

HARVARD



GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF EDUCATION



2021

DEAN'S EDUCATION FELLOWS



## DEAN'S LETTER



Fall 2021

Dear Friends,

When the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic caused our educational system to immediately pivot, HGSE worked hard not only to adapt our own teaching and operations but also to respond to the urgent needs of educators and families around the world. The pandemic exposed persistent inequities while also causing unprecedented threats to access and basic needs for students everywhere. Among the many things HGSE did during that time, the launch of the Dean's Education Fellows Program in 2020 is especially significant. Matching our talented graduates with the immediate needs of school districts around the country was an elegant solution to an urgent problem.

We ran the program in 2021 as well, and I'm proud to say that during the first two years of the program, the Dean's Education Fellows have impacted thousands of learners, working alongside educators and leaders to address the most pressing challenges districts faced related to the pandemic and the many repercussions it has had on schools, students, families, and communities. Thanks to generous donors, partners, and friends, we were able to match fellows by skill and interest with schools and districts across the country, from Boston and Cambridge to Chicago, San Antonio, Los Angeles, New York, Atlanta, and more. From aiding the districts in reopening planning and curriculum design to teacher professionalization and family engagement, these recent graduates applied what they learned at HGSE — in places where their help was needed most.

In the following pages, you will meet these graduates and read, in their own words, how their work made an impact on districts around the country — as well as on the fellows themselves — as they helped to prepare for an unpredictable and unprecedented school year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bridget Terry Long". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "L" at the end.

Bridget Terry Long  
Dean  
Saris Professor of Education and Economics  
Harvard Graduate School of Education



**DIANA ACOSTA**  
BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The fellowship has allowed me to grow both as a professional and person. I am in awe at the amazing work that the family engagement team in Baltimore City Schools is leading. It has reminded me that community

and family engagement work is truly about people, from within the district to outside. Transformative change in education and beyond requires people to be vulnerable, open, and willing to think outside of traditional methods to stand for the values our communities hold. In fact, the fellowship further solidified for me that both learning and unlearning are crucial to effectively and thoughtfully advocate for lasting change. It was amazing to have been part of a team this summer that included parents, community members, and Baltimore-raised staff members who worked intentionally to be in touch with families and advocate with them as they worked with schools and the district.



**CLARIBEL AGUILAR WHYTE**  
CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS (CPS) -  
VIRTUAL ACADEMY

I believe being a Dean's Education Fellow impacts the education field in many ways. To me, fellows are excited, motivated, and ready. This type of enthusiasm leads to powerful

collaboration. In my case, I worked with CPS to launch their first preK–12 remote school. This project was exciting to me because I was able to leverage what I learned at HGSE about systems thinking, design thinking, and equity. Using these skills I was able to help launch the Virtual Academy. Although the school was created in response to COVID-19, CPS is working to make remote learning an option available to all students. Very quickly I realized that being a part of this fellowship makes my voice extremely valuable. I was able to share my thoughts about diversity and equity and feel heard. In addition to the impact the fellowship makes in the field, I learned that my background experiences as an educator and woman of color were also an important piece of why I was successful in the fellowship.

“Very quickly I realized that being a part of this fellowship makes my voice extremely valuable. I was able to share my thoughts about diversity and equity and feel heard.” — CLARIBEL AGUILAR WHYTE



**LEAH ANYANWU**  
BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS (BPS)

My experience as a Dean's Education Fellow deepened my understanding of how districts operate while deepening my empathy for district leadership. It is easy to blame leadership

for shortcomings, but systems are complex and demonstrable progress happens gradually. My work on the racial equity planning tool should help BPS to ensure that every student within the district has what they need to be successful. Equity work requires sustained commitment to realize change. I hope that my contribution will strengthen the district's efforts to achieve equity and, ultimately, improve educational outcomes for the most marginalized students.



