent. He winds through the hilly streets of Oak Park, crisscrossing the landscape nestled between the canyons of Malibu and Palo Comado to visit the high school, middle school and elementary school.

Knight’s achievements over the past few decades are visible in the spaces of the schools themselves. Each campus has a garden where kids cultivate vegetables that eventually end up on their lunch plates. One of Knight’s recent efforts, the recycled shipping containers that have been converted into classrooms, have replaced aging infrastructure at Oak Park High School and Medea Creek Middle School.

At Medea Creek, these new classrooms, built by Carson, California-based CRATE Modular, are filled with sustainable furniture from a company called Natural Pod, whose website describes its tables, chairs and shelving as “designed to foster creativity and innovation.” The classrooms feature large, glass doors at the front, and the learning space is not confined to the four walls. It spills out onto a sunny courtyard, where circular, outdoor workstations have been installed.

K–2 students were able to return to in-person learning at Oak Park Unified by early March. Knight was hopeful that all campuses would be open by mid-March, but that would depend on coronavirus rates continuing to decline.

### GETTING OUTSIDE

Throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has emphasized that outdoor activities are safer because coronavirus transmission rates drop substantially in outdoor settings. This fact of pandemic life has inspired people around the globe to escape the confines of their homes and rediscover nature, and it’s also stirred up interest in an idea commonly dismissed as niche and impractical: outdoor learning.

The idea of teaching outside isn’t new, and in fact, explains *PBS NewsHour’s* Christopher Booker in a segment on outdoor schooling efforts in California, at the beginning of the 20th century as tuberculous raged and the Spanish flu hit several years later, schools conducted classes outside—“on rooftops, on front porches, and even ferry boats—throughout the entire year.” As schools were forced to shut down last spring, a coalition of educators, including Knight, launched the National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative, which provides resources to support efforts to move learning outdoors.

And while this renewed interest has come largely as a result of the difficult circumstances brought on by the pandemic, there are other benefits to outdoor learning beyond lowering the risk of transmitting the coronavirus, from improving the social-emotional well-being of kids to giving students the environmental literacy skills they will need to navigate (and quite possibly save) a world struggling with the effects of climate change.

Stress and anxiety levels of kids were already high before the pan-

## FEATURE

**“If you’re looking at trees when you’re working, you become more productive. It lowers your blood pressure; it makes you more relaxed. And it deepens the learning.”**

—Anthony Knight EdD '06, superintendent of Oak Park Unified

dem, and new data suggests that these rates have increased over the past year. Emergency-room visits associated with children and adolescents’ mental health are on the rise, and more school-age children are reporting feelings of depression.

“Being upset, anxious, nervous and losing our sense of possibility ... are natural, adaptive reactions to being separated from the people who love and care about us, and from the communities in which we engage and build relationships and a sense of self,” USC Rossier Professor of Education, Psychology and Neuroscience Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, an expert on youth social-emotional development, explained in a recent webinar on the school safety net in the pandemic (p. 4).

While schools must address the severe lack of counselors available to students, spending time outdoors can help lower stress and anxiety levels. Researchers from North Carolina State University recently found that spending time outside has helped adolescents counter some of the negative mental health impacts brought on by the pandemic, with 72 percent of those surveyed in the study reporting that outdoor recreation has helped them manage pandemic-induced stress. Time outside can also lead to better learning outcomes. Knight theorizes that nature’s effect on us, and particularly the effect of trees, likely has something to do with our evolution in them as primates. “If you’re looking at trees when you’re working, you become more productive,” Knight explains. “It lowers your blood pressure; it makes you more relaxed. And it deepens the learning.”

This doesn’t mean that schools need to be entirely outside, which would be logistically challenging for some in colder climes (though Knight points the reluctant to schools in Germany that operate outdoors year-round). Spending just 30 minutes or so out in nature, Knight says, can help prepare students to settle down for a math lesson. “It changes your attitude and makes the learning happen easier,” Knight says. A recent study found that third graders who attended a biology class outside “were significantly more engaged in their next instructional period

### → FROM SEA TO SCHOOL

These CRATE Modular classrooms were installed at Medea Creek Middle School in 2020.

on all measures than if they’d received biology lessons indoors.”

Getting kids involved with gardening is also a focus at Oak Park Unified. Knight installed the first greenhouse in the district while he was principal of Oak Hills Elementary in 2002, and the garden program has expanded ever since. The district employs a garden specialist tasked with overseeing the greenhouse and developing curriculum around the district’s annual gardening plans. Seedlings that are later moved to gardens around the district campuses are started in the greenhouse, and the edible plants—fruits, vegetables and herbs—that are propagated throughout Oak Park Unified are incorporated into student lunches.

Knight describes the district’s lunch program as “plant-forward.” No beef, lamb, pork or fish is served at any of the campuses. Some chicken and turkey—sourced from two California farms that utilize sustainability practices—is occasionally served. There are health benefits to this approach, and it also ties into Oak Park Unified’s focus on sustainability. “The district doesn’t shy away from talking about combating climate change,” Knight says, “and we teach kids how by altering what you eat, you can have an impact.”

### SPACES OF ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

Fostering care for the environment is embedded into many aspects of Oak Park Unified—from the campus gardens to the solar panels



installed at every campus. Throughout his tenure, Knight has focused on making the campuses environmentally conscious spaces. In 2013, Oak Park High School became the first school in the nation to install classrooms constructed from single-use shipping containers. This year, six more classrooms of this kind were installed at Medea Creek Middle School. A plaque on the side of one of the classrooms reads, “This project saved 28,160 board feet of wood and other virgin materials, diverted 155,960 tons of waste, [and] saved 184 tons of carbon emissions, a 43% reduction vs. traditional construction.”

The shipping containers, many of which come from China, Knight

## “I’m really environmentally conscious now, and most of that stems from the work at Oak Park.”

—Sam Hirsch, former Oak Park Unified student

explains, are usually bound for the scrap yard. And while Knight wanted to retain some of the industrial look of the containers so students would understand how the containers had been repurposed, the interiors are offset with wood floors and furniture, and at Oak Park High, a garden of native plants grows out front, giving students a view of nature from their desks. Not only do the classrooms divert tons of waste, but they also have been outfitted with LED lighting, ductless HVAC systems and solar panels to reduce utility costs and the school’s energy consumption.

Jared Weintraub, who teaches math at Oak Park High in a CRATE Modular building, enjoys the natural light, the view of the canyons and the generous dimensions of the classroom. The ample space allows for his desk to be in the upper corner of the room so when he’s not in front of the class teaching on a smartboard, he can still keep an eye on all of his students. Weintraub also notes the view of the trees. Weintraub uses the trees to teach trigonometry: “We go outside and measure the trees we look at all the time.” Being able to see the natural world from his desk—the squirrels, the bunnies and the butterflies that come around once a year—puts Weintraub in a more relaxed state. “It puts me in a mindset that is happier—and happier means a better teacher.”

The district’s efforts haven’t gone unnoticed, and its list of accolades is long. In 2013, the district was the first in California to earn a Green Ribbon School distinction from the U.S. Department of Education for its sustainability practices and focus on environmental education. In 2018, the Center for Green Schools at the U.S. Green Building Council and the Green Schools National Network presented Oak Park with its Best of Green Schools—School System Award.

The district also prioritizes hands-on learning activities and long-term projects that not only continue to develop students’

### → YOUNG SPROUTS

Seedlings poke through the soil in the greenhouse at Oak Hills Elementary School.

environmental literacy but also get them outside and involved in their communities.

In 2011, a group of students from the district received the President’s Environmental Youth Award for a project that raised awareness of whale deaths and injuries caused by large shipping containers in the Santa Barbara Channel. One of those former students, Sam Hirsch, describes the whale-watching expeditions that Knight led as “like a religious experience” for the high schoolers and believes Knight has always been “ahead of the curve” when it comes to incorporating environmental literacy into curriculum. Hirsch, now in his final year of law school, plans to do some pro bono environmental advocacy work once he graduates. “I’m really environmentally conscious now,” he says, “and most of that stems from the work at Oak Park.”

Two initiatives especially dear to Knight, a certified master scuba diver and a naturalist, is the long-running restoration project the district’s Continuation High School participates in on Anacapa Island and the annual trip to Catalina Island for the district’s seventh graders. Nirupam Nigam, a professional underwater photographer and Oak Park alumnus, first became fascinated with the ocean in the sixth grade during the district’s weeklong outdoor education program in Malibu Canyon and Leo Carrillo State Park, where students were introduced to tide pools. “I became really fascinated with the ocean,” he says, “and I kept coming back [to the tide pools] and eventually started volunteering with the state parks.” When Nigam went on the trip to Catalina Island in seventh grade, he snorkeled for the first time and discovered the abundant life existing below the surface of the water. His love for the ocean was sealed, and these experiences, he says, “put me on the path to where I am today.”



Taking a look at Knight’s achievements, you might think that the school district is flush with funds. However, because of the way state education dollars are distributed in California, allotting more base funding for schools that serve foster youth, English learners and students receiving free and reduced lunch—groups that collectively account for less than 8 percent of the Oak Park student body—the district receives around \$8,000 per student from the state. (On average, California spent around \$10,281 per pupil according to numbers from 2019.) Oak Park Unified is fortunate to be able to make up a bit of this shortfall on some of the property-tax measures the district has in place. These types of funds, however, are dwindling. Knight, quoted in *The Oak Park Talon*, the high school’s newspaper, stresses that the state needs to allocate more funds for public education—it ranks in the bottom 10 percent in the nation in per-pupil funding.

Oak Park Unified’s relatively small size (it serves just over 4,500 students) does make it nimble, and Knight is resourceful. He opted to buy, rather than lease, the solar panel infrastructure that generates electricity at all the schools—a \$6.8 million upfront cost that has saved the district more than \$500,000 each year. The campus gardens are functional—they reduce the school’s food costs—and the shipping-container classrooms cost about one-third less than traditional school buildings and are more energy-efficient. USC Rossier Professor of Clinical Education Sandra Kaplan, who served as Knight’s dissertation chair, highlights Knight’s creativity in his approach to education. As a student, Kaplan says, he “was easily able to critically translate information presented to him to assess and improve education.” And he carried this skill over to his work as superintendent, where “he was able to transfer creatively what he had assimilated in courses into curricular and pedagogical practices that specifically contributed to the development and prominent reputation of [Oak Park],” Kaplan says.

The demographics of Oak Park Unified don’t reflect the rest of California, and it’s something that Knight has recognized. When he started, he says, the district was nearly 100 percent White. In a move toward diversification, Oak Park became a District of Choice in 2004. Since then, the demographics have changed considerably. As of the 2019–2020 school year, the school body is about 56 percent White, 25 percent Asian, 10 percent Latino and 1.5 percent Black, with 6 percent representing two or more races. “We have students from over 80 ZIP codes, and [Oak Park] is a much more diverse place than it has ever been,” Knight says. “We have increased the diversity of our schools, and that, to me, has made it a richer learning environment.”

## LOOKING FORWARD

The spaces we live and work in, and the places where our children learn, can be thought of as a reflection of what our society values. Unfortunately, a large percentage of our schoolyards, especially those found at urban schools that serve low-income students, are “monocultures of asphalt that support ball play and little else,” says Sharon Danks of Green Schoolyards America. Creating green schoolyards can give kids valuable learning opportunities to witness ecosystems at work and provide “a microcosm of a green city into [students’] daily school routine,” Danks says.

In many ways, Oak Park Unified is an outlier. Knight is a strong leader with a clear vision, trusted by the school board and local community. But, in a year unlike any other, we’ve seen glimpses of other ways of being, and Oak Park Unified can serve as a model. With some form of the coronavirus likely to be around for months to come as schools do begin to reopen, the outdoor learning initiatives championed by Knight, Danks and the like will come in handy as social distancing measures continue for longer than we’d like. But let’s hope we don’t only see getting children outdoors as a means to keep the virus at bay. Let’s hope we also see fresh air, sunshine and greenery as a necessary component for caring for the whole child and as an essential element in preparing future generations for the global fight against climate change. We’re going to need them. —R

## What’s Next for Anthony Knight?

For Anthony Knight, retirement does not necessarily mean rest. An underwater photographer and marine conservation advocate, Knight will now have time to pursue these passions. Among his plans: earning his captain’s license in order to teach ocean sailing; scuba diving trips to local destinations, tropical locales and marine protected areas around the globe; and becoming a qualified naturalist guide on the Channel Islands. Knight would also like to help other districts and plans to continue his work with the California Environmental Literacy Initiative and the National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative.

