

Hands On

SPECIAL ISSUE
THE ED SCHOOL'S
REAL-WORLD
IMPACT ON
THE FIELD —
AND ITS
IMPACT ON US



Ed.

Ed.

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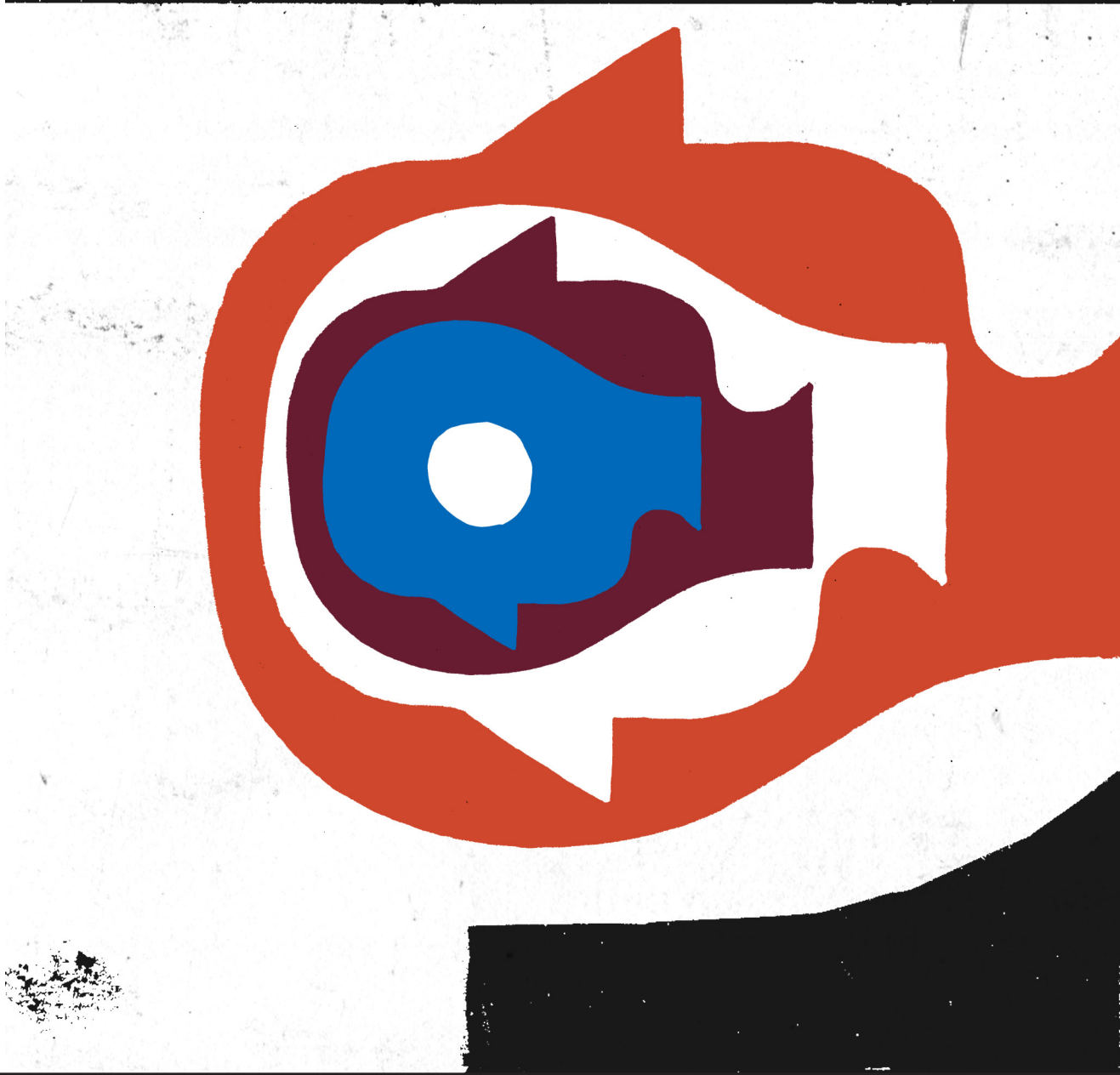
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An abstract artwork featuring a large, vibrant orange circle on a white background. To the left of the circle is a large, dark, textured shape that resembles a stylized leaf or a brushstroke. Above the circle, there are horizontal bands of blue and black, with some white speckling. The overall composition is bold and graphic.

In the Field

I decided to do another theme issue. It was early last fall, and I started making a list of ideas. We had done one not long ago about the school's centennial and another on teachers. During COVID, we managed to produce a full issue on, you guessed it, COVID. I thought, what else would be interesting and touch on all parts of the Ed School community? What might even be a little different?

Then late one afternoon, sitting in a monthly all-staff meeting, I listened as (then interim) Dean Nonie Lesaux asked an interesting question: Where are we? She went on to explain that with her team, she had decided to embark this school year on a fact-finding mission to get a better sense of exactly how the Ed School was involved with the field of education. After more than two decades as a faculty member here, Lesaux knew the school was making an impact with our research, of course, but she also knew many of our faculty, students, and alums were also working directly on projects and in partnership with schools and communities, with education departments and education nonprofits. As she pointed out, the Ed School, from day one, has consistently kept its feet planted in the field of education (not just in the proverbial ivory tower) to understand what real-life problems teachers and students and cities and parents grapple with when it comes to learning, teaching, and being educators. "We are committed," Lesaux said that day, "to producing work that doesn't sit on a shelf."

Well, I thought, here's our theme. It would be impossible in one issue of a magazine to capture all of the ways that the Ed School is involved with the field of education. With this issue, we tried to at least share a few of those stories. Happy reading.

LORY HOUGH, EDITOR

Q&A DEAN NONIE LESAUX

NOT LONG AFTER taking over as interim dean of the Ed School in July 2024, Nonie Lesaux started doing the things deans usually do, like looking over budget spreadsheets and policy goals and introducing herself to donors. But a few months later, Lesaux also decided to tackle something new: She wanted to better understand how the Ed School interacts with the field of education. After serving as academic dean from 2017 to 2021 and as a member of the faculty since 2003, Lesaux knew we were a school heavily involved in many different forms of research, but she also saw countless examples of collaborations and partnerships with teachers and school districts and education departments around the world, some connected to research projects and others by individual faculty members. So, this fall, with the help of Bridget Rodriguez, senior director for external affairs and communications, and Senior Lecturer Carrie Conaway, a former strategy and research officer for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Lesaux launched a new project focused on the school's engagement with the field of education. We asked Lesaux about starting this work, why research is often born out of actual problems, and good surprises.

Why did you decide to look at how the Ed School interacts with the field of education?

We undertook this effort with a set of fundamental questions in mind: Where are we? How did we get here? Where might we go next? The interim period provided a valuable opportunity for reflection — allowing us to step back and systematically examine our engagement with the field. Over the past two decades, HGSE has deepened its identity as a professional school, strengthening connections with educators, policymakers, and system leaders. We see this in countless ways: partnerships, research collaborations, technical assistance, and direct capacity-building work with schools and districts. Yet while we could point to many compelling examples, we had never comprehensively mapped our field-focused engagements both to create a picture of how they look and feel all over the world and to better understand their impact. This year presented a really opportune moment to do so. The project will culminate this spring with a better sense of where we are as an ed school. And of course, everything we do is ultimately in service of the field. By taking a systematic approach, we gain not just a clearer picture of our reach but also insights into how we might amplify our impact.

Any surprises so far?

Rather than surprises, what we've found has been affirming. The Ed School is an extremely active and dynamic organization. And I knew we would learn in more detail about our rich and deep engagements all over the world, but still I was surprised by just how many and all the different types and the ways in which they are influencing everyday practice, policy, and people's lives and experiences. It's so inspiring, and it's also a really important source of information as we think about what kind of work we might do going forward.

Why isn't it enough for the school to just do research?

We want to be rigorous, and we want to be relevant. I would argue that the only way we maintain that really important combination is by doing work both with and in the field. And excellent research in education is often born out of the problems of practice and leadership and dilemmas and policy issues that our partners are facing every day. They look to us for solutions. And it's very important that our research is designed in ways that recognizes the complexity of those dilemmas and challenges and aims to generate breakthroughs. In a lot of cases, that is necessarily going to mean that the work happens

in partnership with the field. The more our faculty and our fabulous colleagues in research centers are in partnership with the field, the more their research becomes timely, accessible, relevant, and creative.

At the same time, the needs of the education sector are evolving. The effects of COVID on student learning are significant, and overall mental health challenges among our students is rising. Turnover among teachers and leaders is a very real concern. And the emergence of AI is reshaping professional roles. To meet our mission, we must produce high-quality research, and one key dimension of high-quality research is its ease for uptake, whether by practitioners, leaders in schools and districts, or the policymaking community. Getting there often demands partnerships and collaborations that were once quite rare.

I assume it's also important for our students.

Absolutely. When faculty and students engage with today's dilemmas of practice, leadership, and policy, whether in our HGSE classrooms or in research groups or through initiatives tied to executive education, it deepens learning and fosters a culture of innovation. Today's field-focused engagements and partnerships shape how and what our faculty teach, and therefore how our students experience their graduate studies.



Everything we do is ultimately in service of the field.”

Any last thoughts about the school's impact in the field?

At HGSE, our impact comes from both groundbreaking research and close collaboration with educators and communities — as well as the synergies and relationships between the two. We are deeply committed to producing work that doesn't sit on a shelf but instead actively informs work in classrooms, schools, and policymaking settings all over the world. Our faculty and students work alongside teachers and school leaders to address pressing challenges in areas like literacy, leadership, and technology. By staying connected to current problems and dilemmas, we are a giant step closer to meaningful improvements in education.

Our reach also extends via thousands of HGSE alumni who are leading change in schools, government agencies, and non-profits. Their work reflects our shared mission to expand opportunities for all learners and strengthen education systems. Looking ahead, we are focused on deepening partnerships and preparing leaders to navigate today's biggest challenges — from the role of AI in education to fostering constructive dialogue in what can be a very divided world. At a time when society is changing faster than ever, education is more critical than ever.

HGSE remains committed to shaping that future with innovation and expertise. ▣



JILL ANDERSON

The Moment: Student Teaching

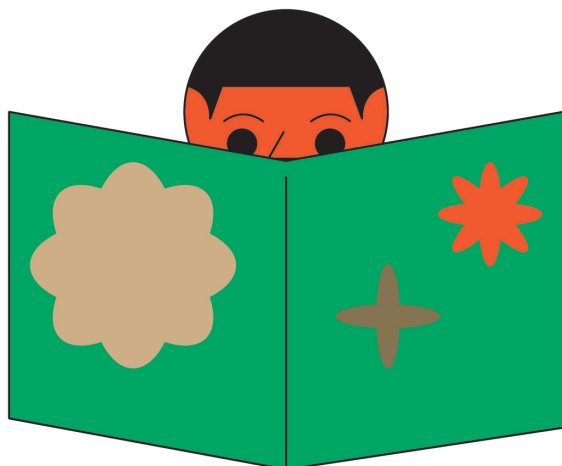




As a student in the Teaching and Teacher Leadership Program, **AKANKSHA PABARI, ED.M.'25**, spent the past school year out in the field, teaching at Somerville High School, less than three miles from Harvard. She says the hardest thing about teaching at the high school level is supporting students who constantly say to her: I can't do chemistry. "Many come in with preconceived notions that chemistry is too difficult for them," she says. "As a former student who struggled a great deal with chemistry, I can empathize. While it's challenging to shift this mindset, my hope is to show students that they can succeed. I do my best to create an environment where students feel safe to make mistakes, ask questions, and learn together." When asked what she loves about teaching high school, she doesn't hesitate: the relationships with her students. "The conversations and small interactions I had with my high school teachers really impacted me. They were always my biggest cheerleaders and sources of support," Pabari says. "I love that I have the chance to do the same for my students. As they're growing into their own shoes and finding their voices, I am grateful I get to be part of that journey. I also really enjoy the fun I get to have with my students. Whether it's our inside jokes or class games, my students always manage to make me smile."

New edtech practicum brings real-world problems into the classroom

Story by **Andrew Bauld, Ed.M.'16**



By Design

Since joining the Ed School while working on his doctorate, Lecturer **DAVID DOCKTERMAN, ED.D.'88**, has straddled the worlds of production and research, bringing his more than four decades of experience designing educational technology into the classroom.

Dockterman's long-time HGSE course, Innovation by Design, has inspired generations of students to bring evidence-driven approaches to designing educational materials. Now, students are getting the chance to put those skills to use for real clients while still in the classroom through his new education product practicum.

"Since we redid the master's programs, we have a much larger Learning Design, Innovation, and Technology (LDIT) cohort, and many of those students are moving into learning design," Dockterman says. "This is an opportunity to give them a closer bridge to what that looks like, with organizations that are designing to make impact at scale. This gets them contributing to something that's real, not just a theoretical or academic exercise."

The practicum was offered as a six-week course this spring, with a dozen students serving as design consultants for a real-life client. For this first iteration, students worked with Slam Out Loud, a nonprofit in India founded by **JIGASA LABROO, ED.M.'22**, that uses poetry, storytelling, theatre, and visual arts to help children from under-resourced communities find their voice through creative expression.

For students, not only did they have a chance to work with a real client, but at the end of the course they created something that can go into a portfolio and on their resume, helping in their search for an internship or job. For some students, the client they worked for in the classroom might even become their future employer.

But in addition to gaining real-world experience, Dockterman also views the class as a way to bring better research and evidence into the design of educational products.

"There are lots of products on the market," he says, "and many of them are weakly steeped in evidence and research, so what does it mean to try and infuse more evidence into the ed tech space?"

For the clients that partner with Dockterman and his students, this could be a huge boon.

“The clients get the benefit of a group of academics — students led by someone, in my case, with a lot of experience in the industry — focusing on something that will make their product more effective,” Dockterman says. “That’s awesome, because clients don’t have the bandwidth necessarily to do that.”

Prior to the spring offering, Dockterman ran the class as a week-long intensive during J-Term. The first set of 12 students consulted for Curriculum Associates (CA), a Massachusetts provider of technology-enabled assessment and instructional programs for elementary and middle school students.

The course mimicked a true workweek, with students in the classroom from 9-to-5 every day — and often more like 9-to-9, Dockterman says. Representatives from CA visited throughout the week, first to introduce the problem of how to better support English language learners in

math. Students then broke into teams, focusing their research on students, teachers, and CA’s editorial team. CA returned in the middle of the week to hear what HGSE students had learned and for an intensive design and prototyping session.

Students delivered their final presentations at the end of the week. Based on reviews, the J-Term week was a success.