**SILVESTRE ARCOS**  
PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

This unique opportunity to work with leaders undertaking monumental projects in a difficult and uncertain time has surpassed my expectations. School districts across the

world are finding creative alternatives to create high-quality learning designs while making sure that communities stay safe and healthy. Through the fellowship I have been able to apply lessons from my time at HGSE as well as my experience in schools. I have spent my career mostly teaching and learning in charter school communities with large national support networks. Through that time, I have encountered educators in various types of schools working from assumptions with nearsighted understanding into other educational systems. I was able to actively address those misconceptions this summer by listening, observing, and collaborating with educators. Schools need more of this level of communication and cooperation to reflect on our own beliefs and practices and improve. I have been thinking deeply about the impact of my work from the last 20 years in education. As I have almost exclusively served within one school and sometimes within one classroom, I have measured impact mostly on the growth of individual students [or] teachers that I have coached. Working at the system level, one must consider a broader set of stakeholders and as a result the measure of impact is more complex. As I think about my own future in education, I need to continue to learn about and from different educational contexts, within the country and across the globe. I will then be able to decide what can help me stay true to my beliefs and goals, play to my strengths, and challenge me to continue growing.



**MARVIN BACLIG**  
LOS ANGELES UNIFIED  
SCHOOL DISTRICT (LAUSD)

My fellowship project focused on reducing chronic absenteeism among Black students in LAUSD's Local District South. After researching the strategies

that other school districts implemented across the country to reduce chronic absenteeism, I created four modules that would be presented to staff and faculty. These modules included: 1) Addressing the Intersectionality of Black Students, 2) Strategies to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism for Black Students, 3) Enhancing Black Family Engagement, and 4) Social Emotional Learning. These modules will allow an opportunity to engage staff and faculty in discussions around advancing educational equity and advocating for the needs of Black students and families. It has truly been a phenomenal experience serving as a HGSE Dean's Education Fellow. Through this experience, I have been equipped with an arsenal of tools that include a deeper understanding of how school districts operate and secure buy-in from key stakeholders for equity-centered initiatives, in addition to learning how to better serve and empower Black students and families.



**SAVANNAH CAMPBELL**  
DEKALB COUNTY SCHOOL  
DISTRICT (DCSD), ATLANTA

I enjoyed working with the School Improvement Team (SIT) at DeKalb County School District. Through analyzing data and creating common tools for both SIT members

and site-level leadership, I helped schools prepare to improve outcomes during a critical school year for students. In turn, I came away inspired by the DeKalb SIT members, impressed by their passion for reform amidst bureaucracy. My project focused on supporting the onboarding of newly hired technical assistance providers (TAPs) and the 26 Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) and Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) schools that they serve. I analyzed school improvement plans and relevant data for these schools, and synthesized this information into “one-pagers” to guide school leadership and staff. I also analyzed school data to create a graduation cohort data tracker and at-risk student action plan template for nine DCSD CSI and TSI high schools. Finally, I facilitated a professional development series for the new DCSD TAPs, focusing on recent developments in school turnaround research.

The fellowship experience cemented my belief in creating courageous spaces for collaborative learning and “big-picture” conversations within education organizations. It also helped me focus my beliefs about school district bureaucracy. Before the fellowship, I often saw school districts as a part of the “establishment” in education politics — often defending the status quo and overly focused on compliance efforts. After my experience, I now appreciate how many people working within district bureaucracies truly believe in the abilities of all students. They want to be a part of systemic and urgent reforms to expand quality educational opportunities for students in the most marginalized schools.



**ZAHIRA CORREA**  
FRESNO UNIFIED  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

As a Dean's Education Fellow, I was looking for an opportunity to translate research findings into tangible applications for educational equity. I was able to do that with the African

American Academic Acceleration Department at Fresno Unified School District in California. I worked on identifying culturally relevant and asset-based practices to engage with African American families and community stakeholders. I interviewed a variety of district staff, parents, students, and community leaders about their past experiences within the district. I focused on creating a literature review, conducting professional development on family engagement, and furthering the agenda for the parent advisory council. This was such a valuable experience for me because I gained insight into how school sites and districts function. Being a Dean's Education Fellow opened my eyes to the varying mechanisms and dynamics of collaboration with a school district. One of the most important lessons I learned during this time was the importance of honoring the knowledge of parents and caregivers in their expertise of their children and building their capacities and skills to support their students.



