In Conversation
Shaun R. Harper on his AERA presidency P. 26

Gamifying the Virtual Classroom
Digital tools increase engagement, but can we ensure access to them? P. 28

Opinion
Pedro A. Noguera on disruption as an opportunity for change P. 42

Scientific Intuition Exists in All Children
But can we keep them engaged as they grow up? P. 14

Looking Back on a Year Unlike Any Other
Alumni share their experiences and hopes for the future P. 8

A New Vision for Schools
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 A. Noguera, PhD
Distinguished Professor of Education
Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean
USC Rossier School of Education
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

FEATURING

Scientific Intuition Exists in All Children
But how can STEM instruction tap into this natural curiosity as kids grow up?
By Athanamie Gammon

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
By Kianoosh Hashemzadeh

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?

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
By Elaine Woo

DEPARTMENTS

Dean’s Byline
Editor’s Note
Rossier News
Tips for Educators
In Conversation
Rossier Supporters

1 In Conversation
2 Opinion
4 Rossier News
13 Bookshelf
26 Alumni News
52 Rossier Supporters
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.

The 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.

To view the webinars, please visit roe.in/newvision.
Three philanthropists with backgrounds in social justice and activism join Board of Councilors

By Rose Brenneman

GREGORY FRANKLIN ‘83, EdD ’97 Inducted into DSAG Hall of Fame; four EdD students awarded scholarships

By Kianoush 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 Ana, 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 Joint 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 Gibbons 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.

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 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 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.

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 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.

SHAMYA 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.

Ulham is also a frequent speaker on impact investing, being presented or lectured at the Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment, the United Nations, Columbia University, USC, UCLA, UC San Diego and the Ebull 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 Arka-tov 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 allattacks.org/a-trusted-space/.

USC ROSSIER HAS ADDED THREE members to its Board of Councilors (BOC).

Kenya Barris, Melanie Lundquist and Shamyia Ullah have agreed to serve a three-year term on the board, playing a significant role in program development and carrying out numerous critical functions on behalf of the school and university.

“I am honored and grateful to welcome three outstanding individuals to the USC Rossier Board of Councilors,” USC Rossier Dean Pedro A. Noguera said. “Kenya, Melanie and Shamyia share the passion and the concerns, but also the great new energy and optimism, that all of us feel about education right now. ... Society is in a unique moment. Postelection and post-pandemic, we must imagine a better way of engaging all students in learning and supporting their success.” — R

USC ROSSIER NEWS

KERRY L. ROBBINS is a former headmaster of St. John’s Cambridge, headmaster emeritus of St. John’s School and St. John’s School in the Desert and former president of the Southern California Council of Independent Schools. E-mail: kerry.robbins@uscr.io

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Leaders in Education Reflect on a Year of Upheaval

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

VIVIAN EXCHIAN 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, Hampshire 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 disensfranchised 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 underserved 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 had known how politicalized 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 these 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.

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 districts 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.

PAKER: 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.

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

PARKER: I told our team our 1:1 launch was here! We quickly activated hot spots, Wi-Fi partner ships, Chromebook and iPad distributions, quick student access to courses and programs through digital platforms. As a result, our students are accessing education 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 who were forced to reach students in unique ways and to engage within our supportive 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 has magnified the importance of school districts have districts 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 their critical needs, we had to learn to adapt, as the inequity of funding 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 meaningful opportunities and all the supports they require in order to be the best version of themselves.

PAKER: 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 access to learning for those who might not have been able to otherwise access our campus and our educational experiences.

EXCHIAN: Even after students return to more traditional instruction, our district will continue to offer a full-time virtual high school for students who thrive 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 and campus leadership and support services with our students.