“Honestly, I loved it,” says **MACKENNA TENPENNY, ED.M.’25**. “It was really intensive, and definitely a time commitment, but I loved working with a real client with a real problem,” noting that the school should add even more classes like this one. “It was so incredibly valuable.”

Much of the enthusiasm for the course also came from the environment Dockterman himself created.

“I saw Dock as a facilitator role-modeling what we were expected to do,” says **PALAK CHANDAK, ED.M.’25**. “He was there 9-to-5 with us. We’d see him looking at the product, being a user himself, showing how he would approach the class as a learner. Because he was role-modeling that for us, we, in some subconscious way, could do that, too.”

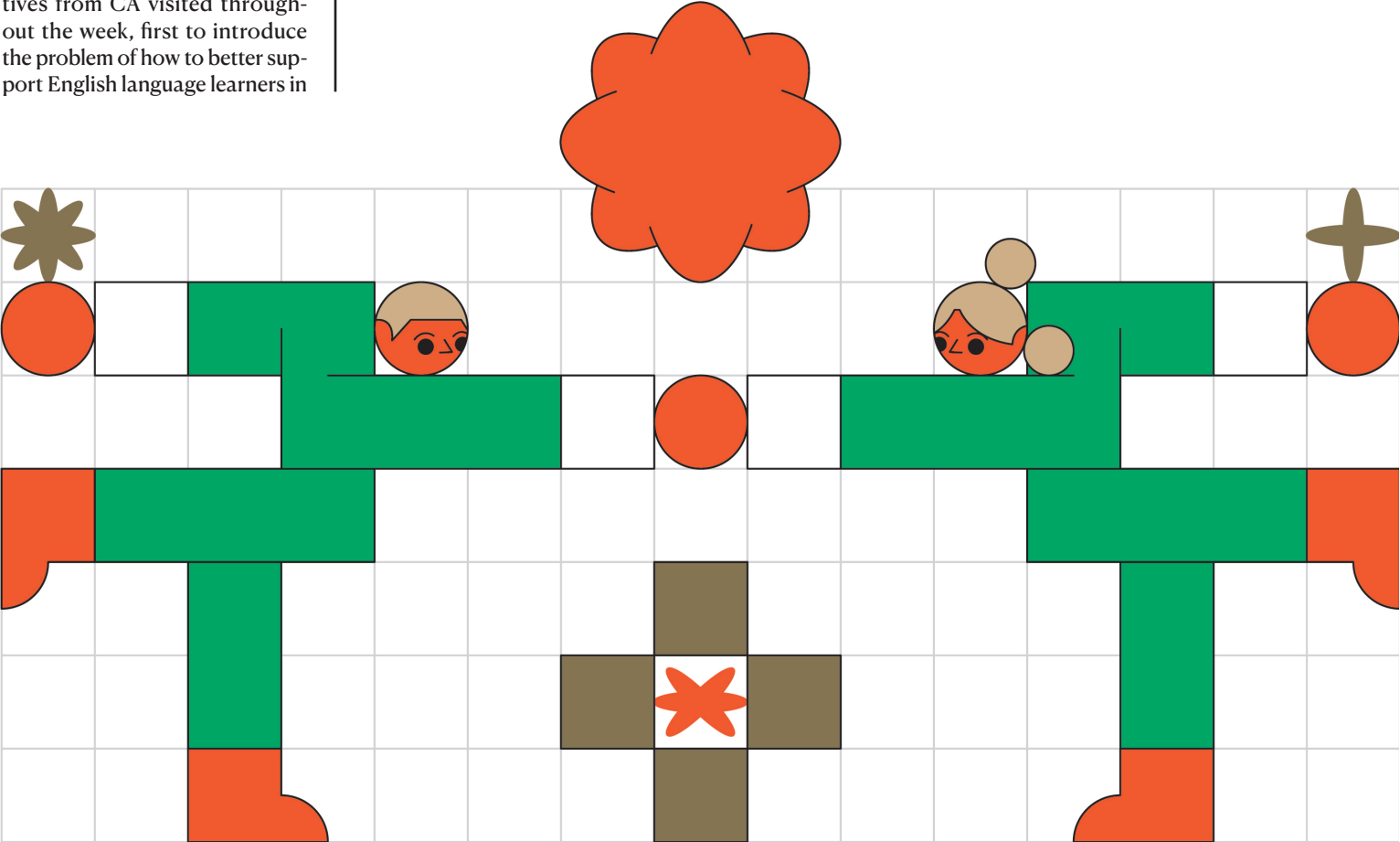
Both Tenpenny and Chandak say the experience with the practicum impacted their future course

plans, with both students taking more courses in product management. Their only regret was they weren’t able to take part in the spring version of the course, since Dockterman wanted to bring in new students for each new client.

With 40 years of experience and no lack of industry connections, Dockterman hopes he’ll be able to offer the class with a new partner each year.

“I love the idea that we as a school can participate in influencing practice pretty quickly and pretty widely,” Dockterman says. “If this works, I’d love to do a lot of these, and I’m hoping we can create demand from potential clients.” □

Andrew Bauld, Ed.M.’16, is a writer based in New York



Why I'm an Educator: **Dalia Abbas, Ed.M.'19**

When I turned 17, my parents made the bold decision to move our family to Cairo, Egypt. As wild as it sounds for a family of eight that had built their lives in the United States, it wasn't an entirely unique immigrant story — parents ensuring their children get a foundation in America before returning to their homeland near retirement. Out of all the things I worried about — leaving my friends, my part-time job at an ice cream shop, and the sports teams I was part of — my biggest concern was my education. I had my eyes set on UC Berkeley and was relying on extracurriculars and SAT prep to get me there. Would Cairo have comparable opportunities? Did anyone there even talk about standardized testing? Would I have access to the AP courses I needed to stay on track?

Much to my surprise (due to my naïve assumptions), Egypt had an incredible selection of high-quality private schools. The choices seemed endless: British, American, International Baccalaureate systems — if you could afford the tuition and pass the entrance exams. After some jaw-dropping moments scanning tuition prices, my parents chose an all-girls American school for me and my sister. Though accustomed to the all-inclusive public schools of California, they quickly decided the investment was worth it, giving us the foundation to decide whether we'd stay in Egypt or return to the United States.

Initially, I dreamed of joining the foreign service after college. I figured it was the perfect way to use my basic Arabic skills and see the world. But as I settled into life in Cairo, I became increasingly aware of the stark inequities in education, and I realized my true calling was not diplomacy but education.

Attending an expensive international school where my peers' families had successful businesses or lived abroad, I saw the privilege I'd been handed. For many Egyptian students, education was not so accessible. Public schools often left students dependent on costly afterschool tutoring just to pass exams. When I asked why, a cousin explained that teachers' salaries were so low they would save their actual teaching for paid lessons outside the classroom. This baffled me. Growing up, I had access to free math tutoring at my middle school. The idea of parents paying for public school teachers to do their jobs was beyond my comprehension.

“**IN
EDUCATION,
IT'S
EQUITY**”

Over time, I began to understand that education systems worldwide are steeped in inequity. Even in the United States, inequities manifest in zoning regulations, underfunded programs, and disparities between districts. But at 17, the realization that a public school could fail to provide the basics deeply unsettled me. I became determined to understand why these inequities existed and how they might be addressed through alternative education models that give everyone a fair shot at building the lives they want.

The turning point came one afternoon when I joined my cousin and her son for a family outing. Her son, about 7 years old, returned home from school and called to the porter's daughter — a girl only slightly older than him — to carry his backpack up four flights of stairs. The image stopped me in my tracks. Didn't this girl have books of her own to carry? Why wasn't she in school? When I asked my cousin, she explained that while education was a legal right in Egypt, many parents kept their children home to contribute to the household income.

In that moment, my path became clear. Education had to be my focus. Everyone deserves the chance to learn, regardless of income, background, or nationality. I wanted to be part of the solution, creating opportunities for people of all ages and walks of life to access education that could transform their futures.

Since then, my journey has been anything but linear. I studied history and political science at American University in Cairo. After graduation, I taught English and history internationally for five years, later moving to San Jose, California, where I hoped to bring my global perspective into a U.S. classroom. Though I loved teaching, the Silicon Valley ethos of scaling great experiences captured my imagination, leading me to pursue my master's at HGSE.

Since earning my degree, my guiding star has been to create alternative education models for learners of all backgrounds. Now, at Ziplines Education, I design courses in artificial intelligence prompting and project management to help busy professionals upskill and thrive in their careers.

What I've learned is that educational inequity exists everywhere. But initiatives focused on creating equitable, alternative models offer a powerful way to dismantle these systems. One message that stayed with me from HGSE was shared on my first day of orientation. [Former] Dean Bridget Terry Long reflected that the central experience of law is justice, and in health, it's wellness. In education, it's equity.

That word, equity, fuels my passion. I think back to the porter's daughter, carrying someone else's backpack when she should have been preparing for her own show-and-tell project. I dream of a future where she and others who missed out on education when they were young have access to lifelong learning opportunities that allow them to shape the lives they choose. □

DALIA ABBAS, ED.M.'19, is a senior learning designer at Ziplines Education



A Full-Circle Experience in Education

James Austin carries on a family legacy of helping others

Story by **Sarah Garfinkel, Ed.M.'20**

Long before he was a student in the Ed School's Online Master's in Educational Leadership (OEL) Program, **JAMES AUSTIN III** was a student with high motivation — both intrinsic and extrinsic.

"My aunts worked in the cafeteria as school nutrition cooks, my uncles drove the school bus. I had aunts who worked in the library," he says. "I grew up witnessing people work in the school system. I didn't have an opportunity to hide at school because I had family always watching."

This was true at home in Americus, Georgia, on the same plot of land his great-grandfather had amassed.

"Growing up, every neighbor was a family member. When I came home from school, they could open their doors, step outside, and elevate their voices across the field," he says. "So, I knew I had to do the right thing."

At Morehouse, he studied finance and taught financial literacy through a nonprofit he founded, Grand Achiever Protege of America. "I knew if finance was taught properly, there could be equitable solutions in various communities."

He was inspired by his grandfather, a steady foundation for him, and by his great-grandfather, who he never met. "My great-grandfather stopped going to school in eighth grade, but he was the wealthiest in the family," Austin says. "As a sharecropper, he amassed 350 acres, and the land has been passed down

generation to generation. He was such a giant of a man that he hid Black families when lynch mobs came through that part of Georgia. Now I'm taking the stories, the unsung heroes, and bringing their voices to be lived out."

Austin was the first in his family to graduate college. His former elementary and middle school principal asked his mom about his post-collegiate plans and then helped him secure his first full-time job as the CFO for the Macon County School District. "I was good in school because I had to be — and it paid dividends," he says. "She introduced me to the first superintendent I worked for. She said, 'This young man needs a job. I don't know his skills, but I do know his character. And I know you can train him.'"

That role eventually led him to his current position as assistant superintendent of finance and operations at Twiggs County Public Schools in Georgia, a role that encompasses a range of responsibilities, from overseeing transportation and nutrition services to innovation in direct response to its families' needs.

"The unfortunate thing about our location is that we are in a food desert and a healthcare desert," he says. Recently, "we were ranked 159th out of 159 Georgia counties for health outcomes."

The pandemic also highlighted the challenge of chronic absenteeism in the district, so the district started brainstorming. One issue was geography. Locat-

ed in the center of Georgia, the county is near major cities, but most families and employees live 30–45 minutes away from school. Due to the distance, Austin says, "If little Johnny is sick and has a doctor's appointment in the morning, it is very unlikely for him to return to school."

So last year, the district opened a wellness center to support students and families. Parents sign a telemedicine consent form. Students are bussed to the center, where they receive dental, general medical, and mental health services. Parents can join virtually so they don't have to choose between leaving work or attending the appointment.

Austin says, "I'm proud to work in and be from a smaller community, because I see the district from every angle." With OEL classmates, he also values the chance to share what he's learned about chronic absenteeism and wraparound services. After graduation, he'll continue working in Twiggs County Public Schools and sharing stories of unsung heroes like his grandfather and great-grandfather.

"I want to be that voice, that face, of rural, underserved, and unheard communities," he says. "Bring them to the table and allow them to shout as loud as they can. I want to say, 'We are just as important.'" □

SARAH GARFINKEL, ED.M.'20, is a writer based in San Francisco and an Ed School teaching fellow







Why Harvard decided that
the university needed a
school of education, not just
a small department

Story by Lory Hough

The Birth of an Ed School



HARVARD ARCHIVES

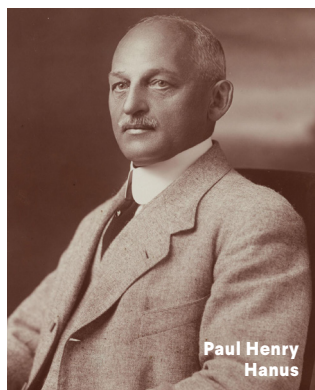
Lawrence Hall, 1874

Harvard has long turned out educators. As Samuel Eliot Morison writes in his 1930 book, *The Development of Harvard University Since the Inauguration of President Eliot, 1869–1929*, “For two centuries the schools and colleges of New England were very largely manned by her bachelors and masters; and her graduates, with those of Yale, Brown, and Dartmouth, carried Puritan ideals of education into the West.”

Despite this, in those early days, the university didn’t see the need for a separate education school. As Morison notes, “Harvard’s influence upon education during this long period was exerted under a conception obviously limited. Teachers were equipped with knowledge of their subjects, but the university had no department for the study of education as a whole.”

Things started to slowly change when Harvard President Charles Eliot appointed Paul Henry Hanus, at a salary of \$2,000, to the first faculty position in education in 1891. For Hanus, this meant running a summer school for teachers in Cambridge and teaching one course, the History and Art of Teaching, which was listed under philosophy and didn’t count toward a degree. Many of his colleagues weren’t thrilled with the new position.

“I did not learn until after the college year began in Sep-

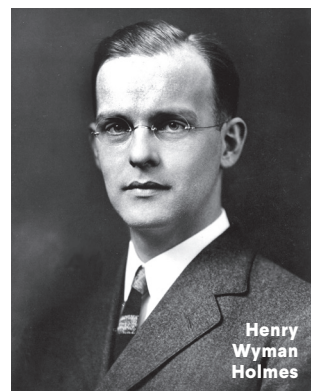


tember that many members of the faculty were doubtful about the value of the new department and that some of them looked on such a department with little more than contempt,” Hanus wrote in his 1937 book, *Adventuring in Education*. “Quite in harmony with this attitude of a considerable minority of the faculty, and doubtless as a concession to that minority, the faculty, while voting in favor of establishing the new department, also voted that the courses in the history and art of teaching should not be allowed to count toward any degree without special permission of the faculty; so that any students who might elect those courses would run the risk of receiving no academic recognition for the work done.”