**LAUREN CRISPI**  
BALTIMORE CITY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

My fellowship supported Baltimore City Schools with the preparation and organization of their numerous Career and Technical Education

pathways. My work was able to help determine a clear path forward for calling and communicating with assessment vendors that the district works closely with. The assessments that students take through these vendors play a key factor into their success in the Career and Technical Education pathways offered by Baltimore City Schools. My work with Baltimore allowed me to understand how school districts are working to both adjust and create Career and Technical Education programs that have strong benefits for their students and the 21st-century workforce. It was fascinating to learn about the numerous approaches that are taken to bolster college and career readiness programs for students.

“This was such a valuable experience for me because I gained insight into how school sites and districts function. Being a Dean's Education Fellow opened my eyes to the varying mechanisms and dynamics of collaboration with a school district.”

— ZAHIRA CORREA



**AYESHA CROCKETT**  
DEKALB COUNTY SCHOOL  
DISTRICT (DCSD), ATLANTA

This summer I helped them write and compile their professional development plan for teachers and other district stakeholders. Through my fellowship with the DeKalb

County School District in Georgia, I offered support to the district in order to build a comprehensive document that details the various professional development opportunities each department in the district will provide to DeKalb County School District educators. Additionally, we worked to solidify a district overview as well as regional information to inform district stakeholders about the strategic goals that each region and the overall district would focus on for the school year. Through the Dean's Education Fellowship, I have learned much more in terms of the layout of a school district and how decisions are made and ideas are implemented. Furthermore, I learned the value of speaking up and making sure my voice is heard to support the team with which I work. Ultimately, I have learned that the process by which great work is achieved is facilitated through strong teams and an open communication model to accomplish goals at all levels of education whether it is at the school level or the district level. Thank you so much for this opportunity to learn and grow, HGSE Dean's Education Fellowship and the DeKalb County School District!



**JEFF DURNEY**  
DALLAS INDEPENDENT  
SCHOOL DISTRICT  
(DALLAS ISD)

The Dean's Education Fellowship provided me an opportunity to combine my experiences as a longtime special education teacher with

the knowledge I had gained through my year at HGSE. As a fellow, I had the great opportunity to work with the Dallas Independent School District in supporting them with the transformation of their special education processes and services. Specifically, I worked on several projects that were part of Dallas ISD building more efficiency in their systems for meeting compliant timelines and recommending and designing resources to support teacher understanding within these systems. In order to fully maximize this learning experience, I collaborated with various individuals and teams throughout the district to hear their concerns while also understanding the strengths of the resources and systems currently in place. Through listening and asking probing questions, I was able to develop a holistic picture of this important work. These conversations forged professional relationships that allowed me to receive meaningful feedback on my ideas which deepened my learning while supporting the Dallas ISD learning community as well. Going forward, I plan to lean heavily on the learning from this opportunity to guide my thinking and actions in the field of education. Through active listening, I will leverage the experience and expertise of various stakeholders to collaboratively design systems that best support the students we serve.



**SAMANTHA FLETCHER**  
BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
(BPS)

My work impacted the field because I had the opportunity to take roundtable discussions on race and equity — something that is rarely

mandated, and topics that are largely uncomfortable and controversial — and not only provide a specially curated list of relevant resources (a number of which touch on schooling in the double pandemic) but also to design a series of yearlong synchronous and asynchronous introspective, multimodal, collaborative, reflective, and action-oriented professional development for a new equity and race initiative the district mandated for principals of the district's 125 schools, impacting 54,000+ students. As large as BPS is, might other school districts look to them as a leader? When they do, might my work be illuminated as something to model after? Wow. That would mean my work would then potentially impact even hundreds or thousands more young lives? I can only hope for such an honor.



**CONSTANCE GIST GUINDO**  
NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT  
OF EDUCATION (NYCDOE)

Being placed in the NYCDOE, which is in service to the largest number of students (1.2 million) in the country, was an amazing experience. I was a fully integrated member of the