FUENTES: We 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 partners, 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 roe.in/educationleaders.
"In my mind, the significance of the election—William Tierney—Julie Marsh
A successful future, however, rests on a clear education in discerning and speaking the truth—WILLIAM TIERNEY
—JULIE MARSH

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 most underserved areas of education.”—Pedro A. Noguera, USC Rossier Dean

I am told, 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

Kia Hill didn’t know it at the time, but she has been preparing for her career in instructional design since she was a homeschooled 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-savy 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-rude 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 noti- cing 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 educa- tion, 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. "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 gener- ates 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 orga- nizations 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 unprece- dented times.”—R

By Brian Suska

USC Rossier and LAUSD announce teacher-preparation residency

By Elaine Woo

MEDICAL SCHOOLING
How this USC Rossier LDT student is improving continuing education for health care professionals
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 $86,000, 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 an Educational Research Association’s School Turnaround Investigator Award from the American Education Association in 2021: Continued Evidence from the Understanding America Study.

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 Savaidera (principal investigator) were awarded a grant for $191,141 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.”

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 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 if those been Black people? I know the answer—so, too, do most other outraged White Americans. Their killers would have been dubbed heroes. Their reactions to racial commentary about the multifarious nature of White privilege. People of color cannot take over a federal building largely without consequence. A mob of White protestors 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 know 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.
But how can STEM instruction tap into this natural curiosity as kids grow up?

Story: Katharine Gammon
Illustration: Chris Gash
**FEATURE**

**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?

“I tell them we 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 Hasian’s recent research focus involves looking at the cross section of family, teacher and student engagement in the experiential learning of mathematics. Hasian, 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.

“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.”

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 differ on topic, we can't be 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 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 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.”

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 Shadqah Ahmed, 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. Sunaal 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 two 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 studied 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 Gail Sinatra, the Stephen H. Crocker Professor of Education. It’s to have a future architect think scientifically and critically 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. —

**INCREASING ACCESS TO STEM**

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

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.

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
Garden

Gratitude

California, in particular, with its mild climate and abundant sunshine, is an especially good place for school gardens to pop up in schoolyards across the United States. 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, crossing the landscape nestled between the canyons of Malibu and Pala 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 Caruso, 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 classroom features 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—walking. “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 six century as tuberculosis-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 pandemic, and new data suggests that these rates have increased over the past year. A study published late last year involved children with adverse experiences 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 Immendorf—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 79 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 climates though Knight points the reluctance 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 tackle a day 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 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 2001, and the garden program has expanded ever since. The district employs a garden specialist tasked with overseeing the greenhouse and developing curricula around the district’s annual gardening plans. Sandies 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.
“I’m really environmentally conscious now, and most of what stems from the work at Oak Park.”

—Sam Hirsch, former Oak Park Unified student

The district’s efforts haven’t gone unnoticed, and its recent accolades. In 2019, the district was the first school district in the nation to install classrooms constructed from single-use shipping containers. The district’s weeklong outdoor education program in Malibu Canyon and the generous dimensions of the classroom. The campus gardens are functional—they reduce the school’s food costs—and the shipping-container classrooms cost that has saved the district more than $500,000 each year. The campus gardens are a model. With some form of the coronavirus likely to be around for months to come into [students’] daily school routine,” Danks says. Looking forward to 2021, Danks and the like will come in handy as social distancing measures continue for some time. With some form of the coronavirus likely to be around for months to come, the district is prepared to 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 a model. With some form of the coronavirus likely to be around for months to come.

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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 rising 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 Underrepresented 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 a 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 decided bipartisanship. 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 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 credible 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 for me 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 most things. Black people in my community, including my family, 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.

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
NOW THAT COVID-19 HAS KEPT Kenedy Quidt 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 engagement,” 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 1990s to the early 2000s 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.

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—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

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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 roe.in/virtualclassroom for links to these and other resources.

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

Closing The Digital Divide

RESOURCES for the Virtual Classroom

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“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 1,247 LAUSD families, the study, “When Schools Come 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. 3).

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 pm, 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 break-out rooms that allow them to interact with each other in small groups. This motivates him to participate, Gary explains. While mediating teaching may bear some of the blame for low student engagement, caregivers likely play a role as well. The “When Schools Come 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 Schools Come 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.”

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
IN CONVERSATION

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 9th and 10th grade, and I was their advisor 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. Jennifer 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, 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 curriculums, we found that current practices are all about memorization. There is a gap between students and their need to actually engage students in 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 Latino 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.