The search for Knight’s replacement is underway, and Knight intends to give the incoming superintendent space while also being available to help if needed. “After a superintendent has been there for 17 years, it’s important to allow the new leader to find their own way and continue to build and grow the district,” Knight says. Filling Knight’s shoes will be difficult. Professor Sandra Kaplan, who has met many of Knight’s colleagues at conferences and other professional events, says, “A common expression that these individuals have expressed is the appreciation they felt to be a colleague and educator in the district where he is superintendent.”

After retirement, Knight might not be walking the grounds at Oak Park Unified as frequently as he currently does, but his legacy will endure. There’s the elementary school garden that Knight started, which includes a commemoration that reads, “Dedicated to Dr. Tony Knight. Thank you for helping our children grow.” There are also the trees throughout the district—Knight has cataloged all 950 of them. Looking back on Knight’s impact, math teacher Jared Weintraub’s mind goes to the sycamore tree Knight helped plant at the beginning of the school year in 2019. The tree was planted during lunch, and Knight, as always, was there to get his hands dirty and help get the tree rooted in its new home.



Interview: Brian Soika Illustration: Heather Monahan

# In a Year of Sea Change, Keeping Equity in Focus

**Shaun R. Harper**, Provost Professor in Education and Business and executive director of the USC Race and Equity Center, discusses his AERA presidency, his role on Gov. Gavin Newsom's educational equity task force and hosting a race and equity summit viewed by millions

**Your term as president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) is concluding soon. What are some of the accomplishments of which you are most proud?**

I am most proud of the appointments that I've made. The one major responsibility of the president is to appoint people to lead and serve on a range of committees and important things in the association. Literally a third of the appointments are made by the president, which is an enormous task, but I'm really, really proud of the diversity of my appointees—not just to positions of service on committees but also leadership of those committees.

Second, I'm already feeling incredibly proud of the association's very first virtual annual meeting [which takes place in April]. Normally, the AERA conference brings somewhere between 15,000 and 18,000 people together. Having a virtual conference could have been an absolute headache and nightmare. But for me, weirdly, I'm excited because it affords us an exciting opportunity to try out some technological innovations that we otherwise would not have experimented with. It allows us to be much more thoughtful about accessibility in terms of affordability.

But I also mean accessible in a second way. With a 15,000- to 18,000-person conference, sessions are oftentimes at a convention center. Plus, attendees need to stay in hotels. So for colleagues with physical disabilities, there were mobility challenges. I actually am feeling really good that we'll have a virtual space to create a much more physically accessible conference experience.

**You are a member of Gov. Gavin Newsom's statewide task force on racial equity, higher education and COVID-19 recovery. What is the task force's mission?**

To fast-forward ahead and anticipate the inequities that will await us on the other side of the pandemic. And to strategically get ahead of those as opposed to waiting until we're at the end of it and then have to clean up.

**What are some of the inequities caused by the pandemic?**

One is student access to reliable high-speed internet. Black and Latinx students, lower-income Asian-American students and certainly Indigenous students have had inequitable

access to Wi-Fi. That, for sure, has compromised their ability to be engaged learners. Another, certainly, is that there were already students who were housing- and food-insecure before the pandemic. With surging rates of unemployment, they're even more vulnerable. Those are two that immediately come to mind.

**"I've been on a lifelong journey to more deeply understand what manufactures and reproduces those kinds of inequities."**

**The USC Race and Equity Center hosted Unfinished Business—Race and Equity in America in October. Can you describe the summit and tell me about your experience?**

It was a beautiful collaboration between the USC Race and Equity Center, the Schwarzenegger Institute and the Safe Communities Institute, which are in the [USC Sol Price School of Public Policy]. We did it on Twitch, which is the world's largest live-streaming platform.

Over three days, we had a series of interviews and panels on racial equity topics including race and voting rights, race and policing, certainly education and race, race in Hollywood. And we had lots of elected officials. This event was decidedly bipartisan. For example, [former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development] Ben Carson was on one of the panels. We also had [former senior adviser] Valerie Jarrett and Attorney General Eric Holder from the Obama administration join us. We had Usher and Saweetie, who is this incredible rapper, and [USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism] alum. It was a really amazing, inclusive and dynamic three days of not just conversations but also action-oriented, agenda-setting panels around how to move our nation toward a more racially equitable present and future.

**You were a member of the National Education Policy team for the Joe Biden/Kamala Harris presidential campaign. What was your role?**

Specifically, I was a member of the educational equity subcommittee. In that committee, we had three responsibilities. First, we helped create a set of research to inform very cred-

ible talking points for now-President Biden and Vice President Harris when they were on the debate stages and traveling and making speeches. We equipped them with facts and data about education. The second thing was to inform the day-one executive actions that President Biden would take. And then the third was to help set an agenda for the first 100 days of a Biden presidency, specifically on education issues.

**And what was your experience like?**

It felt so consequential. When I was invited to be on it, and the invitation specified what we would do, I immediately started thinking about, if I could get just one thing done in this experience—I mean, I wanted to get a lot done—but if I could get one thing, what would it be? At first, it was to help historically Black colleges and universities and minority-serving institutions and community colleges get more resources. But then there was this ridiculous executive order that President Trump issued that banned diversity training. That executive order was incredibly stressful and disorienting for lots of K-12 school districts and colleges and universities across the country. So that was going to be my second-highest priority—to get that god-awful, ridiculous executive order overturned. It was overturned! It's gone. We got that done. It was a thing that I cared so passionately about, and I get to now say that I worked on it.

**You were born and grew up in Thomasville, Georgia. How did your early life shape your approach to education?**

I grew up in a small, rural, racially segregated town. There was tremendous racial inequity and racial stratification. What I mean by that is, I noticed fairly early in my life that most of the White people in my town seemed to be middle class or wealthy. They were in charge of things. They were the leaders of most things. Black people in my community, including my family, we were overwhelmingly poor, lower-income people. I noticed that. As a child, obviously, I didn't have the analytical tools to make sense of it. So, you know, in some ways, I've been on a lifelong journey to more deeply understand what manufactures and reproduces those kinds of inequities. —R

☞ For an expanded version of this interview, please visit [RSOE.in/Harper](https://www.usc.edu/rsoe/in/Harper).

# GAMIFYING

## the virtual classroom



**The pandemic has educators turning to digital tools to increase engagement, but how can we ensure these technologies are accessible for all students?**

Story:  
Nadra Kareem Nittle

Illustration:  
Edmon de Haro

**NOW THAT COVID-19 HAS KEPT** Kenedy Quandt out of the classroom for a year, she's noticed a change in her teachers: They've grown distinctly more creative.

"They're trying to find ways to keep engaging us," explains Kenedy, an 11th grader at Sierra Canyon School in Chatsworth, a neighborhood in Los Angeles, California. "Before, whenever we wanted to study for a quiz or do practice tests, it was mostly just silent on-your-

own work, but since online school started, teachers have been using Quizlet or Kahoot, so everyone's all excited to play and study."

Quizlet is a study app that uses flashcards, games and tests to foster student learning, while Kahoot is a game-based platform featuring quizzes accessible through web browsers or an app. These fun learning tools are just two of many that teachers have employed to enhance online learning during the pandemic.

Javy Martinez ME '13, Kenedy's computer science teacher, says that game-based apps can be engaged across the curriculum. But beyond games, the pandemic is leading teachers to accept a wide range of work, including creative assignments completed with the video editing software iMovie or the digital music creation studio GarageBand.

"I see a lot more teachers accepting digital assignments," says Martinez, chair of Sierra Canyon's computer science department and director of educational technology (EdTech) at the private pre-K–12 school. "Students know how to use a camera, they've learned about filters, they've investigated apps. There's just so much more technology usage."

To make remote instruction stimulating for Generation Z—those born in the late '90s to the early 2010s and widely reported to have an average attention span of only 8 seconds—educators are tapping into this demographic's deep interest in gaming and technology. They're using not only game-based apps but also social media and EdTech that simulate the in-person learning experience. When schools can safely reopen, students and educators alike say technology should continue to play a role in coursework, but doing so successfully requires narrowing the digital divide between privileged and underprivileged families that the pandemic laid bare. Closing this gap, USC Rossier experts contend, goes deeper than just getting devices into students' hands; it means enabling youth and their caregivers to meaningfully interact with technology.

The efforts Kenedy's teachers have made to include technology in class are inspiring, she says. They've mailed to her home lab kits that allowed her to do science experiments with classmates via Zoom, exposed her to interactive science websites that show her what happens when two chemicals are combined, and given her the chance to closely follow their lessons by using virtual smartboards. But game-based EdTech stands out among her favorite learning tools.

"I definitely am way more likely to study for a quiz where I get to compete with my classmates and there's a little bit of fun involved, rather than just printing out worksheets and sitting quiet," she says. "Mr. Martinez has been doing a bunch of different Quizlet-style games that we can all play, and it motivates all of us in the class because we want to try to get to the top of the leaderboard."

The key to using technology in the classroom is balance, Martinez says. It should supplement rather than dominate instruction, and it should be age- and subject-matter appropriate. Although daily use of technology during the pandemic has been an adjustment for some teachers—often equal parts humbling and frustrating—distance learning

has given educators an incentive to reconsider their teaching methods.

### THE CASE FOR EDTECH DURING THE PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

The novel coronavirus may have given educators little choice but to consider how best to incorporate technology and gaming into the classroom, but the simple fact that it's the 21st century should have been the primary impetus for this shift, says David Cash EdD '08, professor of clinical education at USC Rossier. Students spend hours playing video games, and three-quarters of all U.S. households include at least one gamer, according to a 2020 report by the Entertainment Software Association. "They're everywhere," Cash says of gamers. "So, it seems foolish not to take what's happening in homes and try to make it happen in schools."

The former superintendent of four school districts, most recently Santa Barbara Unified, says that video games are a valuable piece of technology because, to some extent, they involve failure—and players readily accept that fact. Conversely, schools all too often send the message that failure is intolerable, Cash asserts. So, the lessons games teach students and their sheer popularity make them an important resource for educators.

Teachers unfamiliar with video games hesitate to use them in class, but Cash says he witnessed one group of educators recognize their value after they created a system of badges and awards that students earned through successful completion of missions. Even the most skeptical educators were awed that students became engrossed in the undertaking. He adds that games can also be assets because they're cross-disciplinary.