School Planning & Design Department which offered me the chance to work on several strategic as well as practical projects that touched every student in the city. As I embarked upon the fellowship, I was not sure what to expect. I quickly learned our undertakings could change daily, sometimes even hourly, but always in response to the dynamic needs of our city's children. The unofficial ethos of my department was "Advancing Towards Equity" and my brilliant colleagues put this attitude at the forefront of our work. As such, I took part in brainstorming methodologies to support our teachers as they created novel classroom experiences post COVID; I designed an outdoor professional sporting event for the 5,000 soccer students across the city; and I even joined the team on site while we were representing the district at a multi-million-dollar groundbreaking ceremony for a community science lab. My management team ensured I was privy to the delicate and deliberate work of the NYCDOE; I know for sure every deed, debate, and decision, was carried out with the welfare of each student in mind. This fellowship instilled in me that school systems are indeed akin to a village, and we must work in open partnership with our communities to deliver the education our students deserve. As a product of the NYC Public School system, myself, it was an honor to be placed here as a HGSE Dean's Education Fellow. It is a district that has so much to offer, yet so many challenges. I, understand the challenges because they were mine — and I work in service to these fabulous students to instill with them the fortitude to persevere, no matter which obstacles are placed in their path.



## SHANNON HAWKINS

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT  
OF EDUCATION (NYCDOE)

Serving as a Dean's Education Fellow at the New York City Department of Education further shines a light on the power of collaborative, human-centered relationships.

Educational systems cannot exist in siloes. Instead, a crucial element to children's transformative academic and supportive socio-emotional development requires intentional, compassionate, and meaningful connections between families, communities, and education leaders. Mutually trusting partnerships between families and communities that honor their wisdom, engage them as decision-makers, and serve to build their access and capacity help to facilitate a more aligned approach that supports communities more authentically. As a fellow, I hoped to impact the field by assisting the district in its meaningful and intentional partnership with culturally and linguistically diverse families to inform a more equitable and culturally responsive learning environment for students. In addition, I sought to help the district go deeper and granular in its engagement with families by developing an equity and asset map survey tool to assist the district's communication plan with local schools across the five boroughs. My experience as a Dean's Education Fellow, and as a student at HGSE, further propels my passion for developing deeper, supportive systems for schools and families to co-create powerful partnerships that facilitate generational, systemic change. As a start-up educational founder of Leading A(head) Collaborative, I desire to continue building upon equity-centered impact through community partnerships to disrupt systemic inequities in schools through healing-centered family and student engagement.



## ARMIN SALEK

GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS (GCPS), GEORGIA

I am a practicing attorney turned secondary educator from Austin, Texas. After deciding to switch the focus of my work from legal practice to legal education,

I received a speedy and cursory training in classroom management from an online certification program. Although I was able to connect with my students and provide effective instruction, I always felt that I lacked a deeper training in special education. I wondered if there was more that I could do to support my students with specific learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, or other unique needs. Now, after spending the summer with the Gwinnett County Public Schools' Office of Special Education, I feel prepared to create a highly inclusive classroom that celebrates the neurodiversity of my community. I even helped develop a professional development program for other teachers transitioning from industries to classrooms. I hope that students and teachers in GCPS will find that they have the tools to serve and support one another.



**RITASHONA SIMPSON**  
DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
COMMUNITY DISTRICT (DPSCD)

The focus of my work was to assist the professional development team with creating a set of focus group protocols for the staff, school building administrators,

teachers, and central office managers at the Detroit Public School Community District. I also provided the team with suggestions for creating and implementing a strategy for improving the professional development learning experiences for employees. I provided a report that reviewed a sample of the historical data for professional development evaluation surveys, reviewed the state and district publications on target goals and current methods for improving employee performance, selected appropriate frameworks for improving professional development, conducted a literature review on methods for conducting focus group interviews, and assisted with the creation of four focus group protocols to be used to gather data on current professional development learning experiences. I have come away from my experience as a fellow realizing that real-world experience is just as valuable as the knowledge, theories, and skills learned at HGSE. I really enjoyed brainstorming the process for evaluating professional development learning experiences. I will seek opportunities to continue to use my knowledge and skills to evaluate systems.



**KELLY TESHIMA-MCCORMICK**  
NOLA PUBLIC SCHOOLS,  
LOUISIANA

Through the Dean's Education Fellowship, I was able to lay the groundwork for analysis that will be used to answer some of NOLA Public

Schools' longstanding questions regarding special education and innovation initiatives in NOLA's unique, decentralized system of schools. To do this, I cleaned, merged, and organized multiple datasets across a four-year period to create three new datasets of grant funding, school-level, and student-level data with information on students' educational environment and type of exceptionality. I then analyzed the datasets to identify interesting trends and created a final report outlining these findings alongside strategic data visualizations. The work that I produced for NOLA Public Schools was an undertaking considered long overdue and will allow for further exploration of the district's needs, including how to more effectively structure the funding formula. Through this fellowship, I got a glimpse of how large and complex school districts are and was reminded that they are run by people, who are also complex and are navigating their own challenges and uncertainties. Flexibility, grace, humility, and patience were the practices that allowed our team to carry out our work and to show that we valued each other. I hope to continue exercising these practices both in my work and in my everyday life.