Hanus wasn’t content and wanted more for Harvard and the field of education than just one course. By 1903, he began pushing for a separate graduate school devoted to

education. As he wrote in *Adventuring*, he hoped that Harvard would develop a graduate school of education “parallel to the other professional schools of law, medicine, etc. of the university, and on occasion I had expressed that hope in conversation, and also to some extent in print. But the realization of that hope was deferred for many years.” In a letter dated August 3, 1903, President Eliot told him, “If I were you, I should neither talk nor think about a ‘School of Education’ at Harvard. The Corporation and Overseers are unquestionably opposed to the establishment of more ‘schools’ within the University. Their hope and expectation is to reduce the number of separate schools rather than to increase it.”

By 1906, Harvard was still wavering about starting a new school for education, but the university did agree to make education a formal division within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Hanus chaired the



division until 1912, when he turned leadership over to his former student, Henry Wyman Holmes, who was, at the time, a local principal.

Morison writes that this continual push by Hanus for Harvard to embrace education as a professional school was critical for the field. “Until Professor Hanus began his labors, no student could obtain at Harvard an historical perspective of educational institutions, an understanding of the social functions of the schools, a command of teaching in light of the facts of individual growth and learning, or an insight into educational policy. The appointment of Hanus implied, therefore, a permanent change of attitude. The university assumed a new responsibility, which it has not since relinquished or denied.”

And then in 1916, just a little more than a decade after Hanus began his bid for a separate graduate school, his pushing paid off when three groups, including the Harvard Corporation, began a united and serious effort to find the money to get started. In May 1919, John D. Rockefeller, founder of the Standard Oil Company, made the first major donation: \$500,000 toward the \$2 million that was ultimately raised. Nine months later, on February 17, 1920, at the Harvard Union, 200 guests gathered for a dinner to celebrate the impending conversion from division to

school. This included Harvard President A. Lawrence Lowell, Hanus, and Holmes, who would become the school's first dean. "On a frigid winter night, elaborate pains had been taken to ensure a warm environment of good fellowship and good taste," writes Arthur Powell in *The Uncertain Profession*. A few weeks later, on April 12, 1920, the Harvard Graduate School of Education was officially established by a vote of the corporation. As Powell notes, "The educational press reported triumphantly that Harvard at long last was firmly committed to the graduate study of education."

This graduate level, Hanus notes in *Adventuring*, was key to elevating the field. "It is a distinctive feature of this new enterprise at Harvard that it is established on a strictly graduate basis. This, too, was in accordance with the plan of the school I had urged for many years, based on the hope that the school would emphasize the training of leaders in the field of education, while not neglecting the best training that could be devised for the usual practitioner."

Starting that September in 1920, the Ed School (housed not on Appian Way, but in Lawrence Hall, near what is now the Science Center) offered two degrees for both men and women: the master of education (Ed.M.) and the nation's first doctor of educa-



The first graduating class

“ I did not learn until after the college year began in September that many members of the faculty were doubtful about the value of the new department and that some of them looked on such a department with little more than contempt.”

PAUL HENRY HANUS

tion (Ed.D.). As Hanus writes in *Adventuring*, this is just what the field needed for “students who were planning to make education their lifework.”

The new graduate school couldn't have come at a more needed time, said Holmes in an interview with the *Harvard Crimson* in 1919.

“The task of training teachers is difficult and cannot be

conducted without the development of something much nearer an adequate science and philosophy of education than we now have,” he said. “Trained teachers are already infinitely superior to untrained teachers, but much remains to be done before teacher-training institutions can hope to be reasonably successful in their own effort.”

Holmes added, “It is therefore especially important to develop university schools in which the study of educational problems may be carried on by those who are to become the educational leaders of the country. In view of all these facts, the establishment of a Graduate School of Education at Harvard may be considered a great step in advance.” □

Q&A BRIAN ROSENBERG

VISITING PROFESSOR; PRESIDENT EMERITUS, MACALESTER COLLEGE

WHY CAN'T HIGHER education change? It's a question that has been on Visiting Professor Brian Rosenberg's mind for years, and why he made it the name of a class he taught twice this year. It's also the topic of his 2023 book, *Whatever It Is, I'm Against It: Resistance to Change in Higher Education*, based on his years working in the field of education, including as president of Macalester College. This past spring, Rosenberg talked with *Ed.* about the need for change, pressure in higher ed, and the next frontier.

Why teach this class?

It's been a topic that has fascinated, puzzled, and frustrated me for much of my career in higher education. I was a faculty member, I was a dean, and I was the president. Every stage along the way, what I saw was a very deep-seated resistance to anything more than incremental change.

Did this surprise you?

It seems paradoxical to me. Higher education has been described as a conservative industry populated by progressives. You have all these people in higher ed who, in their view of society, are looking for change, who in their disciplines are looking for change. But not when it comes to their workplace dynamic. What I thought was, this can't be because people don't want to be good at their job. I don't think it's because people are bad actors. I tend to look for answers in structures and cultures and I came to the conclu-

sion that higher education has a lot of both cultural and structural impediments that make it really, really difficult. And so that's what I focused on in the book and in the class.

Tell us more about the class.

The class essentially has three phases to it. The first is, why do we need to change? Higher education hasn't changed dramatically in a long time. Why should it? Is this moment different? And I make the case that it is, that higher education is under more pressure from more directions than at any point in my career. And unless it adapts and changes, it's going to be in even more trouble.

I talk about the financial model, which for the vast majority of institutions is unsustainable. We can't have schools with discount rates of 60 or 70% that can expect to do that indefinitely. And it's gotten super expensive. The sticker price this year at Macalester, where I was president, was almost \$85,000. And there are fewer and fewer people who are willing and able to pay that price.

Demographics are also a problem. We've peaked in terms of high school graduates, and we're going to go down and it's not going to be small, maybe as much as 15%. You take away 15% of the high school graduates, and colleges that are struggling now have an even bigger problem.

What's phase two of the class?

Phase two is, what are the impediments? I look at a number of factors such as the incentive system, which I think doesn't incentivize the people who are in positions of power to change things.

Can you give us an example of what that looks like?

Why would a tenured faculty member want things to be different? Change is work. Change is scary. You have a guaranteed job for the rest of your life. Why would you want to do the hard work of change? If you're a president and you try to change things dramatically, you're probably going to lose your job, right? If you're a trustee who shows up at a college several times a year and goes to board meetings, why would you want to get in the middle of a mess? All those people have the power to change things.

I also look at the fragmentation of these institutions, particularly things like the departmental structure where you have faculty who are more faithful to their departments than they are to their institutions. It's pretty different, by the way, between faculty and staff. The staff, I've found, usually tend to see themselves as part of an institution.

And change is really, really hard. Change requires those people to be going in the same direction. That's not the way colleges and universities run.

And the final class phase?

The last is the more optimistic phase of the class: What are possible alternatives? We're looking at the rise of mega universities — the Arizona States and the Southern New Hampshires. Is that a good change? A bad change? Whether we like it or not, it's changing. We look at what those schools are doing and the pluses and minuses. We look at people trying higher ed startups, like Minerva, which is well-funded, to underfunded experiential experimental startups. What are the opportunities or blocks to starting a new, different kind of college? And finally, we look at international models. I've been working for the last 48 years with the University of Africa, which is a startup and very different from the American model.

Have there been any surprise areas in the past decade that are changing in higher ed?

I think a lot of the most interesting work is actually happening at community colleges. Community colleges are starting to do a better job of connecting with employers and offering stackable credentials — things that get students into the workforce sooner. They focus on teaching and there is more use of technology and it's making education accessible to students who can't show up on a campus over four years. To me that's the next big frontier. □

“Higher education hasn't changed dramatically in a long time. Why should it? Is this moment different?”



Student Affairs



STUDENT: **DOMINIQUE POPE, ED.M.'25**

HOMETOWN: Sacramento, California

PREVIOUS JOB: judicial law clerk,
graduate legal assistant

After graduating from UC Davis Law School in 2022 and working in the legal world, Dominique Pope thought about switching careers. But after starting at the Ed School, she came to a realization: “I don’t have to be in just law or just education,” she says. “I can do both.”

Specifically, she wants to work in law school administration as a resource for students. “My goal is to always encourage law students to pursue their own path,” she says. It’s something she had to learn how to do, as well.

“I navigated law school all on my own as a Black, first-generation student,” she says. “I decided that when I was in a position to do so, I would support law students who would be in similar circumstances. My hope is to work in student affairs where I can get to know students and help with their personal and academic needs one on one.”

One of the lessons she learned from the Ed School that she’ll take with her, she says, is that conflict isn’t always an obstacle.

“There have been classes where we discussed extremely sensitive topics, and my classmates had opposing views. Despite the tension, we were able to have helpful conversations without attacking each other,” she says. “I plan to continue practicing an empathetic, but also equally effective, approach to communication with my future students and colleagues. HGSE has sincerely shown me how effective leadership is not about status or title, but about how you treat others around you.” □

Student Affairs



STUDENT: QUEENS MALCOLM SMITH JR., ED.M.'25

HOMETOWN: Queens, New York

PREVIOUS JOB: activist and youth educator

Our goals are often rooted in a need — a need to fill a gap or right a wrong. Queens Malcolm Smith's goals come from something personal — his own experience.

"I came out of 22 years of foster care," he says. "I went through psychological, physical, and sexual traumas." As he told an audience at a first-gen celebration at Harvard in October, he is a survivor of a large demographic of young people in foster care who have been labeled as just a number, a statistic. Especially once he turned 18.

"I went from aging out homeless to navigating shelters across New York City and even spending sleepless nights on the Brooklyn Bridge and in Washington Square Park," he said at the event. "Along the lines of these systemic blockages, I've dealt with housing insecurity and with no safety net or plan on how to navigate life as a young being."

Now Smith wants to be that safety net for others. After graduation, in addition to continuing to advocate that foster kids need to matter to educators, his goal is to start an entrepreneurial education organization, possibly a school, that directly supports foster kids who age out of the system, young people who are homeless, and LGBTQ+ youth. He wants to teach them basic life skills, like how to do errands and be on their own — skills he had to learn the hard way. And more than anything, Smith wants to help these young people realize that their dreams can become real.

"I'm an outlier in all of this," he says one afternoon, pointing around the room on Appian Way, "because this kid — me — is an orphan but is also at HGSE."

He wants to tell others with tough childhoods that he "stood in the storm and persevered," and they can, too. "You can go through all of that, but you can also end up at a place like Harvard." □

COURTESY QUEENS MALCOLM SMITH; ISTOCK

Listen Up!

PODCASTS HAVE BEEN A GREAT WAY FOR THE ED SCHOOL TO CONNECT WITH THOSE WORKING IN THE FIELD. HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVORITES

STORY BY SANJANA DULEVALE MATADHA, ED.M.'25



The Harvard EdCast

HOST: JILL ANDERSON

LAUNCHED: 2011

The *Harvard EdCast*, HGSE's official podcast since 2011, offers an accessible exploration of education through weekly conversations with thought leaders. Hosted by Jill Anderson, assistant director of creative media at HGSE, the podcast explores a wide range of topics, looking at newer issues like the role of AI in education and why schools need to be better prepared for cyberattacks, to long-standing concerns over how we teach kids to read and early childhood learning in the United States. By engaging with teachers, researchers, policymakers, and education leaders from around the world, the *EdCast*'s goal is to address challenges and inequities in schools and make education's intricacies more understandable, offering useful insights for anyone interested in the field of education. Recent guests include Tim Shriver, chair of the Special Olympics; Professor Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell on investing in people in schools; and Professor Martin West on the uncertain future of the federal Department of Education.



Free Range Humans

HOSTS: JAL MEHTA AND ROD ALLEN

LAUNCHED: 2021

Free Range Humans invites listeners to explore how schools can be transformed to better serve human needs. Hosted by Professor Jal Mehta and Rod Allen, former district superintendent and assistant deputy minister with the British Columbia Ministry of Education, this series dives deep into the world of education reform. The podcast centers on conversations with educators, seeking ways to achieve deeper learning in schools. By engaging with a diverse range of voices across the education spectrum, *Free Range Humans* offers fresh perspectives on making learning more relevant and engaging. Recent episodes feature Chris Kennedy, superintendent of West Vancouver schools, and Eric Xie, a senior in high school, illustrating the podcast's goal to include multiple viewpoints. Through these discussions, Mehta and Allen challenge listeners to reimagine schools as spaces that truly fit "human consumption," promoting a vision of education that prepares students for an ever-changing world.

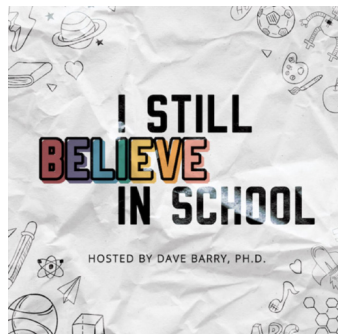


Thinkability

—
HOSTS: SHARI TISHMAN AND
DAVID PERKINS

—
LAUNCHED: 2022

Now in its fourth season, *Thinkability* is a podcast series from the Ed School's Project Zero. Hosted by Project Zero Principal Investigator SHARI TISHMAN, ED.D.'91, and Professor Emeritus David Perkins, this podcast unpacks the world of cognition and learning. Through casual conversations, Tishman and Perkins explore themes such as curiosity, intuition, and metacognition, offering listeners a deeper understanding of how our minds work. The series is designed for anyone intrigued by the connections between thinking and learning. Each episode invites audiences to reflect on their own thought processes and gain new perspectives on education and cognition. In a recent episode, for example, listeners discover how a simple step outside normal routines can lead to "unruly rules" that enhance thinking and action. As the hosts describe it, *Thinkability* is a podcast "for people who like to think about thinking."



I Still Believe in School

—
HOST: DAVE BARRY

—
LAUNCHED: 2024

DAVE BARRY, ED.M.'12, assistant professor of early childhood education at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, brings more than a decade of classroom experience to his podcast, *I Still Believe in School*. What's unique is that despite acknowledging teaching's challenges — a topic he explored in his book, *Addressing Stress with Self-Compassion: A Guide for Early Childhood Teachers* — Barry's podcast shines a light on what's going well in education. Each episode features conversations with educators who share their wisdom and innovative practices to inject positivity into the narrative surrounding teaching. The podcast combines inspiration with action, as guests participate in games to raise funds for classrooms. By highlighting success stories and the rewarding aspects of education, Barry aims to reinvigorate teachers' passion and remind listeners of educators' crucial societal role. Past episodes have included "Because I Believe in Us" and "Because I Believe We Owe it to Every Single Child."