**"Video games involve failure and players readily accept that fact. ... Schools all too often send the message that failure is intolerable. So, the lessons games teach students and their sheer popularity make them an important resource for educators."**

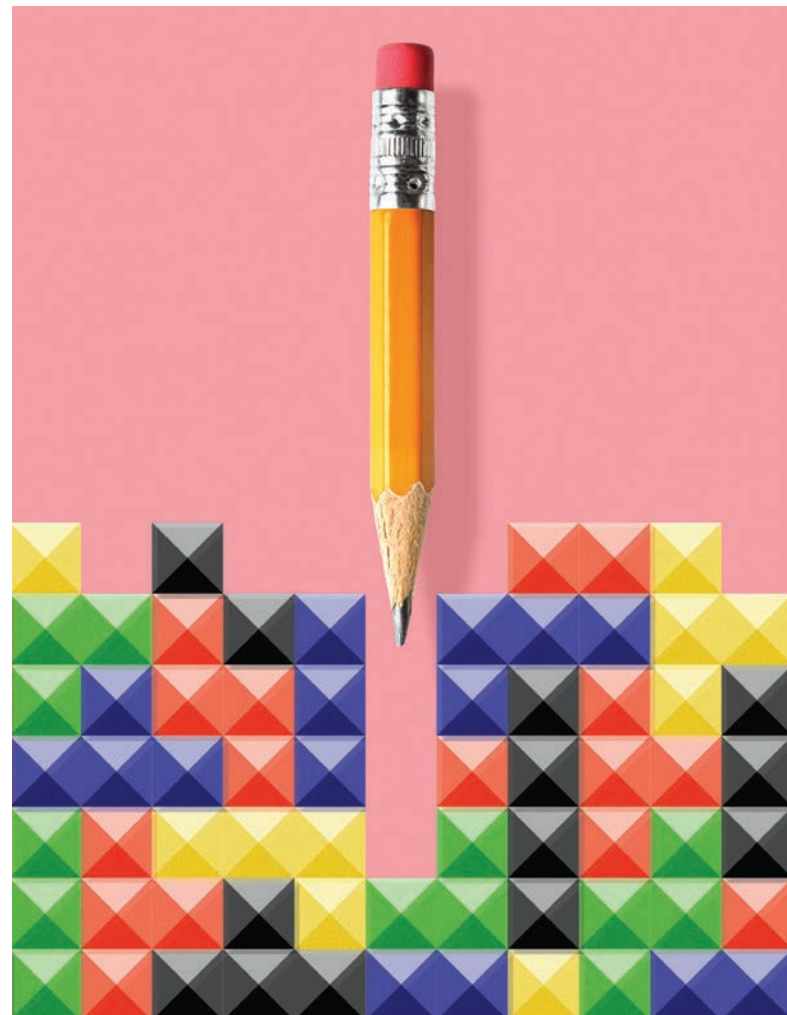
—David Cash EdD '08, USC Rossier Professor of Clinical Education

"You can have a game set up by a chemistry teacher that's going to require a student to be able to read analytically, read for understanding, problem-solve, answer questions, think logically—all things that we would want a student to



**“Kids are overloaded with technology. ... There’s a lack of motivation unless there is some dynamic instruction occurring on the other end.”**

— **Maria Romero-Morales**, Research Project Specialist, Pullias Center for Higher Education and USC Rossier EdD student



be engaged in when they’re doing close reading in English and social studies,” he says.

Educators, however, should avoid using games as gimmicks because students can see through them, both Cash and Martinez argue. Teachers should develop games with content that appeals to kids and be open to accepting work that shows mastery of the concepts even if it isn’t completed in a conventional fashion.

“We have games that apply to typing,” Martinez says. “We have games that apply to geography, history, English, but at a certain point, the students don’t see where it applies in the real curriculum. Now, that doesn’t mean that you can’t have trivia games, such as learning vocab words in English or learning dates with pictures in history.”

By high school, though, the most advanced students might find it insulting for teachers to disseminate knowledge through game-based drills, Martinez says. This doesn’t mean that educators must stop using games in the secondary grades. However, they should make sure that the games reflect students’ sophistication level.

Kids and teens are also increasingly turning to social media for information, be it for learning or for connecting with friends and pop culture. Kenedy says she uses the video-sharing social networking service TikTok in part to watch teachers from all over quickly break down complex historical issues and events.

“Mr. Martinez posts our class lectures on YouTube, and so I can rewatch them if I have any questions,” she says. “Things like that are really helpful because students can comment in the comment section saying they didn’t understand something, and if someone else sees it, they’ll comment back.”

Sierra Canyon instructors also rely on the software program Flipgrid, which allows them to create prompts that students can respond to via video. The program lets students interact with each other through video posts as well. Meanwhile, Microsoft Teams gives teachers and students opportunities to chat, videoconference and store files, among other features.

Although the perception persists that EdTech is more appropriate for science and math than the humanities, Martinez says he’s very impressed by how the performing arts teachers at his school have adopted technology during the pandemic. Entirely remotely, they’ve organized

## RESOURCES for the Virtual Classroom

There’s no shortage of digital resources for teachers. The EdTech sphere includes everything from anti-cheating to project collaboration software. Javy Martinez ’ME 13 recommends the following:

### ProProfs.com

“It’s the next best thing to having a live person proctor the exam,” Martinez says. “It disables you from going to any other tab. It disables copy/paste, and it disables clicking. So the minute that you click on any other tab, boom, you’re busted!”

### Nearpod.com

Allows teachers to see which of their students are online during presentations. If a student leaves, the teacher will know.

### Go Formative

Lets teachers upload documents and add places for student responses. Educators can also track student growth with this software.

### VoiceThread.com

Allows students to record, write, call in or make their own video response to a prompt.

### MindMeister.com

A word-mapping software that allows users to collaborate on projects and branch off into different subjects.

### Repl.it

Allows users to learn multiple computer languages and share with others. “The ultimate group computer science website,” Martinez says.

📶 Visit [rsoe.in/virtualclassroom](https://rsoe.in/virtualclassroom) for links to these and other resources.

plays, movie nights, slam poetry events and choral performances, muting students at certain times to create a melodic effect. “They have taken Zoom and made it their own,” he says. “It has been great.”

But technology’s use in the classroom isn’t always showy. Often, it’s relatively mundane. Maria Romero-Morales, a research project specialist at the USC Pullias Center for Higher Education who is completing her EdD in higher education at USC Rossier, notes that educators routinely employ technology for logistical reasons. This includes having students start discussion threads in the chat sections of videoconferencing programs or asking students and their families to get the Remind app, so they can stay on top of homework and project deadlines.

Gary Wu, a Sierra Canyon 11th grader, says he has depended on apps like OneNote, Evernote and Google Calendar to take notes digitally and stay organized. He appreciates that these apps have an environmental benefit as well: They help him “shrink down the amount of paper” he uses for class, he says.

Like Gary, a number of students have thrived using EdTech during the pandemic, but many have logged on infrequently or not at all, revealing how much of a digital divide exists between middle- and high-income families and their low-income counterparts.

## CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Just a month before the pandemic forced schools to close in March 2020, Kenedy Quandt bought her first laptop, a purchase her parents paid half for while she covered the rest with her earnings as a STEM tutor. She is the founder of the organization Project STEMinist (STEM plus feminist), which provides free tutoring to low-income girls and fee-based tutoring to girls from higher-income brackets. Sierra Canyon doesn’t require students to use computers for schoolwork, but when the pandemic struck, the school scrambled to get laptops to the students who didn’t have devices.

In the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation’s second largest district, ensuring that students received the technology needed for distance learning was a herculean effort given that one-third of the district’s roughly 600,000 students had neither a laptop nor broadband internet at home. “We’ve known through different studies that we’ve done, whether it’s K-12 or higher ed, that some students were and still are doing assignments and homework over their phone,” says Romero-Morales, who researches digital equity in education. “Not every student had a device.”

A report from USC Rossier and the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, published in

**“The internet is basically the new electricity. If we are to call ourselves a society that wants to ensure that every resident has what they need to be successful, then the internet has to be on the table.”**

—Stephen J. Aguilar, USC Rossier Assistant Professor of Education

October, found that low-income families have made sacrifices to ensure that their children take part in distance learning. With a sample size of 1,971 LAUSD families, the study, “When School Comes Home: How Low-Income Families Are Adapting to Distance Learning,” found that about 1 in 3 families report paying for devices such as laptops or for internet service to accommodate their children’s learning needs (p. 5).

In May, LAUSD Superintendent Austin Beutner announced that essentially every LAUSD student who needed computers and internet access had received them, but two months later, the district reported that more than 50,000 Black and Latino middle and high school students hadn’t regularly been logging on to remote classes. Moreover, low-income students were 10 to 20 percent less likely to participate in online instruction, and English learners, special education students, and foster and unhoused youth were all less likely to log on as well.

While LAUSD’s work to give students access to devices and the internet has made it easier for them to participate in distance learning, educators must ensure that their lessons are engaging enough to motivate youth to log on regularly, says Romero-Morales, who has more than 15 years of teaching experience.

“We’ve known that these kids are overloaded with technology,” she says. “They’re sitting in front of a screen from 8 to 3:30, and it’s really challenging for them to just stay there and stare into a screen when there isn’t going to be a lot of engagement. There’s a lack of motivation unless there is some dynamic instruction occurring on the other end.”

Gary says some of his teachers lecture throughout the class period, which he doesn’t find engaging. In Martinez’s computer science class, though, students go into digital breakout rooms that allow them to interact with each other in small groups. This motivates him to participate, Gary explains.

While mediocre teaching may bear some of the blame for low student engagement, caregivers likely play a role as well. The “When School Comes Home” report found that caregivers may not be able to provide the technical support needed to help their children excel as remote learners. Fifty-two percent of parents surveyed in the report said they had not completed high school, and although 73 percent reported using the internet daily, just 33 percent said the same of their computer use. In fact, a higher number, 44 percent, said they never use computers. These findings indicate that low-income parents may have a limited capacity to help their children address software and connectivity problems that arise during online instruction.

“There are gaps there that preclude them from helping their child, despite wanting to, in ways they think are important,” says Stephen J. Aguilar, principal investigator of the “When School Comes Home” report and a USC Rossier assistant professor. “Older siblings are now de facto tech support, which I’m not saying is something that we should avoid. Sometimes the older sibling is the one who knows how to use the device better, but it’s a finite resource where in helping a younger sibling, an older sibling might actually be choosing not to engage in their own work.”

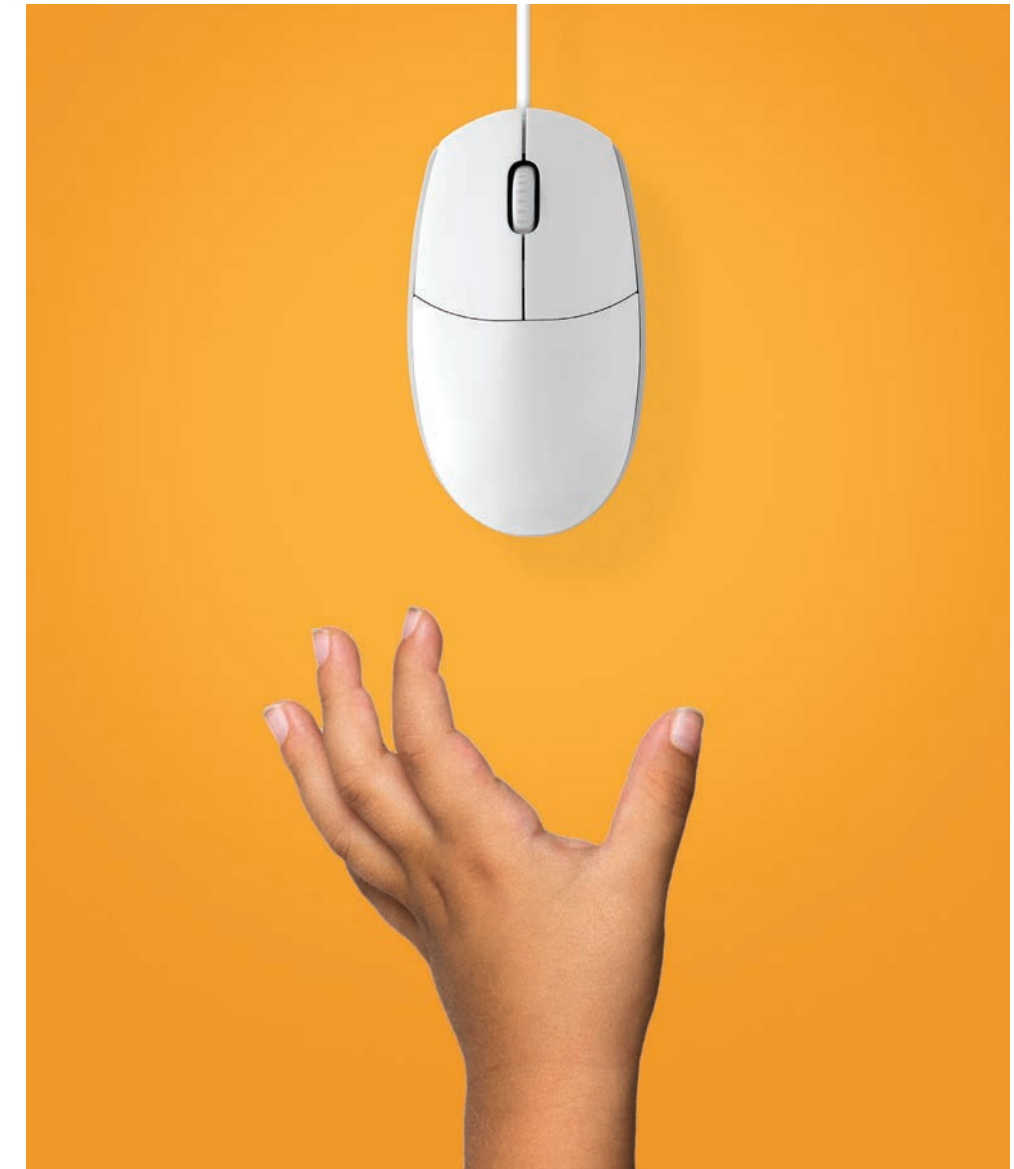
## TIKTOK Hashtags to Follow

### #historylesson

History is reportedly TikTok’s most popular education topic. Videos using the #historylesson hashtag have garnered more than 229 million views combined. These short clips have helped students understand complex historical subjects—from the French Revolution to the women’s suffrage movement.