**KATHY TRAN**  
DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
COMMUNITY DISTRICT (DPSCD)

During this summer, I had the amazing opportunity to partner with Detroit Public Schools Community District to work on a family and community engagement

project. I worked alongside the Partnership and Innovations Office to create an online district Family Resource Gateway tool to directly connect families with service resources. Due to the pandemic, family access to resources such as rental, utility, food, and mental health resources became extremely important. Prior to the Dean's Education Fellowship, I spent three years working in the education nonprofit sector where I partnered with schools to implement campus climate youth programming. I was hoping to apply the skills I learned in the master's program to support a school district. Coming from a nonprofit experience, this fellowship allowed me to be on the other side with the district to learn how school systems can improve the ways we communicate and provide access to direct service resources with families and community nonprofits. In the process, I was able to convene district stakeholders and community partners. By creating a gap analysis on current processes, we were able to pinpoint points of collaboration and I look forward to the tool being implemented in the near future. I gained valuable skills learning how to use Qualtrics, developing a User Acceptance Testing process, and survey community data tools to help families. In the future, I'll be taking this learning to my next position in Washington, D.C. where I'll be working on improving youth policy at the national level. I'm very grateful for the Dean's Education Fellowship staff, mentor Ben Lewis, and my amazing district supervisor Adam Kind for helping me build confidence to make an impact in education.



**CODY UYEDA**  
METRO NASHVILLE PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS (MNPS)

Over the summer I worked with MNPS to conceptualize and implement a high-dosage tutoring program for first- and second-grade literacy and eighth- and

ninth-grade math. Coming into this fellowship, I was somewhat apprehensive as I did not have a traditional teaching or administrative background nor was I familiar with high-dosage tutoring. However, I was quickly integrated into the team, and learned how educational research can be used to not only inform design, but to provide justification and encouragement to others to believe in the power of this work. I also experienced the more practical aspects of how a school district functions, and where projects might run into obstacles along the way. Understanding the mechanics of research and practice as they work in real-world settings like a school district was a key goal that I wanted out of this fellowship, and that was exactly what I found. Ultimately, seeing the passion in everyone involved with bringing MNPS' high-dosage tutoring program to fruition has made me all the more committed to advancing the field of education, and applying this same passion to my own future endeavors.



## KEVIN FÉLIX WEAVER

METRO NASHVILLE  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MNPS)

A few years ago, I was part of the HGSE research team that explored globalizing K–12 classrooms via remote learning platforms. That research project prepared

me to go into the field this summer as a Dean’s Education Fellow to help formulate initiatives orchestrated for student and teacher support. Working as part of the central office for Metro Nashville Public Schools, we assessed social and emotional well-being systems that allow students to articulate their feelings regarding their academic work, home life, or mental health. These systems consist of wide-ranging technology-based student support tools that were beneficial for remote learning at the height of the pandemic. However, the thought process was re-imagined, allowing these support tools to be a continuous resource benefiting students as they return to the classroom. The fellowship has proven to be a valuable experience as I have transitioned from a year of research back to teaching in the classroom this fall. I teach current and aspiring educators about laws that impact student and teacher effectiveness. The fellowship has greatly expanded my curriculum and course ILOs, particularly in the area of wellness. I believe this curriculum expansion will benefit my current students, which will subsequently aid their students’ success and classroom experiences.

### Additional Dean’s Education Fellows:

**KATIE BARRETT KRAMER**, Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia

**HANNAH CHAUVIN**, Baltimore City Public Schools

**SHARON LEE**, Boston Public Schools

**MUNA MALIN**, Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia

**VERONICA MARAVANKIN**, Detroit Public Schools Community District

**MADISON THOMAS**, NOLA Public Schools

The Dean’s Education Fellows program was facilitated by the Public Education Leadership Project.

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— CODY UYEDA