After Hours

—
HOSTS: UCHE AMAECHI AND
MONICA HIGGINS

—
LAUNCHED: 2020

After Hours, created by Lecturer UCHE AMAECHI, ED.M.'10, ED.D.'16, and Professor Monica Higgins, brings real-world leadership experiences into the classroom. Originally designed for their A608 Leadership Entrepreneurship and Learning course, this podcast features interviews with Ed School alumni who are tackling today's complex challenges across various sectors. Each episode explores how leadership concepts taught in A608 manifest in practice, offering students and listeners valuable insights from professionals in the field. Recent guests include MARY WALL, ED.L.D.'17, who led national school reopening efforts and served on the White House COVID-19 Response Team, and REBECCA GRAINGER, ED.L.D.'20, senior adviser for youth and schools to Boston Mayor Michelle Wu. By showcasing diverse voices and experiences, *After Hours* aims to inspire leadership as the discussions address contemporary education issue and bring academic theory and practical application together.

Field of



RACHEL KANTER, ED.M.'12, didn't just stumble upon her passion for books; she was immersed in it. Growing up in Keene, New Hampshire, without cable TV, books were her constant companions. She spent hours reading in her room or raiding the shelves of the local bookstore. Years later, as a high school English teacher and graduate of the Ed School's Teacher Education Program, Kanter knew this wasn't the case for everyone.

"For so many of my students, reading was a painful, unfulfilling task," she says. She noticed a vast difference in their comprehension level of the books assigned to them, compared to the ones they picked out for themselves.

She recalls teaching *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz to her ninth-graders, and the impact a well-chosen book can have on a student's relationship with reading. "It's massive. It has tons of footnotes. But it's about this nerdy Latino kid who's really into gaming," she says. "The story was so funny and interesting for them that it helped overcome anxiety about tackling a book like that."

For Kanter, sharing the joy of reading and ensuring kids have access to books that are relevant to them has been her life's work. Following a few years teaching, she worked for a nonprofit in Washington, D.C. that provides free and discounted books to educators in low-income areas.

Today she's still surrounded by books, though this time she's the one packing the shelves at her

own romance bookstore, Lovestruck Books, which opened in Harvard Square this year. A longtime romance reader, Kanter was one of many who found renewed comfort in the genre during the pandemic. "People were looking for something fun and hopeful and predictable, which is kind of a hallmark of romance," she says.

After returning to Cambridge with her family, she saw an opportunity to turn her passion for reading and romance into a space for the community to connect with books and each other in her old neighborhood. Decked out with vibrant pink shelves and a whimsical floral entryway, Lovestruck invites everyone from stressed-out Harvard students to curious passersby to revel in escapism of a happily ever after.

It's not just the predictability that keeps people turning the pages of romance novels. Kanter often uses the concept of "windows and mirrors," where books serve as both a window into new perspectives, as well as a mirror reflecting back one's own story.

Romance is no exception. For LGBTQ+ readers, people with disabilities, and others who don't often see their love stories reflected in the mainstream, today's romance bookshelves offer everything from regency romances to westerns where their

narratives also take center stage. "Romance isn't meant to be taken too seriously," Kanter notes. "But that doesn't mean it doesn't have the ability to transport and heal."

Just steps from HGSE and the apartment on Brattle Street where she lived as a graduate student, Kanter says she feels more rooted in the community than ever before. With a full calendar of author talks and book clubs in the works, the bookstore is already a valuable resource championing self-published and local authors and diverse voices.

For Kanter, being a bookseller isn't all that different from her days in the classroom when she paired students with books she knew they would love. Then, as now, the greatest joy comes in introducing someone to a book that was meant for them, even if they wouldn't necessarily have gravitated towards it.

As a mother of three, she encourages parents to do the same for their kids: "Take them to the library. Take them to the bookstore. Let them browse," she says. "It should be entirely about them finding something engaging." And it might just be the beginning of their own great love affair with books. □

Megan Maffucci is an associate director in the Development Office

From English teacher to bookseller, grad spreads love for books

Story by
Megan Maffucci

Dreamy-ness

Why I'm an Educator: Matt Weber, Ed.M.'11

Wading in three feet of rancid, mucky water, I was gripping a borrowed \$800 video camera and dressed business casual. The Caño de Martín Peña, a small community in San Juan, Puerto Rico, had always flooded, and I had applied to help document the story of this neighborhood and the social and environmental challenges it faced. It was part of a J-Term course while I was a student at HGSE getting my Ed.M., and during my 10 days in Puerto Rico, I felt like some combination of James Bond, Ken Burns, and Mr. Bean.

While trudging through these flooded streets, yet clearly not from these streets, residents looked at me quizzically and with well-earned skepticism. I was speaking very broken Spanish to them, using words mostly rooted in memorized prayers I learned from Sr. Catherine Joseph in eighth grade Spanish class at Holy Cross Grammar School, but there was one word that I found had changed the tenor of these fleeting interactions: Harvard.

"*Soy de Harvard*. I want to help." Doors opened, I was let inside their homes, and the still preserved, never-got-wet footage of that afternoon is part of Case #2082.0 in the Harvard Kennedy School Case

Program, available for \$6.95. The abstract even refers to the footage as "compelling," which just begins to describe the plight and needs of these dear people I ephemerally encountered that day in 2010.

It is a cliché to say that education opens doors. For me, it literally did that day on a flooded street in a land unknown to me. But I have been the undeserved beneficiary of countless open doors from these hallowed institutions I can call my own, more than 20 years learning and working in higher education. There is something magical that happens at colleges and universities, and I have decided that pursuit of such magic — and subsequent attempts to add to its alchemy — is how I want to spend my life.

This has taken the form of projection mapping a giant rotating pumpkin on the face of the University of Virginia's famous Rotunda — and making an annual event out of it, called of course, The Great Rotumpkin. This magic lies in teaching a class on Zoom during the pandemic, hating Zoom, then appreciating Zoom, and subsequently giving a public lecture to the UVA Club of Charlottesville called "Zoom: A Love Story in Three Acts." There is magic in the symmetry and pageantry and rhythm of the perennial starts and stops, openings and closings, breaks of all types, late night sub-par pizza ubiquity, chicken tender sauce obsessing, convocating, valedicting, commencing, cramming, crying, cheering, jeering, and then doing it all again, and again, and it still has not decayed. I love it all, and like the changing leaves or first snowfall of the season, I relish each new familiar.

What do I do "still in college" my mother may ask? The profession I have chosen makes me a bit of an oddity of sorts in academia, with the ignoble bona fides as UVA's chief creative officer, senior ad-



I WANT TO

COURTESY MATT WEBER

viser to the president, undergraduate instructor, first-year adviser, former mascot, and long suffering part-time doctoral student. I am staff, faculty, and student — and yet, in a word, my vocation is simply one of a storyteller.

As an undergraduate, my senior thesis as an American studies major and film concentration was about wieners. (Please keep reading!) Instead of a term paper, I wrote, shot, and edited a short film on the local hallowed hot dog establishment “New York System Hot Wieners.” What I thought was a creative way to avoid writing the 159th paper of my college career actually lit a fire inside me. From there, whether through writing or filmmaking, I felt an obligation to capture, preserve, and spotlight the people and places I was part of, and ending up cutting my teeth at Harvard for 10 years, working with truly remarkable filmmakers, podcasters, digital producers, and writers during my time. (Including this editor, who I demand leaves in this line!) I got to interview Oprah and Elmo, casually helped Lady Gaga get to the women’s room in Longfellow Hall, did push-ups with Colin Powell in the dean’s conference room, and made countless short films about the people and places of Harvard: My two favorites being about a laptop bag and a monkey who stole a student’s dissertation data. After Harvard, I had the privilege to join the truly special Jim Ryan (former

HGSE dean and current UVA president) on his team in the president’s office, where I learn from him every day the importance of stories and the impact they have on communities.

And now, in this full circle moment, I am sharing with you my story about my love for stories and how the profession of higher education is both where I tell stories and how I learned storytelling. (Unpack that sentence!) I’m going to bed now, as this 800+ word story is being written at 1:49 a.m., when my three kids and wife are sleeping, emails are still, and my dream profession in higher education is not the aspiring stuff of my near slumber, but rather the wide-open door life I am profoundly blessed to be living. □

MATT WEBER, ED.M.’11, is the chief creative officer and special adviser to the president at UVA, plus much more (and a newly minted UVA Ed.D.)

“SOY DE HARVARD.”

HELP

From Bollywood Movies to QR Codes

Ranjitsinh Disale finds ways to motivate students and becomes Global Teacher of the Year

Story by Lory Hough

As soon as **RANJITSINH DISALE, ED.M.'25**, set out on January 5, 2009, the first day of his first teaching job, he knew it wasn't going to be easy.

For starters, his mother had to drive him an hour away to a drop-off spot, where, because of muddy roads, he walked another mile before reaching his destination: the Parishad Primary School for girls in Paritewadi, India.

Things got even more challenging when the school's headmaster brought him inside the two-classroom building and pointed to one of the rooms. "This is your classroom," he said.

Disale's heart dropped. "My classroom was sandwiched between a cowshed and a store-room," he says. And it was occupied by a local villager. "He put goats and cows and feed in my classroom." Disale removed the items, which angered the man, who threw stones at him.

But on that first day, Disale faced what he saw as an even bigger challenge, one that would motivate him to radically change teaching and learning in the area: There were only three students.

"I was very, very aspirational, very motivated, and wanted to see the world and change this world," he says. "But when I landed there, oh my God, there were only three students. Three."

Given the small number, some in the village questioned why he needed more space. His answer

was because he wanted every 9- and 10-year-old in school. This prompted him to start asking why more girls weren't attending. He learned that teen marriage was common, and many parents didn't think formal education was important. Textbooks were also not written in the local language (Kannada). So a few months in, Disale set three goals for himself: change thinking around indifference toward education, get 100% of children enrolled, and give students a quality education.

He started by moving to the village and visiting families to have tea or just to chat, which is very accepted in India, he says.

"If you're a teacher, you're always welcome," he says. "Society respects you and I wanted to take advantage of that. I used to go to each parent's house every day." In time, especially after making an effort to learn their primary language, Disale gained their trust, and more families began sending their girls to the school.

He wasn't content with just more students, though, so he borrowed a laptop from his family — "At the time, my salary was about \$100 a month" — charging it at his home each night because his classroom didn't have electricity. In class one day, he showed a Bollywood movie, which got the students excited.

"I said, this is wonderful, right? Now tell your friends who are not coming to school tomorrow that

school is a fun place," he said. It worked, and even more students showed up. (Today, 100% of students in the village go to school.)

Eventually he started recording his lectures, and parents asked if they, too, could see them. He tried sharing to their mobile devices, but technical glitches were common. Disale realized he needed a better solution. He found it one day when a shopkeeper had him scan a QR code for his purchase — something he had never seen before. He realized this was the answer.

He quickly created a couple dozen general codes that would link to his lectures and the textbook material, and then started creating individual codes for each student to personalize their lessons. After a year, he got funding to scale the QR code project to about 300 schools. Educators started seeing positive results.

"The results were impressive with a 10 to 15% increase in test scores," he says. In 2014, he submitted a proposal to the Indian government. At the time, QR code technology in India wasn't well known, but then something happened that made the government take notice, and Disale was able to expand his QR code project. A publisher printing geography textbooks for schools across the country made a big mistake on a map. Reprinting the textbooks would have been a huge cost, especially considering

the number of students across India. Disale suggested keeping the original textbooks and giving students a QR code that would take them to the correct map.

"This is when the government realized the potential of this technology," he says, and in 2019, the Indian government made a policy decision that future textbooks would be shared with QR codes. When COVID hit and schools closed, QR codes allowed students, no matter where they lived, to continue learning, Disale says.

That same year, he learned that for all his hard work, from turning around education at his small school with the goats and cows to using QR codes across India to a virtual field trip project he started for his students using Skype, he was being crowned Global Teacher of the Year by UNESCO and the Varkey Foundation. He celebrated by sharing half of the \$1 million prize money with the other nine teacher finalists. They all used the money, he says, to fund their own learning projects around the world.

"My philosophy is I want to work for the betterment of society," he says, noting the education foundation he co-created with the other teacher finalists. "I want to be a changemaker. I decided to give away that money because I believe that money can change the lives of thousands of students and empower them, not just empower Ranjit. And the change I brought in my local community, I now want to bring to the international level." □



I was very, very aspirational, very motivated, and wanted to ... change this world. But when I landed there ... there were only three students. Three."



Churned Out

Four students head to Holyoke, Massachusetts,
to tackle transient student attendance

Story by **Lory Hough**



PEETERV/ISTOCK

There are times when students sit in class, taking notes as they learn from the professor and their classmates. There are also times when students learn by going out into the world and partnering with clients to tackle real-world issues, like this past fall in Professor Fernando Reimers' project-based course, Education Policy Analysis and Research in Comparative Perspective. Working in teams, students met with an education client, identified a challenge that client was grappling with, dug into related research, and then offered practical suggestions for what could make a difference.

One team included Ed School Ed.M.'25 students **ASHLEY LAI**, **LALA ALIYEVA**, and **NINA NEDREBO**, and Kennedy School student Mitsuhiro Iwakura. All former teachers, the team decided to focus fairly local: in Holyoke, a city of about 40,000 in Western Massachusetts, where the school district has been in receivership since 2015 and 83.6% of students are low income.

The issue they looked at was one the district has been struggling with — a high absenteeism rate for students considered transient, meaning they enrolled in the district late or left before the school year ended because of migration or homelessness. These are students, the Ed School team noted in their final report, who “have been historically underserved and politically marginalized due to limited school resources.”

For 2023, Holyoke's “churn rate,” the term the Massachusetts Department of Secondary Education (DESE) uses to track these students, was 14.1% — twice the statewide churn rate.

The Ed School team wanted to figure out why Holyoke's rate was higher than the state average, and what the district could do to change course. For several on the team, an interest in digging into this issue was partly personal.

“The topic was important to me because I used to work as a teacher in Holyoke for a couple of years with Teach For America,



and I taught fifth grade math in a part of Holyoke that was probably among the most economically depressed,” Nedrebo says. “Attendance was a really big deal for the school that I worked in and it was a really high priority to emphasize every kind of incentive that we could around attendance.”

She says that after working with students from diverse backgrounds, and especially a largely Puerto Rican population facing socioeconomic challenges, and with the district being in receivership, she wanted to better understand why some students were less motivated to come to school on a consistent basis.

“Why is it that some students face more challenges than others? The students in Holyoke were so bright and so capable, so why is it much more challenging for them,” she wondered. “It didn’t seem just that students here should be disproportionately affected by pressures that other districts were also facing.”

What was happening in Holyoke schools was also personal for Lai.