### #literaturememes

The hashtag #literaturememes is a hub for memes about classic literature. Rather than assigning students to write about the 19th-century novel they’ve just read, teachers can assign a meme response that they post to TikTok.



Throughout the pandemic, families have had to make these difficult decisions while facing stressors such as insecurity in employment, housing and food. Closing the digital divide requires educators to consider all of the factors that might keep children offline and to make sure that if they’re going to engage certain technology in class, students know how to use it. If not, technology may become more of a hindrance than a help to learning.

When schools resume in-person learning, Aguilar says it will be important for educators to remember what the pandemic revealed about the digital divide. Policies, practices and infrastructure must be put in place to allow schools to better serve economically disadvantaged students should remote instruction become a necessity once more. Having recently introduced legislation such as the Internet for All Act of 2021 and the Broadband for All Act

of 2022, California lawmakers are working to make broadband accessible to residents in underserved communities. Also, in 2019, Gov. Gavin Newsom launched the Broadband for All initiative and issued an executive order to get state agencies to pool their resources to provide Californians with access to high-performance broadband at home, devices to use the internet, and training and support for digital literacy. Today, an estimated 1 million California schoolchildren still lack internet access.

“The internet is basically the new electricity,” Aguilar says. “If we are to call ourselves a society that wants to ensure that every resident has what they need to be successful, then the internet has to be on the table. It has to be one of those things that everyone has because everything relies on it now.” —R



Interview: Kianoosh Hashemzadeh Illustration: Heather Monahan

## Why We Must Rethink How We Teach Civics

**Akilah Lyons-Moore**, USC Rossier assistant professor of clinical education, discusses The Democracy Project, growing up in Pacoima and what she misses about teaching high school

**You grew up in Pacoima in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles.**

**How did that shape you?**

Pacoima is a community where everyone knows everyone. As a result of housing covenants, it was the only place in the San Fernando Valley where Black people could live. There are Indigenous peoples who originated in Pacoima and still live there. Pacoima became this area of immense diversity because of the racist housing policies—[home to] Latinos, Filipinos, Japanese Americans and Indigenous folks.

My grandmother, Toy Dula Knight, was a member of the NAACP and was very active in the civil rights movement and in the community. Before she relocated to L.A., she was a one-room school teacher in North Carolina and served in the Black Women's Army Corps in World War II. After earning her California teaching credential, she was—for years—unable to secure a permanent teaching position with LAUSD because of her Southern accent. For most of her teaching career, she was a substitute, eventually landing a permanent job at Filmore Elementary in Pacoima. I was in elementary school when she started showing signs of Alzheimer's. I missed out on a lot of time with her, but a lot of people say that I have carried on her legacy. My grandmother's activism and my involvement in the Black church were instrumental for me.

Much of my youth was spent in the Black church in Pacoima. The Black churches would come together to celebrate Black history, leaders and community service, providing a lot of opportunities for young people to give speeches and take leadership positions.

**You were once a high school history and social science teacher. What do you miss about teaching high school?**

I loved my students, being able to talk with them, teach them, collaborate, build relationships, and see their growth. I taught 11th and 12th grade, and I was their adviser for the Black Student Union, so I knew a lot of students before they got to me. I miss opening a world to students that they didn't know existed. I taught history from a different perspective than most of my colleagues. For a lot of my students, I was their first Black teacher.

**Tell me about your role with Civics & Civility: The Democracy Project, USC Rossier's new civics education initiative.**

Dean Noguera asked me and Dr. Jenifer Crawford if we would be interested in helping to shape a new initiative around improving civics education. Coming together—being able to talk and hear each other—is necessary, especially in our current context. And yet, it is not taught in K–12 civics education.

Dr. Robert Filback, Dr. Crawford and I are co-chairing the committee to get the project up and going. I'm so excited to be a part of this and to rethink how civics education is taught.

**What are some preliminary findings?**

As we researched civics-education curricula, we found that current practices are all about memorization. There is a gap between the need to actually engage students in civic-minded activities and learning experiences. So, we're really thinking about how to utilize the voices of young people and their forms of activism, within what is traditionally called civics education. There is a lack of understanding around free speech, our amendments and the Bill of Rights. There is also a significant lack of ability to parse through discourse and identify what is truth, data and facts, and what are political arguments.

I think about the people who claimed that the election was stolen and what happened at the Capitol, and the first thing I think about is our students. How can we teach to this moment, in order to truly prepare civic-minded students who can have political or ideological disagreements? How do we help them debate their own perspectives and use evidence? At the same time, how can we help them to talk to each other with respect, with empathy, with an understanding that there are a lot of people in this country who are marginalized and have been historically, because it was written within the founding documents of our country?

**What is education's role in ensuring the health of our democracy?**

Education's role is to equip young people with the skills they need to participate in democracy. Instead of focusing on these skills, there's too much focus on the content—and the content is biased. If we focus on, for example, reading and literacy, and think about perspective and how it changes over time, we can equip students to read original documents and help them to unpack the meaning in them.

One of the most important things is to equip young people with civic-minded skills and [an understanding of] the history of the country. I'm a community organizer at heart, so I think about how our young people can consider these issues in the context of their own communities, bridging civics education with civic engagement. Our goal is to create a whole generation of young people who are civically engaged.

**What impact can training teachers to be better equipped to teach and discuss issues of civic engagement and democracy have on historically marginalized students in particular?**

That's a concept we're talking about in The Democracy Project working group: What does civics education mean for our Latinx students, students who identify as LGBTQ, and Black students? [These students] oftentimes have been left out of the civics-education experience, but these communities are often impacted greatly by what happens in our democracy.

**“Our goal is to create a whole generation of young people who are civically engaged.”**

One thing that is rarely taught is the role of youth and community organizers in the expansion of democracy through voting rights. One of my heroes is Ella Baker; she was the adult behind the scenes [of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] helping young people organize, train, strategize and do the work of registering Black voters in the deep South. There are some things that communities of color have done historically, that have contributed to our democracy in fundamental ways, that are not acknowledged.

Civics education has the potential to [help] young people know that they come from a legacy of people who have changed our democracy for the better. The Democracy Project has the potential to help transform communities. Not according to our ideas, but according to the ideas of the community. —R

For an expanded version of this interview, please visit [RSoE.in/Lyons-Moore](https://RSoE.in/Lyons-Moore).

# IS THE PANDEMIC WORSENING THE EQUITY GAP IN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS?

While test-optional policies have some applauding, declining application rates for low-income students and people of color are worrisome

Story:  
Elaine Woo

Illustration:  
Joanna Grochocka

**IT WAS EARLY FEBRUARY**, and Jefferson High School college counselor Enrique Carranza had been trying for days to reach one of his seniors by email and messages on the school networking service, the primary means of staying in touch while campuses across the Los Angeles Unified School District were closed.

When the student finally checked her inbox, she found not only Carranza's messages but also one from California State University telling her she had

been accepted to CSU Dominguez Hills this fall.

But what should have been an occasion for pure joy—she would be the first member of her family to attend college—instead was fraught with uncertainty.

Since COVID-19 turned everything upside down, she has been working as many as 30 hours a week at a fast-food restaurant to support her family through the pandemic. She intends to go to college, but until her family's finances improve, she told Carranza, where and when are up in the air.



“These are the conversations counselors across Los Angeles are having with students,” said Carranza, who was hired onto Jefferson’s permanent staff after two years at the predominantly Latino/Latina, low-income campus as a member of the USC College Advising Corps.

The Jefferson High student’s plight reflects worrisome national trends that suggest the pandemic is deepening inequalities in college access for students from historically underrepresented groups.

“COVID-19 is affecting dramatically who goes to college and where they go to college,” said USC Rossier Professor of Practice Jerome Lucido, who directs the USC Rossier Center for Enrollment Research, Policy and Practice (CERPP). “It’s exacerbating the disadvantages of many populations.”

One of the most troubling signs of a growing equity gap is the sharp decline in financial aid applications.

The number of students who have submitted the federal form known as the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) in February compared to the same time last year has fallen by 12.3 percent at high schools with large

on families having a computer and reliable internet service.

“The counselors are really taxed,” Hall said.

And, FAFSA filing is not the only college application requirement that is getting bogged down by the need to do it remotely. “Something as simple as a letter of recommendation is taking months,” Hall observed.

A further sign of the pandemic’s toll is the nearly 22 percent drop in the number of 2020 high school graduates who enrolled in college last fall, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. The drop-offs varied by type of institution, with the steepest decline seen at community colleges.

The center found that community college enrollment fell by 21 percent nationally, a rate of decline that was almost 20 times higher than during the pre-pandemic year of 2019. Because two-year colleges provide a crucial path into higher education for low-income and other marginalized students, the plummet is ringing alarm bells.

“It is scary,” said USC Rossier Professor of Education Tatiana Melguizo, who studies the economics of higher

“COVID-19 is affecting dramatically who goes to college and where they go to college. It’s exacerbating the disadvantages of many populations.” —**Jerome Lucido**, USC Rossier Professor of Practice

enrollments of low-income students, as defined by the federal Title I program; by comparison, FAFSA submissions have dropped 7.4 percent at non-Title I schools, according to the nonprofit National College Attainment Network (NCAN). NCAN found a steeper decline, of nearly 15 percent, at schools with high proportions of students of color. Although the gap has narrowed since FAFSA season opened in October, experts remain concerned.

These numbers are distressing to college-access advocates because research shows that students who submit the FAFSA are far more likely to attend college and receive a degree.

“We’re hoping for a late swell in FAFSA filings,” said Rakin Hall ME ’13, vice president of enrollment management at the private Arcadia University near Philadelphia. “The pandemic has really exposed a lot of gaps in resources at the K–12 level.”

Part of the problem may be unequal access to college counselors, who play a crucial role in the FAFSA filing process. High school counselors usually hold on-campus workshops to help students and parents wend their way through the long FAFSA form, but now they must do it on Zoom, a far more time-consuming affair that depends

education. “Community colleges are engines of opportunity. If no one is reaching out to those students, they are going to postpone. And nobody knows if they will come back.”

### SIGNS OF HOPE?

While it’s too early to know this fall’s enrollment picture, worrying—and encouraging—trends are emerging in data about the widely used Common Application.

The early numbers show that applications at the nation’s most elite institutions, both public and private, are booming.

Freshman applications at top colleges and universities, such as UCLA, Harvard and Penn State, have surged by 17 percent overall compared with the previous year, according to the Common App. Some campuses have reported growth of 20 percent or more, with significant increases among Black and Latino/Latina applicants.

USC is expecting about 70,000 applications for this fall’s freshman class, a 2 percent rise over last year and a 7 percent increase over the previous high in 2019–20, USC spokesman Ron Mackovich said.