“...”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.”

For an expanded version of this interview, please visit RSOE.in/Lyons-Moore.

IN CONVERSATION
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.

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.
enrollments of low-income students, as defined by the federal Title I program; by comparison, FAFSA submissions have dropped 2.4 percent at non-Title I schools, according to the nonprofit National College Attainment Network (NCAN). NCAN found a steeper decline, of nearly 15 percent overall compared with the previous year, according to the widely used Common Application.

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 4 percent rise over last year and a 7 percent increase over the previous high in 2019–20, USC spokesman Ross McAvoy 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 Orozata Bierenre, Cornell University’s 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,” Bierenre said, and may have contributed to a significant rise in applications to Cornell from historically underrepresented 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.

“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 advisors 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,” Azurmanian 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. 32.
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 differing criteria and processes when making admissions decisions. “I think that this year of all years, [applicants] should take personal context into account when assessing applicants from disadvantaged communities,” Hossler said.

“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.”

“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.”

“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 reviews, process, as it was before the pandemic’s disruptions. Essays may also receive greater scrutiny.

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“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.”

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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 extract from this crisis. I’ve thought there must be some deeper meaning that we could grasp about whether we can use this disruption as an opportunity for change, an opportunity 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 been daunting, our environment was deteriorating rapidly. Is it possible that hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our 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 endless pressure to improve teaching and learning across America’s 13,000 school districts.

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, interns and excellent after-school and preschool programs are widely available. Most of all, we need a vision and plan for creating schools capable of solving the problems that eat away at our quality of life, and if we allow ourselves to imagine and act on possibilities for change, there’s no reason why returning to a par status quo must be inevitable.

Throughout this pandemic, I’ve thought there must be some deeper meaning that we could grasp about whether we can use this disruption as an opportunity for change, an opportunity to use this moment to forge a path that is more sustainable, equitable and beneficial for all of us.

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Pedro A. Noguera
May 2021 / Harvard Education Press

Beyond Standards: The Fragmentation of Education Governance and the Promise of Curriculum Reform
by MORGAN POLKOFF (associate professor of education at USC Rossier)
May 2021 / Harvard Education Press

Polkoff 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.
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 Krueger

Sobrealeiente, 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, Efren 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 Efren 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 Tuscalosa 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.”

Janet Boldt Sáenz was born in 1937 to 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 consular service commonly worked in Passadena. He later opened a Danish import business and a travel agency.

Sáenz always knew she wanted to be a 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.

“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 33rd 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 immi grants, 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 1976, 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 1979 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 Nahualt 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, I did.

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

“The BOTTOM LINE FOR SÁENZ IS THIS: “Hidden gifted [child]ren 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
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ALUMNI NEWS

1960s


1970s

STEPHEN RALLS DDS ’74, EDD ’79 assumed the office of the 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 ’79 retired from her most recent post as senior director of alumni and parent relations at Westmont College, 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 FRITZKER MS ’82, PHD ’87 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


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 Moni ca, Calif.

GINA MOSES MS ’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 MS ’03, EDD ’06 was present ed 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 MISIAZEK ’96, ME ’03 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.

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 34 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 with school 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 310,000 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 Amariello, Texas, opened 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 recalled 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.

Helping schools share their stories

TALKING THE TALK

Holdsworth is getting her students to work on the school’s communications support to schools.

ALUMNI NEWS

SPRING / SUMMER 2021 47
CAMILLE FILARDO-DRAFTED "KRAFT EDD '01" was named commissioner of the Women's National Football Conference.

JENNIFER GERSON ME '06, EDD '20 began a new role as 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 Kuhn-Green on Jan. 30, 2020.

MATT HORVATH EDD '01 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 FLEELY 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 KAIER 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 FRASER EDD '10 received thefavicon National Members Alliance's (fNMA) 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. fNMA is a partnership between the fNMA and the public and private sectors.

TRAMMEL JONES ME '10 created Guided Fre- quency 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; develop 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.

JAMEL 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 17 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 advising of freshmen, sophomores and transfer students.