“Immigrants’ stories and struggles are often ignored in the school system despite education being a right for all students, disregarding documentation status,” she says. “As an immigrant myself, I remember the difficulty my family had handling the transition between schools as we learned to navigate the U.S. school system. My family leaned on school staff and family friends to help us understand the necessary timeframes and documents needed to apply to public schools. Having gone through this, I wanted to focus on immigrant students.”

As a former world history teacher in Massachusetts, Lai says she also struggled when students came and went throughout the school year and remembers how difficult it was to not have a full understanding of a transient student’s previous assignments, learning needs, or abilities.

“This was especially true if the student came from another county,” she says, or if their IEP or 504 plans or past report cards were unavailable. “Language barriers made introducing transient students into the class even more difficult.”

Hands On in the Field

Initially, the Ed School students dug into research to learn more about issues facing transient students and the schools they attend, and then they went to Holyoke to talk with key educators and city leaders. They interviewed the district’s family engagement coordinator, the mayor, the superintendent, and the district’s data person. At DESE, they worked with a member of the board who has ties to Holyoke and had been on the city’s school board.

What they found was that low attendance for transient students in Holyoke was rooted in three main areas: students from families struggling financially often moved because of homelessness or natural disaster, making it difficult for schools to stay in touch or for students to have consistent learning; there were limited transportation options, especially when students missed the school bus; and students who had difficulty adjusting to a new school or language felt isolated and unmotivated.



“Immigrants’ stories and struggles are often ignored within the school system despite education being a right for all students.”

ASHLEY LAI

The team brainstormed several options for addressing these issues. Ideas included providing free public transportation passes to transient high school students, giving them another option when they missed the school bus; expanding social emotional learning (SEL) for teachers and for students; adding a state-funded transient student information coordinator who would help families and students with wraparound services, especially around mental, behavioral, and emotional health; and building an information-sharing platform accessible to all schools and organizations that work with transient students in the city.

What the HGSE students concluded is that no one policy alternative would be able to fully solve the problem of high transient student absenteeism. Instead, says Nedre-

bo, “The policy alternative we ended up recommending was meant to address what we considered the systemic root of the problem, which in the end, we considered to be lack of coordination.” What might work, they shared with their client in Holyoke, including in a report, was “a bundled approach that combines SEL programs, wrap-around services, and an information-sharing platform. This comprehensive recommendation addresses family- and school-based antecedents.”

Looking back, the students discovered surprises while working in the field.

Aliyeva was surprised to find that the work expanded beyond the educational sphere. “It began to address broader public, social, and economic challenges to develop effective solutions. This reinforced my understanding that policymaking is a multidimensional

process, requiring the collaboration of diverse stakeholders from various fields to propose comprehensive policy recommendations,” she says.

For Iwakura, working in a U.S. city helped him see how different the issue is in his home country, where he taught high school before becoming a student at Harvard.

“The biggest surprise I experienced is that the main root cause of absenteeism is so different between the United States and Japan,” he says. “In Japan, the main root cause of absenteeism is not the transiency of the student, but the mental health issues students face because of the highly competitive situation of the entrance examination for high school or college.”

Lai says she was constantly surprised by how much compromise was needed to figure out solutions, especially when they talked about what remedies were feasible given the district’s financial constraints.

“As a teacher, my first instinct was always to try to include all initiatives that would be beneficial to the student,” she says. “Yet, as a consultant, I had to worry about all stakeholders’ viewpoints as well as school leaders’ priorities. While the school system is meant to serve students, it was the first time I had to consider how students were just one stakeholder group.”

Nedrebo learned how important it is for anyone making decisions to think about the unknowns and hidden obstacles that students face in their lives that can spill over into issues like going to school on a regular basis.

“If you look at Holyoke as a municipality, I think what really

affects students who have been displaced or who have moved is psychosocial adjustment challenges, but also challenges like a lack of housing,” she says, citing shelter shortages. “We also know that transient students are affected by the fear of ICE” agents out in the community and outside schools. “That’s also a really compounding challenge for Holyoke.”

The students say that tackling these challenges and working in the field with an actual client has made them better educators. (It also made them published authors: each team wrote a chapter about their work that was published in *Global Challenges, Local Solutions: Advancing Equity, Innovation, and Sustainability in Education*, which was co-edited by Reimers.)

Aliyeva says that after graduation, she will work on policy for the Ministry of Education and Science in Azerbaijan, armed with better negotiation skills. “The invaluable knowledge, experience, and motivation I have gained from Professor Fernando Reimers has inspired me to actively participate in shaping policies that will improve educational equity and create greater opportunities for students in my home country.”

For Iwakura, the opportunity also translates into a possible new focus once he graduates this spring.

“Currently I’m a high school teacher in Japan, but I’m thinking about shifting my career from teacher to a policymaker to address the absenteeism and truancy of students in Japanese high schools,” he says. “This study about Holyoke has been so transformative and informative for me.” □

Student Affairs



STUDENT: DAWN JOVES, ED.M. '26

HOMETOWN: Born in the Philippines, raised in San Diego, California

CURRENT JOB: student equity and belonging coordinator, Office of Diversity & Community Partnerships, UC San Diego School of Medicine

Education, Dawn Joves learned at a young age, is communal. For her, it started with her family, which moved to the United States from the Philippines when she was 2.

“As the eldest daughter of four kids, I was responsible for learning how to be a student in the United States,” she says. “I needed to assimilate to the culture by attending ESL, educate my parents about the expectations schools had for me, translate my homework to my parents so they could help me, and ultimately teach my siblings.”

Her family struggled to integrate into American society and access even basic needs. In high school, she had to apply to college alone, with no support.

“I even got my name wrong on my FAFSA documents because we didn’t understand the concept of a western middle name,” she says. “I didn’t know that I officially had two first names — Dawn Therese — so my name didn’t match my social security number, which led to my FAFSA being delayed and my parents needing to take out predatory payday loans for my first semester of college until the Pell Grants were dispersed.”

These personal experiences, she says, have had a big impact on her work at the UC San Diego School of Medicine, where she helps medical students root their academic experiences in the pursuit of health equity. She also oversees a program that lets high school students whose STEM programs have limited resources learn on the UC campus.

“It is a testament to how education can facilitate so much change within a community or a family,” she says. “I believe that education is a communal asset if we want to live in a better world.” □

COURTESY DAWN JOVES

Q&A TANYA WRIGHT

ED.M.'22

WHEN TANYA WRIGHT, ED.M.'22, saw her book, *Hairiette of Harlem: The Great Birthday Surprise*, for sale at a Target store for the first time last fall, she didn't hoot or holler. Instead, she says, the moment was quiet but still very profound. "Seeing the book on the shelf was evidence of what I had worked on for years. The book was my thought made real, just like Hairiette makes her thoughts real," she says. "Seeing the book on the shelf reminded me of the power we all have to use our imaginations and create real things that live outside of ourselves. It was powerful." Recently, Wright talked to *Ed.* about the new chapter book, the larger Hairiette literacy world she created that revolves around a 7-year-old girl with magic hair, and why this graduate of the Learning Design, Innovation, and Technology Program and an iLab finalist stays grounded in the field by visiting schools with a puppet.

Before *Hairiette of Harlem* came out, you also wrote a picture book?

Yes, *Goodnight, Hairiette* is the prequel to *Hairiette of Harlem: The Great Birthday Surprise*. There are cliffhangers at the end of *Goodnight, Hairiette*, the answers to which can only be found in the slightly more advanced chapter book, and that also has a 24-minute puppet musical and a reading curriculum that focuses on phonics. That picture book was really inspired by [then-Professor] Chris Dede's class on motivation

and engagement, which I believe is at the root of the — I'll put this in quotes — "reading achievement issues" that people are very concerned with. I think that we should be more concerned with motivation and engagement.

The *Hairiette* stories are fun but also based on learning.

Yes. Hairiette has a learning opportunity, something that she kind of fumbles in her real life. Hasty Hairiette is always in a hurry. Hairiette's big flaw is that she wants to live life. She's 7 but wants to be 10. I know that when I was 10, I was angling to be 13. She gets herself in a little bit of a jam because of her impatience so she goes to this place called Magic Nation, which is her imagination. There she meets her magic friends, Charlie the Comb and Barbara the Barrette, and they work out whatever calamity she has created in her life. This is all going on in her imagination. When she comes back out of her imagination, into her waking life, she gets another chance to do the thing that she fumbled. So it's really about learning, right?

An edtech company that offers online courses for educators recently reached out?

Yes, a company called fobizz saw some of my Hairiette stuff online and said, hey, we see how passionate you are about children and learning and education. Is

there a course that you would like to create for teachers? I was so excited because I have been wanting to do this. So I created a course called Storytelling and Multi-Modal Curricula for Early Learners. I walk teachers through how I created book, the puppet musical, and the accompanying curriculum and how they can also create multi-modal curriculum for their early learners.

How many chapter books will eventually be written?

The first, *Hairiette of Harlem: The Great Birthday Surprise*, is out in Target now. The second, *Trouble at the Hair Salon*, is coming out in June and the third will be in Target this September. I've got 30 *Hairiette* chapter books all ready to go. I also want to write another series called *School Time Hairiette* that is focused on different subjects, like science, math, social studies, and art.

What's your favorite part of doing this work?

My most favorite thing of all is visiting schools. There's nothing like that. It makes it all make sense for me. And, also, I have been enjoying connecting with educators and parents. In many ways, *Hairiette* is like a triangle. The child is at the top and anchoring the child are the educators and the parents and caregivers. I'm really interested in that trifecta. I went to Harvard thinking that I would just

create things for children because [laughing] adults were troublesome. And, boy, I did a complete turnaround on that whole concept. It was quite humbling. Now the adults are integral parts of everything that I think about and create for *Hairiette*.

Why is it important for you to visit schools and libraries and be with students?

Two things. It's the thing that has given me the most joy and then also, *I'm learning*. I'm still learning what people need. And I don't get that information unless I am out in the world and I ask people what they think and I'm seeing how they respond. For me, it's a continual learning opportunity.

Is there anything you've changed after being out in the field, seeing how people respond to your work?

One thing that I adjusted is the puppet musical. I made this 24-minute *Goodnight, Hairiette* puppet musical as a film. I go to libraries and schools and museums, and I show the puppet musical, but a new thing that I do now is I physically bring the Hairiette puppet into the space with children. It's like, wow! There's something that goes off for the students. They look at me like, did you make that? Could I make something like that? I say, yes, absolutely. And that's been revelatory for me. □

“I'm still learning what people need. And I don't get that information unless I am out in the world and I ask people what they think.”



PHOTOGRAPH BY SÉAN ALONZO HARRIS

Student Affairs



STUDENT: ANNE-MICHELLE ENGELSTAD, ED.M.'16, CURRENT PH.D.

HOMETOWN: Washington, D.C. area

PREVIOUS JOB: senior research coordinator, Kennedy Krieger Institute, Center for Autism Services, Science and Innovation

Anne-Michelle Engelstad has always loved working with children, but it was after volunteering in high school with children with autism that she found that she especially loved being in early childhood special ed classrooms.

"I became interested in the mechanisms underlying the children's learning and behavior," she says. "That pushed me toward studying psychology and eventually to the Mind, Brain, and Education Program at HGSE."

Her goal, she says, is to improve access to high-quality services for children with developmental differences, including improving early screening and identification for all kids, even those living far from academic and medical centers, because "the most effective intervention is early intervention," she says.

While at the Ed School, she has worked on clinical trials of early intervention models for children with autism, Down syndrome, and tuberous sclerosis complex. Currently in Canada on a Fulbright scholarship, Engelstad is learning about an Inuit approach to supporting children with neurodevelopmental differences that infuses traditional and cultural Inuit knowledge into early intervention.

She says the best part of her work is seeing breakthrough moments, like when a child hits a developmental milestone after a delay. "Those moments make the challenges all worth it," she says. "I'm also inspired by the parents that stop at nothing to get their child the support they need." □

ELIS IMBEAU @POLAR/POLAIRE

Why I'm an Educator: Tyler Thigpen, Ed.L.D.'17

I'm 21 years old, and *this kid is asking me seriously for a job.*

It's hot, dry, and brown in the plaza of a pueblo joven (or "young town") on the outskirts of an 8 million-strong Lima, Peru. No running water, no electricity, and thousands of people making life in a desert.

A good number of the American suburban high school kids I pastor have made the southward trek with me and are playing soccer on *la cancha*.

With no police around, I watch the group. A guy with a yellow shirt, yellow hat, and yellow bike rides by selling ice cream I know will make me sick. It's as I'm declining the offer that I see him, a kid, walking up to me with three other, smaller kids.

"Hola. Please," he says, handing me a dirty piece of notebook paper. The English is so poor, I can't understand it and instead say, "Hablo español, amigo. Dime."

So he tells me.

Name's Juan Carlos. Dad's an alcoholic and works in distant Chilean mines, coming home once in a while with nothing to show for the journey. Mom's sick with something I can't translate, and bedridden. *Hermanitos* at his side he claims to care for — two girls, 3 and 5, and a quiet boy, 10, whom he reveals, and I now see, has *síndrome de down*.

Juan Carlos is 12.

He finishes his spiel, and I brace for the ask. Money.

Or if he's creative, a plane ticket to the States.

But Juan Carlos is a better man than me.

The discovery wallops me when he asks me to put him to work so that he can support his family.

No words.

My younger sister is here with me and I have her take over the conversation. I duck into an alley, alone, and cry for 30 minutes.

I cry because I do not know how to help this kid in the long term.

But really, I cry because this kid has courage, and I am afraid.

Of looking foolish. Of never measuring up. Of lies I've told. Of not knowing normal.

I, too, am the son of an alcoholic.

Weeping still, I remember Viktor Frankl, whom I've read weeks earlier: "*Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.*"

Leaving the alley, and not knowing what else to do, I give Juan Carlos some money. I decide to aspire to his strength. And for the rest of my life to learn how to help communities long term and not just one-off.

Growing up pre-Juan Carlos, I glean from my mom and dad that doing well in school will mean I can do anything I want when I'm older.

My dad manages his alcoholism, passed down to him from his parents and theirs, and works as an interim financial consultant for rural health care systems all over the southeast United States. Addressing challenges of multiple bucolic hospitals, he changes jobs more frequently than his peers. I look up to him for his adaptability and willingness to provide. And I listen carefully when he credits a college degree, a unique distinction in his family second only to his sister's, as the catalyst for a respectable career.

My mom, also the second in her family to graduate college, thrives as an elementary school teacher, working in Title I schools and teaching English to children of immigrants. When her students struggle or lack basic things, I am sometimes annoyed and eventually proud she engages our family to reach out and help.