Admissions experts have attributed the higher-than-

normal application rate at selective institutions to a decision that caused seniors to sigh in relief: About 1,700 colleges and universities, including USC, scrapped the SAT/ACT requirement for at least this year because of the closure of testing centers during the pandemic. Some experts predict that the requirement will eventually be eliminated permanently. “Instead of disqualifying themselves from applying because they think their scores aren’t good enough, students are saying, ‘I’m going to go for it,’” said Alyssa Orrantia Bieneme, Cornell University’s associate director of admissions and coordinator of diversity outreach, who will complete a master’s degree in enrollment management policy at USC Rossier this spring.

At Cornell, freshman applications are up by more than 16,000 this year. A contributing factor may be the shift to virtual recruiting: Cornell, like USC and other highly competitive institutions, hosted information sessions online, which enabled them to reach many more high schools than was possible when in-person campus visits were the norm.

“This has been surprisingly beneficial,” Bieneme said, and may have contributed to a significant rise in applications to Cornell from historically underserved students.

Even before the pandemic, some institutions declared themselves test-blind, meaning that they do not look at scores even if applicants submit them. More schools have chosen the test-optional route, meaning that they are not requiring scores but will consider them if submitted.

The movement toward test-optional or test-blind policies is the biggest change in college admissions in the COVID-19 age. It will be a cause for major celebration if it ends up leveling the playing field for poor, Black and Latino/Latina students, whose low average scores have been linked to lack of access to costly test-prep courses.

But that is a big “if.”

“Test-optional and test-blind operate alongside a host of factors affecting enrollment,” said USC Rossier Associate Professor of Higher Education Julie Posselt. “In many places the move to test-optional seems to be associated with an uptick in applications. What’s not clear is whether there are countervailing factors that might still pose barriers to students being admitted and ultimately enrolling,” such as the desirability of their extracurricular activities and ability to write a compelling personal statement.

“There are lots of ways that privilege and cultural capital show up in admissions,” Posselt said.

Some admissions professionals say that waiving the test-scores requirement will not radically alter the process because they approach applications

## COLLEGE COUNSELING BY ZOOM

The coronavirus pandemic upended nearly everything about going to college, including the way members of the USC College Advising Corps (CAC) work.

In normal times, counselors could nab a student outside a classroom for a quick chat or summon them to the campus college center. But once campuses closed, keeping tabs on college-bound seniors became much more difficult, requiring technology and other resources many students didn’t have.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing CAC’s 38 counselors—all recent college graduates with backgrounds similar to those of the students from the underrepresented communities they serve—was learning to develop rapport in an online environment.

“Building relationships happens walking through the hallway or at a basketball game or play,” said Program Director Ara Arzumian. “That’s all gone. Now much more work has to go into just arranging meetings with students.”

Some students are too shy to turn on their video during Zoom advising meetings, for example. “Most of the time, I’m talking to a picture. That’s a barrier,” said Lupita Martinez, who works at Alhambra High School, a predominantly low-income, Latino/Latina and Asian-American campus in the San Gabriel Valley.

To increase the ways they connect with students, the corps members have gotten creative.

They expanded online resources, including a YouTube channel with helpful videos on topics such as how to navigate college application portals and to request tax records for financial aid forms. Martinez has held live Instagram sessions where students and parents pop in to ask questions.

Senior advisers also developed a guide to e-advising with concrete tips on how to connect with school staff as well as students in a remote world.

“Our advisers are working their behinds off,” Arzumian said, “but they are determined to reach every student they can.”

**For more on the USC CAC and how you can help keep these much-needed advisers in schools, see p. 52.**



holistically, meaning that no one indicator of merit will determine a student's admissions status. This year, the Common App also includes space for applicants to describe how the pandemic may have affected them.

"We have always approached the review of applications holistically and compassionately, understanding the challenges many students and families face," Cornell's Bieneme said.

Don Hossler, a senior scholar at USC Rossier's CERPP, said removing test scores, no matter how problematic, from the equation could make it even harder for students and parents to understand how admissions decisions are made.

He helped lead a recent study of 10 institutions with different levels of selectivity that emphasize a holistic approach to admissions. The study found that no school used the same criteria and processes when making admissions decisions.

"Not only will low- and moderate-income students not understand the rules of the game, but the process will become less transparent to all students," Hossler wrote in a recent op-ed. "This should give all of us pause."

If test scores are off the table this year, what factors might come in for greater scrutiny?

Bieneme said assessments of academic rigor, such as whether students took advantage of any available Advanced Placement courses, will be a key factor in Cornell's holistic review process, as it was before the pandemic's disruptions.

Essays may also receive greater scrutiny.

"I think that this year of all years, [applicants] should pay particular attention to the writing that they submit to colleges," USC Dean of Admission Timothy Brunold said in October.

At Arcadia University, Hall said admissions decisions will lean more heavily on grades.

"I've always been a huge fan of GPA," he said. "The SAT is a snapshot of a student's day—could be a good day or a bad day. GPA tells me how you show up in life. Isn't that what it's about, how you show up at 8 a.m. or 8 p.m.? [It tells me], 'Are you ready?'"

"I also like the idea of letters of recommendation," Hall added. "GPA indicates consistency. Letters of recommendation speak to your character."

the most elite institutions, find better ways to identify the most promising students from disadvantaged communities, and create and fund programs that give them the greatest chance for college success.

One approach she admires is the USC McMorrow Neighborhood Academic Initiative, a seven-year pre-college program that prepares students from South and East Los Angeles for admission to a college or university. Since its first graduating class in 1997, 83 percent of the more than 1,000 participants have enrolled as freshmen at four-year

"COVID-19 and the racial uprising unveiled the unequal opportunities for our students ... a whole reckoning with the idea of merit."

—Tatiana Melguizo, USC Rossier Professor of Education

College advisers say they hope admissions officers will take personal context into account when assessing applicants from disadvantaged communities.

"I'm happy to hear from some of them that they are definitely looking at senior year with a grain of salt," said Ara Arzumanian, program director of the USC College Advising Corps, which aims to improve college outcomes for low-income, first-generation and underrepresented students by providing understaffed Los Angeles high schools with qualified counselors. "They're trying to figure out what happened to the students, how much of what they see on the transcript is related to the pandemic or the fact they don't have Wi-Fi or a place to do classwork at home."

#### FORGING A NEW PATH

Many experts hope the pandemic, along with last year's Black Lives Matter protests, may finally lead to a wholesale rethinking of college admissions that improves equity in college outcomes.

"COVID-19 and the racial uprising unveiled the unequal opportunities for our students ... a whole reckoning with the idea of merit," Melguizo said.

"It hit our most vulnerable communities harder, so we have families who have first responders who need to be at work every day, and we have parents who are able to work from home and who are going to give as much as they can afford to make their kids more competitive. As institutions, we need to think about that. We need to think about ways to expand educational opportunity. Otherwise, we are maximizing these inequities."

Melguizo would like to see higher education, especially

institutions, including 42 percent at USC.

Another model is the Thompson Scholars Learning Communities, a comprehensive, college-transition program based at the University of Nebraska. A residential program that combines academic and social support, scholarships and individualized attention in the first two years of college, it has improved the graduation rates of low-income and racially minoritized students.

"When you give the resources and the emotional support, these students thrive," said Melguizo, who has studied the Thompson Scholars program.

Such initiatives are expensive, but USC Rossier scholars are examining new ways to pay for them.

At CERPP, Lucido and his colleagues are launching an effort to design a federal program that would provide colleges and universities with greater financial support if they commit to admitting and graduating more underserved students. It targets federal Pell Grants, which flow to institutions without requiring them to ensure that the recipients persist to graduation. Lucido would like to make those institutions more accountable.

"Colleges may chafe at such a federal requirement, but there is ample data to show that higher education as a sector has not stepped up to move these students forward and advance social mobility in America in any way that meets current need," he said.

"I don't know an admissions officer who doesn't want to do better on the equity front, but they feel so many constraints in getting that done," he said. "So we really need the kind of restructuring and breaking down of barriers that have prevented them from opening doors wider." —R

## Disruption as an opportunity for change

By Pedro A. Noguera  
Distinguished Professor of Education  
Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean



**THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC,** I have reflected on what lessons we might learn from this crisis. I've thought there must be some deeper meaning that we could extract that might prove helpful as things return to some semblance of "normal."

In April of last year, acclaimed author Arundhati Roy wrote, "Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next." Before the pandemic, our society showed clear signs of strain and stress. Inequality was growing, our political systems and parties were unable to solve the problems that eat away at our quality of life, and our environment was deteriorating rapidly. Is it possible to use this moment to forge a path that is more sustainable, equitable and beneficial for all of us?

This question is particularly pertinent to schools. While the logistics involved with reopening safely have taken precedent, it's not too early—or too late—to think about whether we can use this disruption as an opportunity for positive, lasting change. Too many of our schools are reproducing patterns of inequality. Despite years of effort and reforms, the achievement gap based on race and socioeconomic status is largely unchanged. Kids are under pressure to earn high grades and test scores, but how many are truly inspired by what they learn?

Educators have not fared much better. Districts are grappling with severe teacher shortages—not from a lack of qualified teachers, but because too few are willing to accept teaching jobs. Principals and superintendents, especially in urban school districts, are frequently asked to do more with less. Under relentless pressure to demonstrate evidence of improvement in test scores and graduation rates, many are questioning their long-term commitment to the education profession.



Our kids deserve to be in schools where they are challenged and supported. Parents have a right to know that their children are safe and being well-prepared for the future. And it is reasonable and fair for educators to expect that their service be honored and respected, and that they will not be blamed for failing to solve problems over which they have no control.

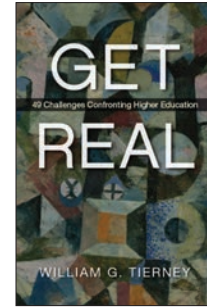
To create the schools we need, we must have education policies that prioritize high-quality teaching and learning opportunities over standardized testing and a narrow focus on achievement that ignores the social, psychological and emotional needs of kids. We also need to build systems of support for schools so that social workers, psychologists, internships and excellent after-school and preschool programs are widely available. Most of all, we need a vision and plan for creating schools capable of meeting the needs of all the students they serve.

For those who've been in the trenches of education, creating such schools and policies may seem unattainable. It's easy to see how obstacles related to state regulations, poverty, union contracts and politics make change difficult. However, if we are willing to learn from the schools that already serve as beacons of hope and opportunity, and if we allow ourselves to imagine and act on possibilities for change, there's no reason why returning to a subpar status quo must be inevitable.

Rather than walking through the gateway to this new world, "dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us," we can, Roy writes, "walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it." —R

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS GASH

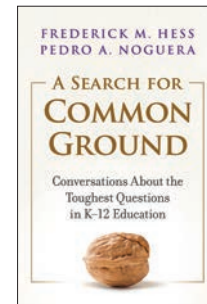
## Faculty publications



**Get Real: 49 Challenges Confronting Higher Education** by **WILLIAM TIERNEY** (University Professor Emeritus at USC Rossier)

December 2020 / State University of New York Press

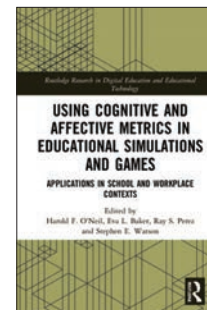
In 49 short essays, Tierney provides a thought-provoking overview of the many challenges confronting higher education, from diversity and free speech to the rise of for-profit colleges and student debt.



**A Search for Common Ground: Conversations About the Toughest Questions in K-12 Education**

by **RICK HESS** (director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute) and **PEDRO A. NOGUERA** (Dean of USC Rossier)

March 2021 / Teachers College Press  
During a time rife with bitter national polarization, Hess and Noguera, who often fall on opposing sides of the ideological aisle, candidly discuss some of the toughest issues in K-12 education, from school choice and testing to diversity and privatization. Written as a series of back-and-forth exchanges, through their sharp, honest and civil debate, they uncover a surprising amount of common ground. To view a discussion between Noguera and Hess about their book, visit [rsoe.in/commonground](https://rsoe.in/commonground).