KRISTINA RIDDEN MAT '16, EDD '17 was selected as one of 12 fellows in the second cohort of the iKapership Leadership Academy, a program aimed at helping STEM faculty and administrators from under-represented backgrounds access 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-funded 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.

MARTH 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 JELLICK 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 gay-tasting 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.


JANNETTE FLORES EDD '13 was elected vice chair of the National Society for Association of College Alums & 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 Melisa Nova, “Partnerships in Practice: Developing a Positive School Culture Toward Title I School Success.” The chapter is part of Creating School Partnerships that Work (Kochan & Grigo, 2020). The chapter demonstrates how two Title I urban elementary schools with decreased funding and high numbers of English learners developed academic success in multiple school performance indicators through implementing a multi-faceted 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 GOTTI 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
BUSINESS TO LOCAL DIVERSE TO STRENGTHEN TIES

MICHÈLE TURNER ’81, can keep those small businesses from cites both education and business social justice. To get there, you’ve got previously the executive director of the president of the effort. The office will USC’S NEW OFFICE OF with area businesses owned by minor the university’s civic engagement and ities, women and v —

VERONICA OREGON NW ’01, EdD ’14 published the book. The Telemental Health Work- book, 10- Youth Friendly Activities for Mental Health Professionals. Veronica partnered with co-author Flor Chiaide, a fellow Latina social worker working in urban areas of Los Angeles. Their goal was to create tools that support men- tal health providers working in BPOC communi- ties. 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 newly 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 Coun- seling Department at Dallas Theological Semi- nary’s Washington, D.C., campus in July 2020.

CHRISTOPHER RIDDICK EdD ’17 is an associ- ate, organizational transformation at Boise Allen Hamiton in Washington. Christopher and his wife, Laura, are also happy to announce the birth of daughter Zoe Kellen on July 21, 2020.

DALLAA TAHIROVICH ME ’17 founded Acada- me of Excellence, a learning center based in La Jolla, Calif., that supports students’ prepa- ration for life beyond high school. Dallaa also founded the Institute for Teacher Excellence, a mentorship program for teachers who are already credentialed but looking to improve their educational philosophy and practice from both Waldorf and Montessori philosophy.

JOSEPH CORTEZ EdD ’18 was named to lead the International Association of Chiefs of Police Re- search Advisory Committee (IACP). The mission of IACP 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 organization is comprised of professional and financial 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 professional arenas.

TERRI HORTON EdD ’18 was selected to be a strategic consultant for the University of Chica- go Harris School of Public Policy, Obama Foun- dation Scholars Program.

ALBERTO PIMENTEL EdD ’18 completed his first as a full-time, tenure-track socio- logic professor at Los Angeles Harbor College. Alberto also serves on the academic senate, curriculum committee and several scholarship commis- sions, in mid-September, he was appointed co-ordinator 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 Go- néntech in South San Francisco, Calif. Diontrey 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. Diontrey 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 Lotto Show with Stephen Colbert in New York City.

AERIAL ELIIS 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 PRSA, the organization’s student section.

DIANE WRIGHT EdD ’19 is an assistant professor of education policy, organization and leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

CELCIA JEREZ ME ’20 is a bilingual teach- er at EDS My Classroom in Venice, Calif. She prepares lesson plans in core subject areas (English, math and science) and the Spanish curriculum.

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 Michèlle 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 minor- ities, 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.” —

BRANDON KIYOSHI ABO ME ’20 passed away unexpectedly on Sept. 19, 2020 while surfing in Huntington Beach, Calif., at the age of 46. Brandon received his master’s degree in educational psychology and worked in K-12 education before co-founding Project RISE in Las Vegas, was elected to the Leadership Board of Directors, and as a co-chair the PRSA Foundation Board of Directors, and as a co-chair for the Champions for PRSA, the organization’s student section.

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ALBERTO PIN”...
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. Often times, 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 filings 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.

TO SUPPORT THE USC COLLEGE ADVISING CORPS PLEASE VISIT RSOE.IN/CAC.
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 / @aprilwong