In fact, the first funeral I ever officiate is of the mother of Mariana, one of mom's students whose family has immigrated from Mexico. Mariana's mom dies suddenly, leaving her husband, Mariana, and two more children. Over hymns and Bible verses, we grieve together in the closet the local funeral home lends out to families who cannot afford the usual payment. Worried they won't make the funeral, I am relieved when not just my mom but many other teachers and administrators come to help this family mourn.



For years, Mariana and her family receive support from that and other bands of teachers. And around the time I decide to stop working at a church and start working at a school, where there are numerically more kids I hope to help, Mariana graduates.

I am beginning to believe good education can position people to win their future.

Naïve, I grow alarmed observing not all education is good.

In year two of teaching Spanish at Georgia's largest public high school, I'm asked to teach classes for all the students at the school that have failed Spanish the year before.

My first day with them I say, "How many of you knew you would be in Spanish again today?"

No one raises their hand.

Uneasily, "Honestly how many of you do not want to be here?"

Everyone raises their hand.

As a teacher and later principal, I make it habit asking students the reasons some disengage. *The material isn't interesting, the material isn't relevant, and when am I ever going to use this?* are top replies. Finding so much detachment haunts me, because of the promise of a good education. So I search for new ways.

I witness a high school in Georgia drop a fierce subservience to a bell schedule, organize themselves in groups to solve real-world problems, and eventually compel 85% of the student body to write op-eds in favor of the approach. Astonished, I watch seniors, during their final semester of high school, spontaneously celebrate by running down a school hallway and high-fiving classmates because of a school project they have a say in creating.

I see ways that captivate young people better than what most schools do now, and I resolve those ways are scalable. Why should this generation of students have to wait for the adults in the room to catch up?

Today, I am in education to help update the approach and engage a generation. Some, like Mariana, will blossom from reassurance in the face of pain. And others, like Juan Carlos, already have enormous strength and courage and just need the chance to translate their hard work into progress, to choose their attitude and then their own way. □

TYLER THIGPEN, ED.L.D.'17, is head of The Forest Schools and the Institute for Self Directed Learning, both in Fayetteville, Georgia. He is academic director at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

“ I SEARCH FOR NEW WAYS ”

After Service, School

Collaboration with City Year helps corps members become Ed School students

Story by **Sarah Garfinkel, Ed.M.'20**

They clap. They cheer. Sporting City Year uniforms and wide grins, they greet students as they arrive at school.

Each morning, City Year AmeriCorps members stand outside of their assigned school buildings and welcome students. Operating across 29 cities in the United States, City Year members serve in schools with students in grades 3–10. The schools in which they work are often high schools with lower completion rates and the elementary and middle schools that feed into those high schools. Some City Year members go into their service year knowing they

want to teach someday. Some come to that realization during their service. Others discover additional possibilities for working in the field of education.

That's where the Harvard Graduate School of Education comes in. For years, City Year alumni have attended the Ed School. Now, the organization is making the relationship with the Ed School official. This fall, in a collaboration with the school's Admissions Office, the first City Year scholarship recipients will arrive on Appian Way.

City Year CEO Jim Balfanz, a City Year alum, says, "Through this joint initiative, Harvard is innovating with us to reduce the cost of graduate school and providing our AmeriCorps members and alumni access to their institution, renowned for its commitment to advancing education through research and innovation. We look forward to the positive impact our City Year members will have as they continue their educational journeys at such a distinguished institution."

The collaboration will provide \$10,000 tuition scholarships per year for up to two City Year applicants to the Ed.M. Program, plus application fee waivers and dedicated 1:1 support throughout the application process. These two new scholarships are available to City Year AmeriCorps members, alumni, and staff applying to any of the six master's programs.

As an AmeriCorps program, City Year offers a living stipend to members. After completing one year of service, they also earn a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, which they can use to pay back student loans or apply

to their studies at the Ed School or another institution. If they serve two years, they receive an additional education award.

City Year, which began in Boston in 1988, now has more than 40,000 alumni. Kanna Kunchala, City Year's executive vice president and chief strategy officer, is one of them. He's also an alum of Harvard College. Kunchala recalls how the idea for the partnership started.

"This all began when **JIM HONAN, ED.D.'89**, senior lecturer at HGSE, whom I still teach with twice a year, reached out to me as he was brainstorming outreach to potential HGSE candidates," he says.

A collaboration between the two made sense. "Our shared mission-alignment and dedication to social justice laid the foundation





for this collaboration,” he says. In a hypothetical Venn diagram of the Ed School and City Year, the overlapping area would show a common goal: preparing those who want to make a positive impact in the field of education.

Jackie Spencer, assistant director of admissions at the Ed School, says that one benefit of the collaboration is to illuminate the vast career opportunities in the field of education. “We abso-

lutely want teachers to work in the classroom, but people don’t realize that education is an entire field,” she says. “There are so many ways you can be in education outside the classroom.”

From nonprofits, to policy, to think tanks, to educational media, the possibilities for those who want to study education and serve students are virtually limitless, she says.

Spencer hopes that this joint initiative will help to demystify both the Harvard name and the process of applying to graduate school. Specialized information sessions and outreach add an

extra motivator for students who might not have previously considered a school like HGSE.

“We want students to know that they shouldn’t self-select out of the process,” she says. “HGSE is very welcoming, community-based, and mission-driven. Everybody who comes to HGSE absolutely belongs at HGSE.”

Balfanz says, “City Year is thrilled to collaborate with the Harvard Graduate School of Education. We believe that young people, regardless of background, should have access to the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to thrive in career, college, and life.”

Spencer is excited to see the collaboration continue to bloom.

“I think this can be a way to reach people who we hope will consider education. Especially now,” she says, “because we need people who are passionate about education in the field.” □

SARAH GARFINKEL, ED.M.’20, is a writer and editor whose work has appeared in *The New Yorker* and *McSweeney’s*. She is also a teaching fellow at the Ed School

Why I Became an Education Journalist

And how I know the profession needs to dig deeper — and change

Story by **Alexander Russo, Ed.M.'91**

My education career has been a series of love affairs and break-ups. My first love was classroom teaching, and I took a job right out of college teaching 7th and 10th grade English literature and coaching sports at a boys' prep school in Los Angeles.

I had thought I might eventually want to be a school head, but I quickly realized that I was unlikely to enjoy fundraising or board meddling or the feeling that the kids I was teaching weren't particularly needful.

My second love was public policy, which I pursued after HGSE. I worked for Policy Studies Associates, led by HGSE alumna **BRENDA TURNBULL, ED.D.'78**. I had envisioned working for the Senate education committee or in the White House, but I eventually became frustrated with the endless internal battles and the hypocrisy around prioritizing kids.

My third career as an education journalist has lasted the longest, been the most satisfying — and perhaps also the most demoralizing.

I hadn't grown up wanting to be a journalist or paying much attention to the news. Even as an adult working in the field, I barely skimmed the headlines and rarely learned much from the stories I read. But I could see journalism's importance in terms of informing

the field and the public. I knew that I would find it intellectually stimulating. I had no idea how difficult it would be.

One of the things I've most enjoyed is how entrepreneurial switching to journalism has forced me to be. Finding interesting story ideas was never hard but selling them to magazine editors was an ongoing source of frustration. Here and there, I wrote for a slew of different outlets — *Slate*, *The Atlantic*, etc. — but my strong suit turned out to be starting education-themed blogs and newsletters that people were willing to pay for, including *This Week in Education*, *District 299* (about Chicago schools), and *LA School Report*. I applied for a handful of journalism fellowships, got one at Columbia's journalism school, and turned it into a book about a group of teachers trying to rescue a struggling LAUSD high school. Then, years ago, I came up with an idea for my current project, an effort to help improve education news coverage, and persuaded foundations to support it.

What's it like, covering education? At its best, it's an opportunity to keep learning about an endeavor that's important and fascinating. You get to call anyone you want and ask them questions. You get to visit classrooms and schools. You get to try to ex-

plain a topic or place that might seem boring or complicated to non-educators in a way that's appealing and insightful.

However, there's also a fundamental passiveness to being a writer. You're informing your readers, sure, and occasionally your work can have real-world effects. But you're not directly helping anyone. For all its good intentions, journalism is often superficial, extractive, and deeply misleading to its readers. It's become both more tabloid in its approach, and more ivory tower. It's lost its traditional funding sources and much of its prestige.

I've lately begun worrying about whether the coverage is actually helpful. It's not so much the occasional inaccuracies that are a problem. It's the tendency to focus on shiny new things (like new technology) rather than ongoing stories about topics that affect large numbers of kids or schools, the tendency to tell stories from the district or school perspective (rather than the kids and parents), and most of all, the tendency to amplify fears with dramatic anecdotes and statistics rather than giving readers context. So many things that win attention from the media these days — school gun violence, private school choice, school deportation raids — are grossly ex-

aggerated and seem driven by ideological or economic fears. That's why there's so much focus on culture war issues and politics.

To paraphrase LCD Soundsystem: Journalism, I love you. But you're bringing me down.

My latest reflection is that educators and education journalism is this way in part because education journalists have been sold stories that go much deeper than how we teach kids to read.

The first story we've been told is that education is critically important to individual and societal success — a belief in the power of schools and social mobility that may once have been true but is increasingly less so in the present.

The second story is that journalists and journalism are the good guys — that the coverage they produce is beneficial to the people and communities being covered rather than reinforcing inequalities. Again, this may not be as often the case as it once was or as we were led to believe.

If so, then educators and education journalists are going to have to dig deep to understand these myths and revamp the way we do things going forward. For my own part, I'm working on a new podcast that will feature honest attempts to wrestle with issues, as well as a book on the rise and fall of the 90's and 00's school reform movement. □



To paraphrase LCD Soundsystem: Journalism, I love you. But you're bringing me down."

You can find **ALEXANDER RUSSO's** work online at *The Grade* or follow him at [@alexanderrusso](https://twitter.com/alexanderrusso)



Why I'm an Educator: Barbara Selmo, Ed.M.'94, Ed.D.'04

1984. I am a newly minted master's degree recipient and am standing at the front of an empty classroom, waiting for my 15 students to file in. It is September. I am about to teach the first freshman English class of my career. I am shaking in my new black pumps.

Why did I choose to teach? The career counselor at my graduate school suggested I might give it a try. What else does a 24-year-old English major and creative writing master do with those degrees? School had always been a comfortable place for me, a safe place, a rewarding place. I found a teaching job, much to my parents' delight, that was near them. Safe, solid, recession proof.

Those three years of being an English teacher were a crash course in adolescent development, curricular struggle, inflexible community norms, and the challenges of being a woman in a traditional boarding school setting. But I had mentors and senior teachers whose life examples taught me a lot about being a teacher and about being an adult. The children — and despite their swagger, smoking, and sophistication, they were children — taught me that the real world, their

world, learned very different things from Shakespeare and Thurston and Dickens than my insular world of graduate school bothered to discuss. "Poetry — it's all about death, right, Miss Selmo?" a fresh-faced sophomore once said to me. They were looking for big themes.

Yet I was impatient but couldn't define my impatience. So I left, and I pivoted, as we are fond of saying these days — but rushed into another school setting — higher ed.

2004. I am wearing a crimson graduation gown, a black velvet hat, and sandals (no black pumps this time). I am about to walk down the steps of Longfellow Hall, Appian Way, along with my fellow Ed.D.s, leading the procession of graduates of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The crowd is cheering. My legs are shaking, again, but I am also cheering inside. It took me 10 years to get here, 20 years from that freshman English class in Connecticut.

I jumped from the high school setting to the university setting to work and support graduate students. I replaced study hall monitoring with office hours, grading essays with putting together award packages. I worked at many institutions, with students in many disciplines, but fortunately for me, always in places where the pursuit of knowledge, the testing of oneself, the commitment to doing something larger and greater, were uplifted and valued. I went back to graduate school myself, earning two degrees from HGSE, and all the while thinking "this journey is about something." For me, it was about

“
THIS JOURNEY
IS ABOUT
SOMETHING”

great learning (capital and small “g”); it was about teachers of all kinds moving you into places and mindsets you would never have imagined. It was about crying every day after class (statistics) or laughing every day with people who became my lifelong friends. (You know who you are.) It was about becoming a teacher inside, outside, around, above, behind, or below the classroom.

2025. My father would have been proud. I managed to keep a job in a school, in one way or another, all these years. I still wear black pumps, sometimes. I have worked with, hired, mentored, and cheered on so many fellow HGSE alums. So many other 24-year-olds giving education a try, thinking it is “safe,” learning that it is mind-blowing and challenging no matter what your role — if you decide to stay. □

BARBARA SELMO, ED.M.'94, ED.D.'04, is the director of graduate admissions at Emerson College. Prior, she held admissions and enrollment services positions at the Ed School, Lesley University, Boston University School of Law, Babson, and Columbia Business School



JILL ANDERSON

Student Affairs



STUDENT: SIZA MTIMBIRI, ED.M.'26

HOMETOWN: Zimbabwe, currently living in New Hampshire

PREVIOUS JOB: elementary school principal, Milford, New Hampshire

Born in a small town in Zimbabwe when the country was known as Rhodesia, and as one of nine children, Siza Mtimbiri says he faced “slim odds” of even finishing elementary school. Fortunately, with community support, he went on to earn a degree from the University of Cambridge before coming to Harvard. This support is why he decided to become an educator, especially for young students from similar backgrounds.

“I am passionate about elementary education, particularly in underserved rural areas in Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa,” he says. Ten years ago, he started a school in Zimbabwe. This August, he will head back to the school to oversee much-needed updates.

“While Zimbabwe is home to some outstanding schools, there are many rural schools in dire need of support in terms of infrastructure, curriculum, and expertise,” he says. At his school, this includes installing solar panels to provide electricity, adding another water tank, and training staff on how to engage children in hands-on work. “And, for the first time, we will provide small laptops so our students can practice and develop basic technology literacy skills.”

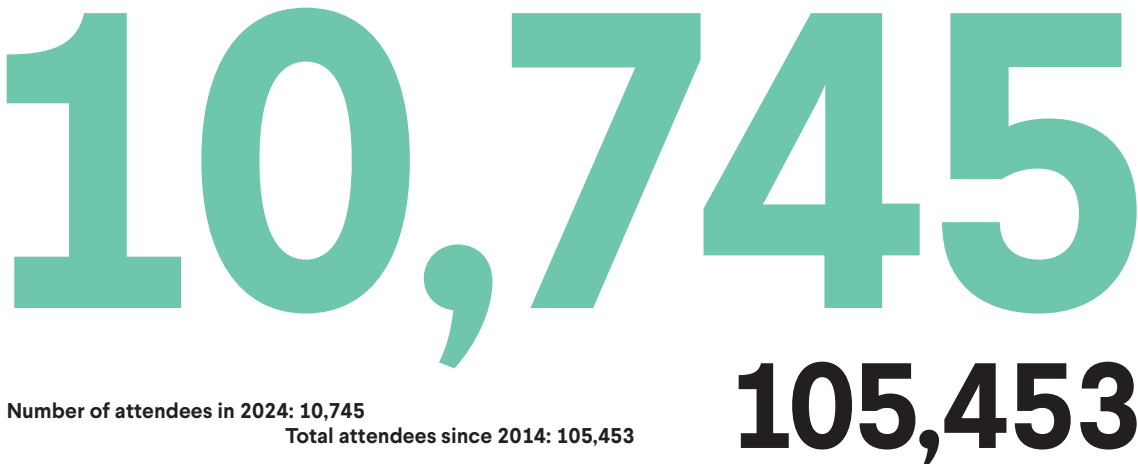
This isn’t the only school he helped get off the ground.