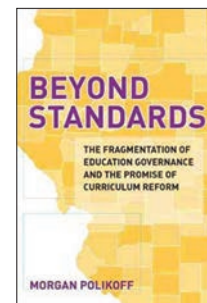


**Using Cognitive and Affective Metrics in Educational Simulations and Games: Applications in School and Workplace Contexts**

edited by **HARRY O'NEIL** (professor of educational psychology and technology at USC Rossier), **EVA L. BAKER** (Distinguished Professor at UCLA), **RAY S. PEREZ** (program officer of the Cognitive Science of Learning Program, Office of Naval Research, U.S.), and **STEPHEN E. WATSON** (independent consultant)

May 2021 / Routledge

In response to the rise in use of computer-based simulations and games across academic and professional sectors, this volume explores how cognitive and affective metrics can be used to effectively assess, modify, and enhance learning and assessment outcomes of simulations and games used in education and training.



**Beyond Standards: The Fragmentation of Education Governance and the Promise of Curriculum Reform**

by **MORGAN POLIKOFF** (associate professor of education at USC Rossier)

May 2021 / Harvard Education Press

Polikoff offers an impassioned argument about the ways that our decentralized educational systems undermine the pursuit of educational equity and excellence, addressing why standards have failed, whether standards-based reform can be salvaged, and what we can do to improve teaching and learning across America's 13,000 school districts.

## READING AS REFUGE Recommendations from our students



**MOLLY NESTOR,**  
MS in Marriage and Family Therapy  
*Long Division* by Kiese Laymon

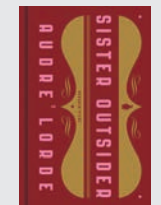
I love contemporary sci-fi and have returned

to this book often for its depth of character and deeply human experience. In education we talk about providing "windows and mirrors" to both understand others' lived experience and see our own reflected back—this book feels like both.



**KEVIN LIU,**  
ME in Educational Counseling  
*The Science of Storytelling: Why Stories Make Us Human and How to Tell Them Better* by Will Sorr

I'd recommend *The Science of Storytelling*. I loved it because it explores the scientific factors for stories' appeal and how these factors help me better relate to myself, others and the world around me.



**JACOB BOARNET,**  
ME in Post-Secondary Administration and Student Affairs  
*Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde

I first read this book about four years ago, and re-reading it in the midst of the several sociopolitical events this year gave me the opportunity to reflect on the content from a new perspective. Particularly with its form as a collection of essays and speeches, engaging with the material as I was observing the impactful events occurring around me was extremely profound.



# Discovering the Talents in Every Child

This alumna's illustrious career in gifted education took her from LA to the remote villages of Mexico

Story:  
Diane Krieger

**SOBRESALIENTE. THAT'S SPANISH FOR "GIFTED."** Janet Boldt Sáenz '59 is an expert on the subject, having spent the past 60 years studying *niños talentosos* ("talented children") and training teachers to identify them.

It was pure serendipity that took Sáenz, a longtime professor of education at Autonomous University of Tlaxcala, to Mexico in the first place. When she arrived in 1964, she was a tour guide who spoke rudimentary Spanish.

Today, at age 83, she's a national authority on gifted education. Still very active in her profession, Sáenz is teaching a course on multi-exceptional persons and a seminar in qualitative identification of giftedness. She's also co-developing Mexico's first guide for teachers and parents of gifted children. She's been toying with retirement, but her dean asked her to hold off until the rollout of the revamped master's program and proposed doctoral program that Sáenz designed in consultation with gifted-education pioneers Joseph Renzulli and Sally Reis.

At least she isn't driving to Tlaxcala every week. Since the pandemic, she's been teaching remotely. Normally, Sáenz would make the two-hour drive early Tuesday, crossing two states lines and a volcanic mountain range to deliver her graduate courses in person. On Thursday afternoon, she would then head back to Mexico City, where she lives with her husband. A professional bolero musician and composer, Efrén Sáenz, 84, still performs with his ensemble, Trio Los Soberanos, which he founded in 1959. The energetic octogenarians celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary last year.

The early years were hard. A teacher by day and grad student by night, Janet Sáenz was often alone with their two young daughters, Charlotte and Laura, while Efrén performed at nightclubs or toured nationally and internationally with his trio.

But he always supported Sáenz's career goals, which required her to take weeklong teaching assignments in El Salvador, Venezuela, Ecuador and Guatemala, and spend summers in Tuscaloosa to work alongside faculty researchers at the University of Alabama.

"He understood," she says. "I really have my master's and doctoral degrees thanks to him. Every summer, we drove five days to the University of Alabama. Then he'd fly back to Mexico City and return for us three months later to drive us home." Sáenz's young daughters stayed with her during those summer research trips.

**JANET BOLDT SÁENZ WAS BORN IN 1937**, the child of Knud Boldt, a Danish diplomat stationed in Los Angeles, and Linda Boldt, an Australian immigrant who worked as a secretary. After Germany occupied Denmark, Knud Boldt left the consulate to work for Lockheed, and the family settled down in Pasadena. He later opened a Danish import business and a travel agency.

Sáenz always knew she wanted to be teacher. At 10, she started her own backyard summer school for neighborhood kids. At 18, she enrolled in the teacher-training track at Pasadena City College, then transferred to USC in 1957, earning her BS in 1959.



## ↑ THE PATH LESS TRAVELED

Sáenz (white dress) visits a bilingual school in a Nahuatl community in 1990, accompanied by Diana Negroponte (blue dress), wife of then-U.S. ambassador to Mexico John Negroponte.

Sáenz (far right) with her family, husband, Efrén, second from left, and daughters Charlotte and Laura.

## ← A LEADER IN HER FIELD

Sáenz (right) and colleague Barbara Clark, professor emerita at California State University, Los Angeles, visit Mexico City in 1990 to present at the Autonomous University of Tlaxcala.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JANET BOLDT SÁENZ

"I can't say enough good things about my 'SC training," Sáenz says with a bright smile. "It gave me the basis for everything else I've done in my whole career."

Her first teaching job was at Lockwood Elementary School, but after three years she returned to USC as a master demonstration teacher. Sáenz had received her student-teacher training at 32nd Street USC Performing Arts Magnet, then



known as the USC Demonstration School, and it was there that she first became interested in talented children. Assigned to an experimental K-1 class full of gifted Spanish-speaking immigrants, she was amazed to see how quickly they advanced.

**SÁENZ'S OWN SPANISH SKILLS** were about to undergo dramatic improvement. As a young teacher with her summers free, she worked for her dad's travel agency leading college students on overseas tours.

While accompanying a group to Mexico, she connected with teachers at the American School Foundation, a distinguished, international K-12 school in Mexico City. Intrigued, Sáenz engineered a two-year teacher-loan arrangement for

herself through Los Angeles Unified School District. When an LAUSD superintendent offered to send her to graduate school through the University of Alabama's then-new international program in Mexico City, she jumped at the chance. Sáenz completed her master's in elementary education in 1975 and her EdD in 1990, supplementing her studies in gifted education with intensive training at the University of Connecticut's iconic Confratute.

Sáenz started teaching at the university level in 1985, with appointments to the faculties of the Autonomous University of Tlaxcala and the University of the Americas in Mexico City. She also began consulting for the Ministry of Education, tasked with developing Mexico's first gifted-student program.

"We opened the pilot in 80 public elementary schools in Mexico City," she recalls.

As the effort expanded across Mexico's public and private educational systems, Sáenz documented the inception-to-execution of the nationwide gifted-education program in her dissertation.

Sáenz designed gifted programs, enrichment programs and ESL programs deployed in more than 1,000 schools across Mexico and trained tens of thousands of teachers to identify gifted students. She became the founding president of the Mexican Association for the Gifted in 1997 and has authored more than 70 scholarly articles. She's been interviewed by numerous Mexican media outlets and has presented at hundreds of conferences. In 2017, the California Association for the Gifted recognized her 50 years of service with a special award.

Of special interest to Sáenz has been the study of giftedness in Mexico's Indigenous communities. She has visited dozens of villages where teachers and students speak Spanish in the classroom and a native language like Nahuatl or Totonac on the playground. In one-room schoolhouses, Sáenz trained hundreds of teachers and developed qualitative methods to identify talent in Indigenous children.

Sáenz is no fan of IQ tests. In line with Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, she says, "I discovered many, many kinds of giftedness in many kinds of intelligences." For Indigenous people, renowned for their fine craftsmanship, she devised questionnaires that identify which child would make an exceptional carpenter or wood carver, which might create magnificent clay vessels and which could dazzle with his embroidery.

Yes, *his*.

Sáenz took up photography to document the artisanal traditions of the Nahuatl town of San Isidro in Tlaxcala, where unconventional gender roles date back to antiquity. While women commonly work the fields, the men often stay home to embroider traditional garments worn in religious festivals.

**THE BOTTOM LINE FOR SÁENZ IS THIS:** "Hidden gifted [children] are everywhere, but they're not easily identified. My recommendation is for more qualitative research to help teachers, together with parents, identify the talents in each child." —R



# 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](http://rossier.usc.edu/alumni/class-notes). To submit updates for consideration for future magazine issues, please email [alumni@rossier.usc.edu](mailto:alumni@rossier.usc.edu).

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

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### 1960s

**JACK NELSON EdD '61** published *Critical Issues in Education* (ninth edition), co-authored with Stuart Palonsky and Mary Rose McCarthy (Waveland Press, 2021).

### 1970s

**STEPHEN RALLS DDS '74, EdD '79** assumed the office of president of the American College of Dentists in September 2019. He earlier served as executive director of the organization for more than 20 years.

**TERI BRADFORD MS '78** retired from her most recent post as senior director of alumni and parent relations at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, Calif., after a long, fulfilling career in higher education and the local nonprofit community. During her 41-year career, Teri also served as the associate dean of students at Westmont College, executive director of Life Network Pregnancy Care Center and executive director of the Youth and Family Services branch of the Channel Islands YMCA. Along with enjoying the benefits of retirement, Teri is grateful to now be serving on the Board of Trustees at Westmont College.

**MARY ANN LILLYWHITE DUMBECK '79, MS '80** retired in June 2018. The last 20 years of her career, Mary Ann was with the Newport-Mesa Unified School District teaching deaf and hard of hearing and learning-handicapped students. She worked with children from third through 12th grade.

### 1980s

**STEVEN PRITZKER MS '82, PhD '97** was co-editor-in-chief of the third edition of *The Encyclopedia of Creativity*, published by Elsevier in May 2020. He founded and was director of the creativity studies master's and doctoral specialization at Saybrook University, where he still teaches. Steven is also past president of Division 10 of the American Psychological Association, where he is a fellow.

### 1990s

**REBECCA SHORE EdD '96** published her fifth book, *Changing to Charters: How and Why School Leaders Convert*, through Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Rebecca is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

**JENNIFER PRINGLE MS '99** earned a master's degree in education from UCLA in June 2020 and serves as an instructional coach in Pasadena Unified School District.

### 2000s

**JEFF MILLER PhD '01** was promoted to chief learning officer and vice president of organizational effectiveness at Cornerstone OnDemand. In this role, he generates and drives global strategy for learning and development; diversity, equity and inclusion; internal communications; performance and succession management; and employee experience. Cornerstone is the world's leading human capital management software company and is headquartered in Santa Monica, Calif.

**GINA MOSES ME '02** joined the No. 3-ranked Virginia Tech online master of information technology program as director. Gina is tasked with developing and expanding the program and academic offerings nationally and internationally to working professionals looking to make career pivots or advancement in their careers. The program will be moving to the Innovation Campus in Alexandria, Va., tied to the new Amazon HQ2 location.

**JOHN PURCELL ME '03, EdD '06** was presented with the Los Angeles Unified School District 2020 Teacher of the Year Award, an honor bestowed upon educators who have established excellence in their school and the school's community. John is a first-grade teacher at 32nd Street USC Performing Arts Magnet School.

**GREG MISIASZEK '96, ME '05** published *Ecopedagogy: Critical Environmental Teaching for Planetary Justice and Global Sustainable Development* with Bloomsbury Press (2020). Ecopedagogy is centered on understanding the struggles of and connections between human acts of environmental and social violence.



#### ↑ TALKING THE TALK

Holdsworth is putting her studies to work as she provides communications support to schools.

Story:  
Kianoosh  
Hashemzadeh

PHOTO COURTESY OF AMANDA HOLDSWORTH

**AMANDA HOLDSWORTH EdD '17** FIRST STEPPED onto a college campus in Windsor, Ontario, when she was just 5 years old. Her mother, pursuing a psychology degree and faced with a lack of child care options when Holdsworth's first snow day came around, had no choice but to bring the kindergartner to class.

Windsor averages more than 50 inches of snowfall a year, so Holdsworth attended class with her mother a few times, an experience she describes as “magical.” She was even, on occasion, a tool for instruction, once brought to the front of the lecture hall during a child psychology course and asked to draw pictures for the class to analyze.

When Holdsworth attended high school, Ontario schools included a grade 13 that prepared students for postsecondary education. Holdsworth already knew she wanted to do something in communications. And she also knew she wanted to see the world.

Her father, a first-generation Canadian, had roots in Eastern Europe, so when she began looking into study abroad programs for her final year of high school, Russia topped her list. However, given the country's economic and political upheaval at that time, Holdsworth settled on New Zealand, enrolling at Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre.

When it came time for college, Holdsworth, an accomplished athlete in tennis and soccer, was recruited by several U.S. universities. She landed at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she played Division I tennis and studied communications management. Holdsworth also continued to see the world, studying abroad in the Czech Republic before enrolling at USC.

Holdsworth's first degree at USC was a master's in strategic public relations from the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, where she served as a graduate assistant for the International Communications Studies program, overseeing a class that travels to London, Paris, Prague and Geneva.

Her 20-year career has spanned K-12 schools and universities. But even as she reached great heights—earning 24 industry awards and speaking at conferences around the world—Holdsworth felt the pull of the classroom.

She knew that in order to take on larger-scale market research projects within schools and districts, she needed the credentials. With a doctorate in education, Holdsworth felt she would be equipped to “talk the talk.”

Already balancing a full-time job with raising two small children, Holdsworth needed flexibility. USC Rossier's online EdD in Organizational Change and Leadership checked all the boxes, and Holdsworth knew what she would be getting at USC: high-quality instruction and the opportunity to expand her network.

While attending USC Rossier, Holdsworth worked at Oakland Schools, an intermediate school district that provides consolidated administrative support and services for 28 districts and 210,000 students in the Detroit area. The district had previously used a large public relations firm to handle its communications. Holdsworth was underwhelmed by its efforts. She soon began to see a trend: PR firms were serving schools without understanding the “ins and outs” of education.

Holdsworth knew education, and she knew communications, so she created Holdsworth Communications in December 2016. The firm provides a host of services, but one of her central goals is to equip schools with easy-to-use tools so they can simply and affordably share their stories even after her contract is over.

Holdsworth Communications has worked with a variety of clients, but Holdsworth has a special interest in career and technical education schools. For Holdsworth, whose father and brother are skilled tradesmen, the mission of these schools—to prepare the next generation of electricians, chefs and mechanics—is especially dear to her heart.

One client, AmTech Career Academy in Amarillo, Texas, will open this fall. Holdsworth's agency is managing all communications aspects of the school's opening, including name selection and creating marketing materials.

The pandemic has created enormous challenges for schools in communicating with students and parents. Holdsworth encourages schools to first consider internal messaging. For example, schools can boost morale and engage external audiences by sharing “behind the scenes” stories of teachers and staff who are keeping the wheels turning.

Holdsworth recalls a photograph she recently saw that showed “a teacher sitting in the middle of her dark classroom, on the computer, with all of the kids on the screen.” The image moved her to tears. It showed an educator who “did not choose this,” but nonetheless was continuing in her pledge to educate students, no matter the means or circumstances. —R

## Three USC Rossier alumni appointed California school district superintendents



**CHERYL HILDRETH EdD '19**  
Superintendent, Washington  
Unified School District



**JULIE OLESNIEWICZ EdD '12**  
Interim Superintendent, Claremont  
Unified School District



**JULIE SYNWARD EdD '10**  
Superintendent, Martinez Unified  
School District

**CAMILLE FILARDO-KRAFT EdD '03** was named commissioner of the Women's National Football Conference.

**JENNIFER GERSON ME '06, EdD '20** began a new role as the director of graduate affairs in the School of Social Sciences at the University of California, Irvine. After working at USC for 16 years and earning her doctorate in educational leadership, Jennifer is excited for her new role.

**ANDREW GREEN '07, MAT '08** and Elizabeth Kuhn '07 welcomed son Anthony Paul Nagem Kuhn-Green on Jan. 30, 2020.

**MATT HORVATH EdD '07** was named assistant superintendent, personnel services, in the Beverly Hills Unified School District.

**KRISTY MCCRAY ME '07** earned tenure and promotion to associate professor of sport management in the Department of Health and Sport Sciences at Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio. Additionally, a journal article that she co-authored was named a finalist for Best Paper of 2019 in the *Sport Management Education Journal*. Kristy was also interviewed and quoted by *USA Today* on sexual violence precautions by the NCAA. Her research area is sexual violence prevention in college athletics.

**PAT PEFFLEY EdD '08** was promoted to deputy director, strategic engagement for the Machine-assisted Analytic Rapid-repository System (MARS) Program at the Defense Intelligence Agency in Washington, D.C. She is accountable for project management and operational effectiveness to facilitate stakeholder engagement in executing the MARS Program. Pat develops a strategic engagement and communications plan; oversees a technically diverse team of military, civilian and contract personnel; and champions MARS capabilities and capacity across the intelligence community.

**PATRICIA DICKENSON EdD '09** created a book, *The Virtual Classroom: Creating Distance Learning Experience*, for teachers to develop remote teaching practices in mathematics instruction in response to educators worldwide working remotely this school year.

**SUE KAISER EdD '09** is happy to announce the birth of grandson Calihan Dax Kaiser (a future Trojan) on May 20, 2020.

**EDWARD TRIMIS EdD '09** was featured in the Association of California School Administrators

EdCal newsletter in August. Edward is the principal at Legacy Visual and Performing Arts High School (VAPA) in South Gate, Calif., and an adjunct professor with USC Rossier. VAPA has improved in leaps and bounds in the four-plus years he has been principal, including major improvements in academics, arts and athletics.

### 2010s

**GUS FRIAS EdD '10** received the InfraGard National Members Alliance's (INMA) 2020 National Award for Public/Private Partnerships, acknowledging his leadership in helping to ensure the health, safety and success of students and staff in K-12 schools. INMA is a partnership between the FBI and the public and private sectors.

**TRAMMELL JONES ME '10** created Guided Frequency LLC, with the mission to bring awareness to the long-term physical and mental health benefits of incorporating consistent yoga, meditation and other holistic wellness practices into a person's lifestyle. Guided Frequency facilitates conversations and fosters meaningful experiences, online and offline, that create access and inspire elevated interactions with the self and the surrounding community.

**JASON PAPPAS EdD '10** received the 2019-2020 undergraduate teaching award at Florida State University. He is an associate teaching professor with Florida State University's College of Education in the Department of Sport Management. Jason also serves as director of the sport management internship program.

**ELISABETH SUMMERS (LANGE) MAT '10** earned her EdD from Concordia University in December 2018.

**CHRISTINE GERCHOW MAT '11** was named director of UC Berkeley's Academic Talent Development Program (ATDP). For almost four decades, ATDP has invited excelling students from the Bay Area and around the world into a unique academic community to pursue their academic passions through rigorous summer coursework. As director, Christine will create and supervise programs; devise budgets; supervise, hire and train staff; monitor the effectiveness and results of programs and plan adjustments; ensure compliance with accrediting bodies; and maintain strong relationships with university officials.

**JAME'L HODGES EdD '11** was appointed vice president for student success and engagement at Edward Waters College in Jacksonville, Fla.

**WENLI JEN EdD '11** was named one of 13 faculty advising fellows at California State University, Dominguez Hills. She will represent the Health Sciences Department in the College of Health, Human Services and Nursing. The Faculty Advising Fellows Program is designed to improve advising on campus and student retention by increasing university faculty involvement in the advisement of freshmen, sophomores and transfer students.

**KRISTINA RIGDEN MAT '11, EdD '17** was selected as one of 24 fellows in the second cohort of the IAspire Leadership Academy, a program aimed at helping STEM faculty and administrators from underrepresented backgrounds ascend to leadership roles at colleges and universities. The academy is one pillar of the diversity and inclusion work underway through the Aspire Alliance. The National Science Foundation-backed alliance is working across postsecondary institutions to develop more inclusive institutional cultures supporting the access and success of all undergraduate STEM students, especially those from underrepresented groups.

**MARUTH FIGUEROA EdD '12** was appointed assistant vice chancellor, student retention and success, at the University of California, San Diego. Maruth provides leadership to the Chancellor's Associates Scholars Program, the Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services, Undocumented Student Services, the Student Success Coaching Program, the Student Veterans Resource Center, Academic Enrichment Programs, and Transfer Student Success.

**MATTHEW JELICK MAT '12** was promoted to assistant director of the Center for Language Education at Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen, China, where he has worked for the past four years. In addition, he won the university's Administrative Service Award, for which he was asked to give a speech to university governance on Teacher's Day, highlighting the importance of "Education Outside the Classroom." In his spare time, Matthew enjoys seeking out Mexican restaurants in China, none of which compares to that guy selling tacos from the back of his van outside the Staples Center.

**JONATHAN MATHIS PhD '12** and **CARLOS GALAN ME '18** are among the authors celebrating the forthcoming release of *Cultivating Key Capabilities Through Volunteer Service: Preparing Youth for the Future of Work*. This publication celebrates the 25th anniversary and legacy of the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards Program, while gaining critical insights on the outcomes of volunteer service among program alumni.

**DANIEL DIAZ EdD '13** wrote an op-ed, "Tips on Remote Learning for Panicked Parents," that was published in the *Los Angeles Times* on Aug. 11, 2020.

**JANNETTE FLORES EdD '13** was elected vice chair of Association of American Colleges & Universities Liberal Education and America's Promise Texas.

**ASHLEY MITCHELL MAT '13** earned her EdD in K-12 educational leadership and policy from Vanderbilt University in May 2019.

**MARCO NAVA EdD '13** published a book chapter co-authored with Imelda Nava, "Partnerships in Practice: Developing a Positive School Culture Toward Title 1 School Success." The chapter is part of *Creating School Partnerships that Work* (Kochan & Griggs, 2020). The chapter demonstrates how two Title 1 urban elementary schools with decreased funding and high numbers of English learners developed academic success in multiple school performance indicators through implementing a multifaceted approach.

**MIRIAM OTERO MAT '13** joined the faculty as a middle school history teacher at Kent Place School in Summit, N.J.

**L.G. MICHAEL BROWN MAT '14, EdD '17** was hired in August as the director, institutional advancement engagement services, at the University of Maryland Global Campus. He is responsible for the overall strategy, implementation, administration, reporting and delivery of all institutional advancement programming and activities that engage students and graduates for career advancement and advocacy, as well as developing and sustaining collaborative relationships and partnerships with internal and external stakeholders.

**MICHAEL GOTTO EdD '14** was promoted to assistant superintendent, human resources, in the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District.

## SARAH PEYRE MS '05, EdD '08 NAMED DEAN OF UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER'S WARNER SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



**SARAH PEYRE MS '05, EdD '08**, associate dean for innovative education at the University of Rochester Medical Center and executive director of its Institute for Innovative Education, has been appointed dean of the Warner School of Education and Human Development at the University of Rochester.

The Warner School dean is a senior academic leader at the university who shapes the vision and objectives for the school, generates resources in support of those priorities, and effectively manages its operations. The dean develops the school's strategic plan, ensuring its financial sustainability, building community both within and beyond the school, fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, and maximizing its impact on the fields of education and human development. —R



## MICHÈLE TURNER '81, EdD '14 TO LEAD NEW USC EFFORT TO STRENGTHEN TIES TO LOCAL DIVERSE BUSINESS

### USC'S NEW OFFICE OF BUSINESS

Diversity and Economic Opportunity will be led by Michèle Turner '81, EdD '14, who was named associate vice president of the effort. The office will be tasked with building partnerships with area businesses owned by minorities, women and veterans. Part of the university's civic engagement and economic partnerships team, the effort aims to further USC's broader strategy for equity, diversity and inclusion.