“I had the privilege of working on the founding and implementation of an all-girls’ school in Malawi,” he says. “The staggering inequities, especially for girls in rural areas, were the driving force behind this school.” □

COURTESY SIZA MTIMBIRI

Field to Campus: PE’s Impact

One of the most impactful ways that the Ed School supports the field is by bringing educators back to campus — in person and online, individually and in groups — for professional education programs. The programs, which can run from one day to a full year, combine research and theory with what teachers, school leaders, deans, department heads, and others are experiencing every day as educators. Current offerings include programs on moral leadership, mental health in schools, working with families, culturally responsive literature instruction, confronting racism in higher education, strategies for disagreeing, and using data to improve quality in early education settings. Here are a few stats that show the impact these and other professional education programs are having on educators around the world.



PARTICIPANTS BY ROLE (TOP 2):

K-12
teacher/teacher leader + school principal

EARLY CHILDHOOD
teacher/teacher leader + center director

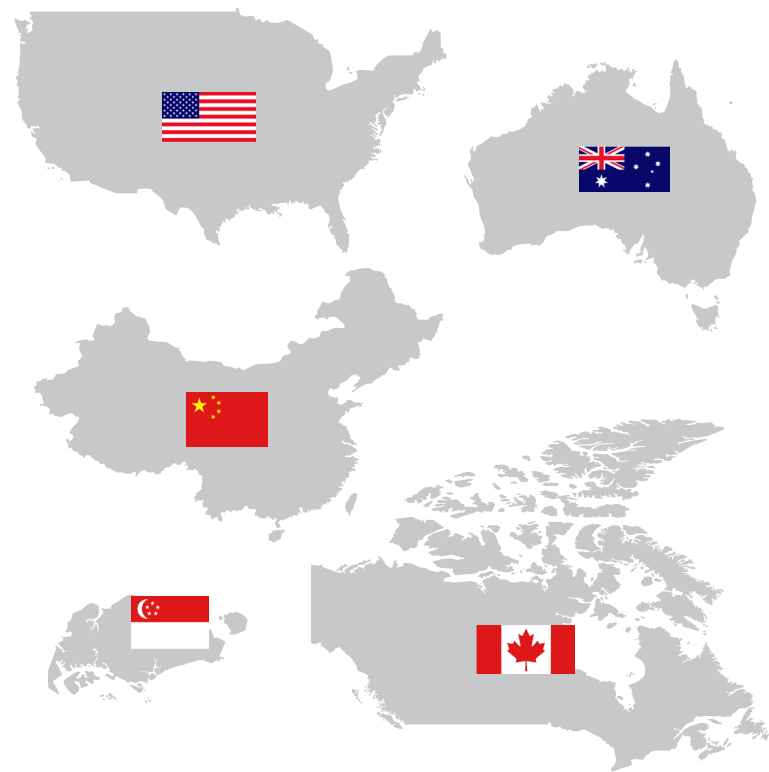
HIGHER ED
faculty member + director/department chair

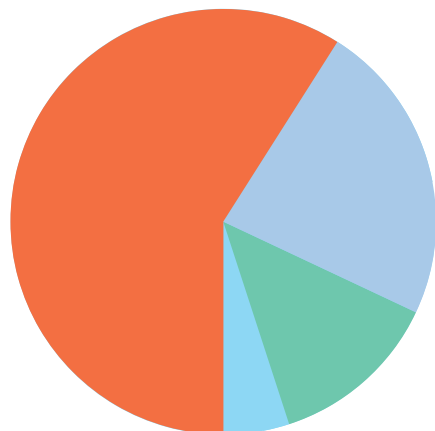
EARLY CHILDHOOD/K-12 SCHOOL DISTRICTS SENDING THE MOST PARTICIPANTS (SINCE 2020):

- New Haven Public Schools (Connecticut)
- Early Learning Indiana
- Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education
- New York City Department of Education
- (tied) Suzhou Singapore International School
- (tied) Cambridge Public Schools (Massachusetts)

NUMBER OF COUNTRIES REPRESENTED:

113 in 2024; 165 since 2014
Top 5: United States, Australia, China, Canada, Singapore





PARTICIPANTS BY EDUCATION SECTOR:

- K-12 59%
- Early childhood 23%
- Higher education 13%
- Undisclosed 5%



MOST POPULAR PROGRAMS BY ENROLLEES (2024):

EARLY CHILDHOOD

- (online) The Science of Early Learning (CEEL series)
- (in-person) The Science of Early Learning and Adversity

K-12

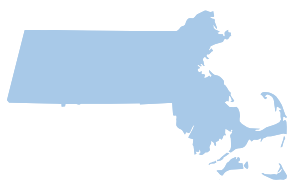
- Universal Design for Learning Explore Teaching
- (online) Universal Design for Learning: Explore
- (in-person) School Turnaround Leaders

HIGHER EDUCATION

- (online) Mental Health in Higher Education: A Theory to Practice Approach for Student Well-Being
- (in-person) Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians

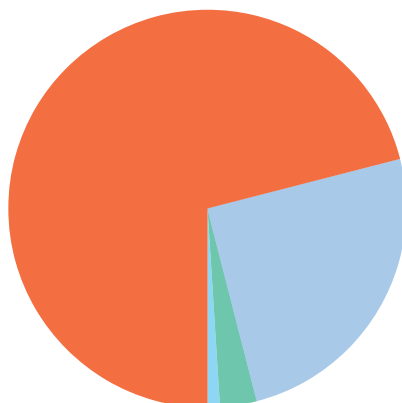
TOP 10 STATES SENDING PARTICIPANTS OVERALL:

- Massachusetts
- California
- New York
- Florida
- Indiana
- Texas
- Connecticut
- Illinois
- Virginia
- Georgia



HOW PROGRAMS ARE DELIVERED:

- Online asynchronous 71%
- In person 25%
- Online live. 3%
- Blended 1%



Student Affairs



STUDENT: CLAIRE PATTERSON, ED.M.'25

HOMETOWN: Redwood City, California

PREVIOUS JOB: casting at Warner Bros. Television

For Claire Patterson, starting her master's degree at the Ed School was a major career shift, a shift that took her from a classroom on the lot of a television studio to an actual classroom at Harvard.

"I've never worked directly in education before," she says. "Still, academia has always been part of my life — my parents are all professors, and one is even a retired college president. My own career has been in television, where I've spent the past eight years working in Los Angeles, most recently in casting at Warner Bros. Television on shows like *Abbott Elementary* and *Ted Lasso*."

It was while working in casting that she started to see a possible career shift.

"In that role, I had the opportunity to collaborate on DEI pipeline initiatives aimed at increasing access and support for actors from underserved and underrepresented communities," she says. "Those efforts showed me the power of getting creative about inclusion, an approach I'm eager to integrate into my future work."

Post-graduation, Patterson hopes to work in advancement and engagement at independent schools or in higher education.

"Attending an all-girls high school in the Bay Area introduced me to a strong, supportive community that shaped my path," she says, "and I believe that private schools and colleges can foster these meaningful experiences, but only if they have the mission-driven resources to be truly inclusive and accessible." □

NATALIE NIGITO PHOTOGRAPHY

Q&A FERNANDO REIMERS

ED.M.'84, ED.D.'88

ASK ANYONE AT the Ed School this question, “How have our students, and HGSE overall, made an impact on the field of education around the world?” and unanimously, everyone would say to contact one certain faculty member: Professor **FERNANDO REIMERS**. For more than 25 years, Reimers, a transplant from Venezuela who first came to Harvard as a student himself, directed the school's former International Education Policy (IEP) Program and now serves as faculty chair of the Global, International, and Comparative Education concentration. He's advised dozens of doctoral students writing dissertations ranging from a study of Syrian refugees to the evaluation of private schools for the poor in Kenya. He's published more than 50 books about global education, and he regularly hosts international visitors when they come to the school. When it comes to listing the countries and international development agencies he's advised over the years, it's probably easier to list the ones he hasn't worked with.

This past spring, Reimers spoke to *Ed.* about how he became the school's international guru, how our students and alumni are having an impact around the world, and the common thread that connects those who work in the field globally.

How did you end up as the director of IEP?

I graduated in 1988 from HGSE,

and I immediately got hired by the Harvard Institute for International Development. I worked with them for about a decade. Towards the end of my tenure, I took a leave of absence to go to the World Bank. When I came back in 1997, then-Dean Jerry Murphy tells me, “Fernando, we realize there is a big opportunity to do something international.” The Ed School had an international program, but it was more like a concentration. I said, why don't you build a full program? And that's when we built the International Education Policy Program [a precursor to today's Global, International, and Comparative Education concentration]. And the way we went about building that program is we basically interviewed a lot of people who work in international development agencies, and we said, what kind of skills should someone who knows about education have? What would be valuable to you in your work in the field?

Based on that, what did you think graduates would end up doing out in the world?

Initially I thought all of our alumni were going to go and work in ministries of education and help them make good planning and policy decisions. And undoubtedly some of them do that. A number of graduates have been deputy ministers and ministers of states or provinces. Others

work for international development agencies like UNESCO, UNICEF, the UN High Commission for Refugees, USAID, and The World Bank. But it turns out they are doing so many different things, and it's all education. I had not imagined that some of them were going to create universities. Others built K–12 schools. I have former students who are now involved in running chains of schools around the world. That's not something I had imagined they were going to do, but the world has changed relative to 1998.

Can you give us some specific examples of the different ways alumni are working in the field?

There are so many. I had a former student who worked in international development upon graduation in Pakistan, and then wanted to teach. She taught history for six years at a school in the United States before returning to work in international development with RTI International, a nonprofit research institute.

Another former student came to us from Brazil with little direct experience in education. She wasn't sure what she wanted to do but knew she didn't want to work in government. I connected her with a donor at a university in Brazil. She managed to get the donor to fund her for three months to travel around the country and find out what

she could do that would have an impact. She concluded that for low-income Brazilians, learning to speak English was very important. In Brazil, if you can speak English, you have chances you wouldn't otherwise have. And so she created a company and hired 30 people, half were computer programmers and half knew something about curriculum. The company delivered courses in English at a cost of \$20 a month. She was wildly successful. At one point, she was training 50,000 students a month. Pearson eventually bought her company, and she became their head of innovation.

Another worked in Abu Dhabi and Bahrain, teaching in an international school. She came to the Ed School and developed a real passion for climate. She realized teachers need help figuring out how to teach kids about climate change, and so she started her own company. It's called Subject to Climate.

Is there a common thread for our international students or for alumni who work globally?

The one thing they all have in common is this commitment to using education as an avenue of social mobility, to using education to help people who can really benefit from it, and sometimes using education to help people see things they wouldn't see otherwise. □

“Initially I thought all of our alumni were going to go and work in ministries of education and help them make good planning and policy decisions.”



Student Affairs



STUDENT: ALISTER D'MONTE, ED.M.'25

HOMETOWN: Bengaluru, India

CURRENT JOB: founder and CEO, Unherd.in

Growing up in India, Alister D'Monte saw how limited career awareness and gendered societal expectations often restricted teens from going after what they really wanted to do. Hearing phrases like “Boys don’t pursue the arts!” or noticing how girls were discouraged from going into science fields, inspired him to start Unherd.in, meaning “doing different from the herd.” The organization helps teens explore careers with mentors from different fields. Since 2017, D'Monte says they have connected more than 2,500 teens with 550 mentors. Moving forward, he wants to work with younger kids and add STEM programs for girls and psychology and arts programs for boys. He also wants to increase scholarship funding.

“My vision is to integrate industry mentorships into school systems, enabling students to explore career interests in school without judgment,” he says, “and ensure every young person, regardless of their socio-economic background, has an opportunity to pursue a career that aligns with their potential, interests, and skills.”

It’s these students who keep him motivated, he says. “It’s the teens who feel lost and have no one to guide them who inspire me to stay in education, despite the challenges. These are the young people who often fall through the cracks, unsure of their potential and direction. Knowing that I can be a source of support and guidance for them, helping them discover their potential and make confident choices about their future, drives me forward.” □

Faculty Take the Field

Here's what happens when faculty put boots to the ground

Story by **Lory Hough**

In 2020, in a special issue of the magazine celebrating the school's Centennial, we ran a story about how many of our professors come to the Ed School after working as teachers, principals, education policymakers, and school counselors, and now as Harvard faculty, they continue to collaborate with the field. It's something that makes us "a different kind of ed school," said Senior Lecturer Mandy Savitz-Romer, a former school counselor. "We have a sense of what the field needs." And faculty are clear that collaborations are mutually beneficial, helping to shape and sharpen their research and what they bring back to their classrooms on Appian Way.

There is no way to fully capture all of the work being done by our faculty members with schools and districts and NGOs and other universities around the world, so we decided to highlight examples of direct field work that haven't previously been covered in the magazine.



FRAN PURCELL

SENIOR LECTURER; FACULTY DIRECTOR,
ONLINE MASTER'S IN EDUCATION

Students at community colleges across Massachusetts can, in part, thank Fran Purcell for making cost and procedures better. Purcell serves on the Board of Trustees at North Shore Community College, where she chairs their student success committee. Recently, this included advocating on behalf of the recent statewide initiatives to provide free community college for students of any age and income level in Massachusetts who have not yet earned a bachelor's degree. The work grew out of previous community college work she did as the associate commissioner for academic and P-16 policy at the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. There, among other projects, Purcell spearheaded the creation and implementation of the statewide MassTransfer policy to streamline the transfer process and reduce the time and cost for community college students who transfer to four-year colleges and universities. This past December, Purcell also finished a project on behalf of the Ministry of Education in Rwanda called Reimagining Rwanda's Higher Education

Framework. There, she led a team that analyzed Rwanda's regulatory and accreditation standards and processes to help improve the quality of the higher education system. Purcell also co-chairs the Nursing and Workforce Education Taskforce for the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education.