Turner is a graduate of USC Rossier's Global EdD program and was previously the executive director of the USC Black Alumni Association. Turner cites both education and business as essential tools for social equity. "Business ownership is a way to generate wealth for diverse families," Turner says. "That's a primary goal, and it's tied to social justice. To get there, you've got to take down institutional barriers that can keep those small businesses from competing." —R

**ARNOLD LAANUI EdD '14** is the director of extensions at Waipahu High School in Hawai'i and leads initiatives to bridge campus scholarship with the needs of an evolving economy and workforce. After 25 years in federal law enforcement, Arnold left a career with the FBI to answer a new call to service. Today, he works at a progressive high school where he designs curricula, coaches teachers, connects industry to scholarship and inspires a new generation of civic-minded leaders.

**OSCAR MACIAS EdD '14** was published in the Association of California School Administrators' *Leadership Magazine*. His article is titled "Social Emotional Competence, Emotional Intelligence and the Prosocial School Leader: How the Pandemic, School Closures and Distance Learning Can Guide Leaders."

**VERONICA OBREGON MSW '01, EdD '14** published the book *The Telemental Health Workbook: 30+ Youth Friendly Activities for Mental Health Professionals*. Veronica partnered with co-author Flor Chaidez, a fellow Latina social worker working in urban areas of Los Angeles. Their goal was to create tools that support mental health providers working in BIPOC communities. The workbook provides research, activities and tools that support the use of online mental health services.

**ANACANY TORRES ME '14** co-founded Project RISE on her community college campus in 2018 to serve formerly incarcerated students. She recently earned her EdD from California State University, Long Beach, conducted research on support services for formerly incarcerated community college students and contributed as a co-author to academic briefs with pending publications.

**MICHELLE WOODY EdD '14** was granted tenure and promoted to associate professor in the Counseling Department at Dallas Theological Seminary's Washington, D.C., campus in July 2020.

**MARCO SANCHEZ EdD '15** was promoted to director of secondary education, research and evaluation with the Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District (NLMUSD). He has been with NLMUSD for two years and previously served the Pomona Unified School District for 15 years as a high school math teacher, assistant principal and principal.

**VICHAYA VANNASIN MAT '15** returned to Thailand after graduation and worked as an English language instructor, curriculum developer, U.N. Language Proficiency Examination facilitator and coordinator at the U.N. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Learning Centre for four years. She was entrusted to develop and facilitate training that enhances language proficiency of U.N. staff members to further their career development and multilingualism. In February 2020, she joined the U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime, overseeing the training academies and core curricula for the border management program staff.

**ELIZABETH BECKER ME '16** is a first-year student at Loyola University Chicago School of Law pursuing her passion in higher education law.

**MARCO QUEVEDO MAT '16** earned his master's degree in educational psychology and educational specialist degree in school psychology from Azusa Pacific University in May 2019.

**TIMOTHY FRETWELL MS '17, EdD '20** was selected for promotion to lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps and moved to Okinawa, Japan, where he will serve as a deputy assistant chief of staff for logistics.

**CHRISTOPHER RIDDICK EdD '17** is an associate, organizational transformation at Booz Allen Hamilton in Washington, D.C. Christopher and his wife, Lauren, are also happy to announce the birth of daughter Zoe Kellan on July 21, 2020.

**DALILA TAHIROVIC ME '17** founded Academy of Excellence, a learning center based in La Jolla, Calif., that supports students' preparation for life beyond high school. Dalila also founded the Institute for Teacher Excellence, a mentorship program for teachers who are already credentialed but looking to improve their educational philosophy with methods from both Waldorf and Montessori philosophy.

**JOSEPH CORTEZ EdD '18** was named to lead the International Association of Chiefs of Police Research Advisory Committee (RAC). The mission of 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.

**THEO FOWLES EdD '18** founded Stay Motivated and Rise Together Enterprises in February 2020. The firm builds community and offers professional development via podcasts, workshops and consulting services. The first initiative to launch is *The Black Social Capital* podcast, a biweekly show focused on successful Black professionals discussing issues affecting Black students, staff and faculty on college campuses and in other professional arenas.

**TERRI HORTON EdD '18** was selected to be a strategic consultant for the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy, Obama Foundation Scholars Program.

**ALBERTO PIMENTEL EdD '18** completed his first year as a full-time, tenure-track sociology professor at Los Angeles Harbor College. Alberto also serves on the academic senate, the curriculum committee and several scholarship committees. In mid-June, he was appointed co-coordinator of distance education for the college.

**MIGUEL SOLIS EdD '18** is head of school at Maui Preparatory Academy in Lahaina, Hawai'i.

**DIONTREY THOMPSON EdD '18** is head of diversity and inclusion business partners at Genentech in South San Francisco, Calif. Diontre

was selected after an extensive candidate search due to his deep diversity and inclusion background, his team-orientation, collaborative partnerships and his strategic acumen across many dimensions of the business. Diontre was one of two recipients of the USC Rossier Second Century Award in August 2019.

**CARLY COOPER EdD '19** was appointed an adjunct professor at USC Bovard College.

**CAMILLE EDWARDS ME '19** is an apprentice at *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* in New York City.

**AERIAL ELLIS EdD '19** was named to the 2020 Board of Directors for the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the nation's leading professional organization serving the communications community. She has also been appointed as a board representative to the PRSA Foundation Board of Directors, and as a co-chair for the Champions for PRSSA, the organization's student section.

### 2020S

**PAUL BRUNO PhD '20** is an assistant professor of education policy, organization and leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**CECILIA JEREZ MAT '20** is a bilingual teacher at EDS My Classroom in Venice, Calif. She prepares lesson plans in core subject areas (English, math and science) and the Spanish curriculum.

**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, Calif. She is responsible for leading the academic skills, support and academic advising programs for all medical students.

**MCKENNA KLEINMAIER MAT '20**, a biology teacher at Alexander Hamilton High School in Los Angeles, was chosen by the Knowles Teacher Initiative as a member of its 2020 Cohort of Teaching Fellows (p. 16).

**MEGAN ROBBINS MAT '20** is a special education teacher at Willamette Connections Academy in Scio, Ore.

**JENNIFER QUEZADA EdD '20** was elected to the Fontana Unified School District Board of Education.

**MALYSSA VIZCARRA MAT '20** is a special education science and history teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

## I N M E M O R I A M

**BRANDON KIYOSHI ABO MAT '20** passed away unexpectedly on Sept. 19, 2020 while surfing in Huntington Beach, Calif., at the age of 46. Brandon received his MAT from USC Rossier and taught at Los Angeles Academy of Arts and Enterprise. Brandon was born on July 11, 1974, in Los Angeles to Luke and Margaret Abo. An educator and fitness enthusiast, Brandon loved teaching, surfing, CrossFit, volunteering, and spending time with family and friends. Brandon is survived by his son, Solomon Walton; sister, Janna (Alan) George; niece and nephew, Kamala and Luke George; grandmother, Hatsumi Morita; and countless loving uncles, aunts, cousins and friends. He was preceded in death by his parents; paternal grandparents, George and Miyo Abo; and maternal grandfather, Tom Morita. Condolences may be sent to P.O. Box 7232, Huntington Beach, CA 92615.

**LESLIE EUGENE WILBUR PhD '62**, professor emeritus of higher education, died in Honolulu, Hawai'i, on Feb. 9, 2020 at the age of 97. He earned his PhD in higher education at USC Rossier and became the founding president of Barstow College. He joined the USC Rossier faculty in 1965 as a professor of higher and postsecondary education. Born in Modesto, Calif., in 1924, Leslie grew up in a working-class family. He served as a sergeant in the U.S. Army and attended the University of Illinois on the GI Bill, graduating in 1948. He completed a master's degree in English at UC Berkeley in 1951 and began his teaching career at Bakersfield College as an English instructor, later assuming the role of associate dean. Leslie was a force of living kindness who enjoyed a beautiful, impactful life and was admired by many. Together with his wife, Norma June Lash Wilbur, and close friends, Wilbur leaves behind a lasting legacy at USC. In 1978, he co-founded the annual Pullias Lecture, dedicated to the memory of his friend and mentor, Earl V. Pullias. In addition, with Evelyn Kieffer, Leslie established the Wilbur-Kieffer Professorship of Higher Education and Postsecondary Education, currently held by Adrianna Kezar. He is predeceased by his wife of 47 years, Norma Wilbur, and survived by his daughter, Lesley (BA '73), son, Stuart (BA '86), grandchildren Sydney Wilbur Fernandez (BA '03) and Scott Wilbur (PhD '17), three great-grandchildren, and many nieces and nephews. Donations to the Pullias Lecture are appreciated.



## Declining Budgets Leave College Advising Services Underfunded

As enrollment drops in underserved districts, schools are left with difficult choices

**SCHOOL DISTRICTS ACROSS** the nation have faced incredible strain on their budgets as they've dealt with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Oftentimes, it is the positions like school counselors that get cut in times of financial stress, and with California schools already lagging behind the nation with a student-to-counselor ratio of 620-to-1, the stakes are high. Nationally, schools aren't faring much better—student-to-counselor ratios hover around 482-to-1, leaving many students with just 20 minutes a year with a college counselor.

The USC College Advising Corps

(CAC) is meant to help schools fill this gap by placing recent college graduates in high schools to serve as near-peer, full-time college advisers for two years. The USC Center for Enrollment Research, Policy and Practice (CERPP), which runs the CAC, strives to diversify its funding for the program, including support from school districts, schools, and private and corporate foundations. These philanthropic investors include the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation, the California Community Foundation, the Bank of America Charitable Gift Fund and

the CTBC Bank Corporation. School districts and the CAC, kick in the rest.

With many of the schools the CAC serves in urban areas experiencing declining enrollment, the pandemic has only exacerbated this decline by fueling a greater exodus from cities into the suburbs. This has resulted in a decline in funding for the schools. Several are facing shortfalls this year and are unable to meet their match to fund an adviser. The Compton Unified School District, which has been hit particularly hard by the pandemic-induced budgetary concerns, does not have a CAC adviser working with its student population this year. "That is a very high-need district that we should be serving, and that we could be serving if we didn't have any budgetary concerns," says Emily Chung EDD '15, associate director of CERPP.

The impact the CAC has had on the schools it serves has been impressive to say the least. Over the 2018-19 school year, CAC advisers held nearly 46,000 one-on-one meetings with over 10,600 students. These meetings have led to remarkable and measurable results. Over 11,100 (68 percent of all) seniors submitted at least one college application; over 10,450 students submitted the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); and over 10,000 students were accepted into at least one college.

The CAC has continued to operate during the pandemic, shifting meetings to Zoom, but with FAFSA fillings down for this year and a 22 percent drop in college enrollment last fall (see p. 36 for more on how the pandemic has affected college admissions), the work of the CAC is especially vital. Despite the challenging circumstances, three of the schools the CAC serves, Mark Keppel High and San Gabriel High in the Alhambra Unified School District and Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High in the Los Angeles Unified School District, currently rank in the top 10 of the statewide leaderboard for schools of their size for FAFSA and California Dream Act completion rates. —R

↑ **GUIDING THE WAY**

Karina Valdez, adviser at Lakewood High School in Long Beach Unified School District, addresses a group of high school seniors.

Students who meet with a USC CAC adviser are 18% more likely to apply to college, 19% more likely to apply for financial aid, 20% more likely to apply for a scholarship, and 6% more likely to be accepted to college



College adviser Guadalupe Martinez serves Alhambra High School in the Alhambra Unified School District.

Photo by Jenny Lynn / Steady Jenny Photography

PHOTO BY JENNY LYNN / STEADY JENNY PHOTOGRAPHY



**OUTDOOR LEARNING**

Plants are started in the raised beds of the garden at Oak Hills Elementary School in Oak Park, California. Read more in “The Pandemic Forced Us Outside, and Oak Park Unified Shows How Schools Can Benefit,” p. 20. Photo by April Wong / [aprilwongphotography.com](http://aprilwongphotography.com/) / @aprilwong