Her why for staying in the field:

"It's important to me to stay connected to what community colleges do because these are the institutions that educate the greatest number of first-generation, low-income students, immigrants, adults, and others who are seeking to better their lives and their communities. Around 40% of undergraduates attend a community college, so in many ways, this is where the most impactful work in helping students access upward mobility takes place. As a first-gen student and daughter of working-class immigrants whose lives were transformed through higher education, I want to do my part to help others have these types of opportunities."



GRETCHEN BRION-MEISELS, ED.M.'11, ED.D.'13

SENIOR LECTURER; FACULTY CO-CHAIR,
IDENTITY, POWER, AND JUSTICE IN EDUCATION CONCENTRATION

Over the years, **GRETCHEN BRION-MEISELS** has stayed connected to the field of education by working directly with schools, including offering workshops on research methods for young people and educators, supervising local interns, and writing or supporting the development of curriculum. More recently, she has been connecting to the field with students in her yearlong Ed School class, S501: Researching in Community. In the class, students learn about participatory research methods and develop activities and workshops to then teach these methods to young people. This year they partnered with teams of middle and high school students in Somerville and Boston, and with young adults on the other side of Massachusetts in the Berkshires. Each research team chose a question related to educational justice, developed a study design, collected data, and figured out action steps for improving their school or community.

Her why for staying in the field:

"I cannot imagine teaching at HGSE without working in the community at the same time, for so many reasons! First and foremost, I learn an incredible amount from youth and educators in the field. Particularly given the topics that I study — participatory action research, school culture/climate, and anti-oppressive education — young people are often at the forefront of innovating and visioning. I find that working with students and educators gives me more energy. It reminds me of why I am doing the work, grounds me in the reality of everyday experiences in schools, and it motivates me to want to do better. Finally, I

believe that the purpose of education is individual and collective transformation. Practicing what I teach helps me continue to grow and transform as a person; working on youth-run research teams helps us to continue to foster collective wellbeing in our communities. Connecting back to this purpose helps me stay grounded.”



DREW ALLEN

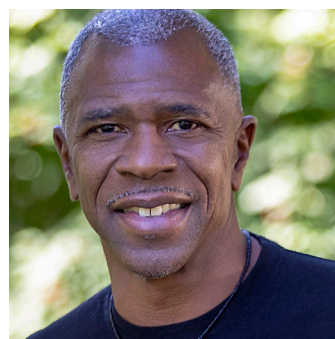
SENIOR LECTURER; ASSOCIATE PROVOST,
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Drew Allen's work in the field is, more specifically, in the Yard. When Allen joined the Ed School in 2022 to teach, he also joined Harvard's Office of the Provost as an associate provost for institutional research and analytics. In that role, he leads a team of 12 in the university's central institutional research office, providing institutional data analysis and reporting. He also serves as the point person for Harvard's institutional accreditation processes with the New England Commission of Higher Education and co-leads the university-wide data governance efforts, including supporting a community of “data stewards” across Harvard who are tasked with protecting data. Allen is also a reviewer for the New En-

gland Commission of Higher Education's review process at other universities around the country.

His why for staying in the field:

“Being connected to the university as a leader of institutional research has been incredibly helpful in how I've delivered my courses, the content I've chosen to highlight, and the approach I've taken to advising and interacting with students. In my teaching and advising, I've always been eager to use real-world examples and challenging cases that I've faced in my administrative roles as opportunities to illustrate concepts, theories, and dilemmas students face in the classroom. As a professor teaching about higher ed, I am always engaging with current events, the latest research, and with student perspectives that emerge from classroom discussion and debate. New ideas and innovations are often explored in my courses, where students bring great ideas to the table. I also discover interesting ideas or interventions in preparing for classes that I like to share with my students. Being an administrator at Harvard means that I have a real-world laboratory to test out ideas that surface in the classroom. It also means that my class preparation, teaching, and advising is informed by the day-to-day experiences as a leader at Harvard.”



SHAWN GINWRIGHT

PROFESSOR

Shawn Ginwright has deep roots in the field of education, starting with the summer camp he created nearly three decades ago with his wife in San Diego. The camp was for young people of color suffering from persistent traumatic stress, meaning stress from growing up in toxic environments shaped by violence, systemic racism, and other factors. In 1991, he also co-founded Flourish Agenda, a national nonprofit research lab that provides professional development, training, and tools to educators around the country who are working with young people of color and helping them flourish using a healing-centered approach — an approach that views trauma not simply as an individual, isolated experience, but

something that is collective. Ginwright is now working in two large school districts (Philadelphia and Boston) training teachers and young people in healing-centered engagement. He says the partnership in Boston began in 2024 after the Boston Health Commission's *Health of Boston 2024 Mental Health* report found that the percentage of high school students in Boston Public Schools reporting persistent sadness climbed from 26.7% in 2015 to 43.9% in 2021. In response, the commission formed partnerships with organizations like Flourish Agenda to explore how healing-centered engagement through trauma-informed care could help students. In 2024, Flourish started working with 10 Boston schools to identify opportunities for innovation around care, identify social toxins to promote healing in school communities, provide technical assistance, and create opportunities for school staff to connect with one another to collaboratively create change.

His why for staying in the field:

“Working in the field is important to me because theory and practices need to be in constant conversation. My theorizing and research is based on what I learn from practice. My aim is to use theory to inform improvements in educational practice.”



Teaching middle school math helps me be better at every aspect of my Harvard job. It informs my research on students' learning of math; it helps me think about how I can support novice teachers of math; it makes me a better teacher generally. I believe that all academics who study teaching and learning need to stay ‘fresh’ and up to date about the challenges that teachers face when teaching in schools.”

JON STARR


JON STARR, ED.M.'93

PROFESSOR

JON STARR had been looking for an opportunity to get back into a math classroom for many years but had trouble squeezing it into his Ed School schedule. When a middle school in Watertown, Massachusetts, needed a part-time math teacher back in 2018 and was willing to work around his teaching duties at Harvard, Starr signed on. He now teaches one section of eighth grade algebra I every day, and he works twice a week with a small group of fifth-graders who need extra enrichment in math. He also attends department meetings and holds afterschool hours with students. And yes, he's there for all of the parent-teacher conferences.

His why for staying in the field:
"There are many reasons why I

pursued this opportunity, but first among them is that I really love teaching math! I love supporting my middle-schoolers as they make sense of math. But it is also the case that teaching middle school math helps me be better at every aspect of my Harvard job. It informs my research on students' learning of math; it helps me think about how I can support novice teachers of math; it makes me a better teacher generally. I believe that all academics who study teaching and learning need to stay 'fresh' and up to date about the challenges that teachers face when teaching in schools. For me, teaching middle-schoolers using methods that I developed in my research lab has given me invaluable insights into the challenges teachers face in implementation. These learnings have both sparked new research projects and significantly changed how I work with preservice teachers. And finally, working in a local middle school gives me the opportunity to have a direct impact on children's learning of math. While findings from my research have informed state and national curricular standards and have been embedded in some standards-aligned curriculum materials, the daily impact that I have on a small group of middle school children is particularly satisfying."


NANCY HILL

PROFESSOR

Often, collaborations between researchers and those in the field start with a common interest. For Nancy Hill, her partnership with Medford (Massachusetts) Public Schools began when both groups wanted to figure out how to improve students' engagement at school as well as their sense of belonging. The principal at Medford High believed that if he could figure out what he called the "school engagement and belonging gap" between students from different backgrounds, he could solve demographic gaps in achievement outcomes. He was interested in identifying practices that worked and wanted to create a research mindset among his faculty and staff. For seven years, Hill and her team helped the high school annually survey students, develop interventions,

and work with teachers to better use data. Hill continued to collaborate with the principal after he moved on to other posts, and the research team continues to publish research findings from the data. Now, they are developing partnerships that mirror the partnership with Medford, including with schools in Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and China. And up until last year, students in Hill's Ed School Adolescent Development course engaged in a "problem of practice" selected by Medford High School. The students met with faculty, students, staff, and families to figure out how each stakeholder understood or experienced the problem, and then students developed evidence-based recommendations for change. Findings were presented to members of the school community.

Her why for staying in the field:
"Working in partnership with schools and communities sharpens the research questions and helps ensure that we are asking the right questions. The ideal set of questions are ones that are immediately important and useful to the schools and agencies where we are working, while simultaneously having broader significance for theory-building and science. Working in partnership reduces the friction in the process of 'translating' research to practice."

“

A priority for me is making sure that what we're teaching in class is directly connected to what's happening in the field right now, so I focus on ways that we can bridge that gap between research and real-world practice."

ALEXIS REDDING



ALEXIS REDDING, ED.M.'10, ED.D.'18

LECTURER; CO-CHAIR, HIGHER
EDUCATION CONCENTRATION

ALEXIS REDDING teaches two courses that help students transition into careers that support college students. H205 lays the groundwork on student development (the “why”) and H205b focuses on how to put that all together (the “how”) and includes partnering with institutions to tackle a real-world challenge. Two recent collaborations were with Harvard College: a new training program for 200 pre-orientation student leaders that served 900 first-year students, and an initiative called Insight Spheres aimed at building a sense of community on campus for students. Recently, Redding also launched a new program focused on college student mental health through

Professional Education at HGSE, giving her a chance to share many of the ideas from her classes with practitioners.

Her why for staying in the field:

“A priority for me is making sure that what we’re teaching in class is directly connected to what’s happening in the field right now, so I focus on ways that we can bridge that gap between research and real-world practice. Student affairs professionals are on the frontlines of creating a culture where students feel supported, safe, and have a sense of belonging – whether that’s through residence life, student organizations, advising, or crisis response. Now more than ever, we need student affairs leaders who are prepared to navigate those shifts with skill and empathy and a robust understanding of student development. It’s incredibly rewarding to help train the practitioners who are going to take on that challenge and create positive change at their schools. We now have ‘H205ers’ in student affairs roles at more than 150 high schools, colleges, and universities around the globe. It is incredible to watch how our H205 alumni take what they learned in the classroom and translate these ideas directly to their professional roles. Each year, we also have more than a dozen graduates return to speak and to

serve as role mentors for our current cohort.”



MANDY SAVITZ-ROMER

SENIOR LECTURER

Mandy Savitz-Romer’s latest impact on the field of education came about because of something both tangible and less concrete: a book and word of mouth. At a national conference a few years ago, a presenter from the Illinois Student Assistance Commission spoke about how Savitz-Romer’s book, *Ready Willing and Able*, had transformed the state agency’s work, which is focused on helping Illinois students think through education beyond high school. In attendance was Bill DeBaun, a senior director at the National College Attainment Network (NCAN), a nonprofit that supports organizations and school districts that work directly with under-represented students who aspire to go to college and succeed once they’re there. DeBaun left the session convinced that Savitz-Romer’s practical advice from the book would help his agency’s members better understand what drives students. The result: Savitz-Romer, a former school counselor with Boston Public Schools,

is now partnering with NCAN, offering a webinar series, blog posts, and peer exchange drop-in sessions, covering topics such as how motivation shapes students’ college-going and the developmental milestones that all college access programs, K–12 school leaders, practitioners, and community partners should be aware of in their interactions with students. Currently, Savitz-Romer is also working on a national definition of college and career advising in partnership with CARA: College Access: Research and Action, a nonprofit that supports post-secondary access for first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color in New York City.

Her why for staying in the field:

“I began my career as a practitioner and that continues to drive and inform my work as an academic. To carry out one’s work in the academy, it is crucial to engage deeply with the people, communities, and spaces that are engaged in practice in order to be respectful and reflective of the reality of the work we support.” □

Why I'm an Educator: Joe Reilly, Ph.D.'20

The three people responsible for my lifelong love of STEM education are Bill Nye, Captain Picard, and my father. Bill Nye's contagious excitement made learning fun and revealed the everyday world through a scientific lens. Captain Picard was my gateway to science fiction, imagining a utopia of science and diplomacy while critiquing our society and the risks of technology. Finally, my father worked long hours but reserved Sunday afternoons for me. Our most regular trip was to the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. The Hall of Minerals was my favorite exhibit, with crystalline angles and vibrant colors showcasing how macroscale properties of objects result from the minute arrangements of their atoms. These influences, along with some outstanding high school chemistry courses, led me to pursue a chemistry major.

I worked in a laboratory and wrote an honors thesis intending to pursue a chemistry doctorate after graduating, but I realized my senior year that my heart wasn't in it. The research was intellectually stimulating but socially isolating and far removed from application. Through Alpha Phi Omega I'd tutored at an afterschool program for children of low-income families in Northeast Washington, D.C. Most

were English language learners having difficulty adjusting to the American school system. This work was fulfilling, and I realized my passion was teaching science and passing on the spark I'd felt.

I began my pivot to science education as a teaching assistant at a D.C. middle school serving students with dyslexia and ADHD through arts-infused, experiential curricula. These students and their parents described being left behind by other institutions. I was astounded by their horror stories and how much pain they associated with learning. I began teaching my own sections of seventh grade science the next year, studying IEPs and tailoring lesson plans to immerse students in science as an active process rather than a static body of knowledge.

I took special education courses at night to earn a master's and thus my D.C. teaching license. The program was practitioner-focused on applying pre-written schema and adopting best practices. This helped my small set of students, but I lacked the time and training to critically evaluate why certain techniques worked or why the education sector operated as it did. While I continued teaching for several years after finishing my master's, this line of thought eventually led me to pursue a doctorate at HGSE.

At Harvard, I dove into research methodologies and immersed myself in educational psychology and policy perspectives to extend my understanding and abilities. My interests led me "across the Yard" to the computer science and statistics departments to gain the quantitative skills I needed. I engaged in design-based implementation



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THE CL

research, partnering with practitioners to understand how to make student data salient to both students and teachers. My doctoral work with [then-Professor] Chris Dede and Principal Research Scientist Tina Grotzer focused on automated formative assessment tools that could detect unproductive struggling and provide appropriate scaffolding. I defended my dissertation in April 2020 as the whole world was in limbo, leaving academia to leverage my skills as a data scientist.

In industry I learned Agile methodologies and honed my technical skills on vast datasets under much tighter time constraints. Developing and deploying models to meet specific business needs was a far cry from perusing my self-collected dissertation data. My stint in data science was fruitful in several ways but it couldn't overcome how much I missed the classroom. Most importantly, it led me to Northeastern University where the dual knowledge of academia and industry was valued.

At Northeastern, I serve as an assistant teaching professor and the program lead for the master's in analytics, sitting at the nexus of life-long learning, data analytics, and workforce development. Northeastern's commitment to experiential learning and innovation bridges the

gap between theory and practice, situating learning in the workplace and ensuring learners know the tools and techniques they'll need beyond the classroom. We prepare learners from all walks of life for data-centric roles in the ever-changing global economy.

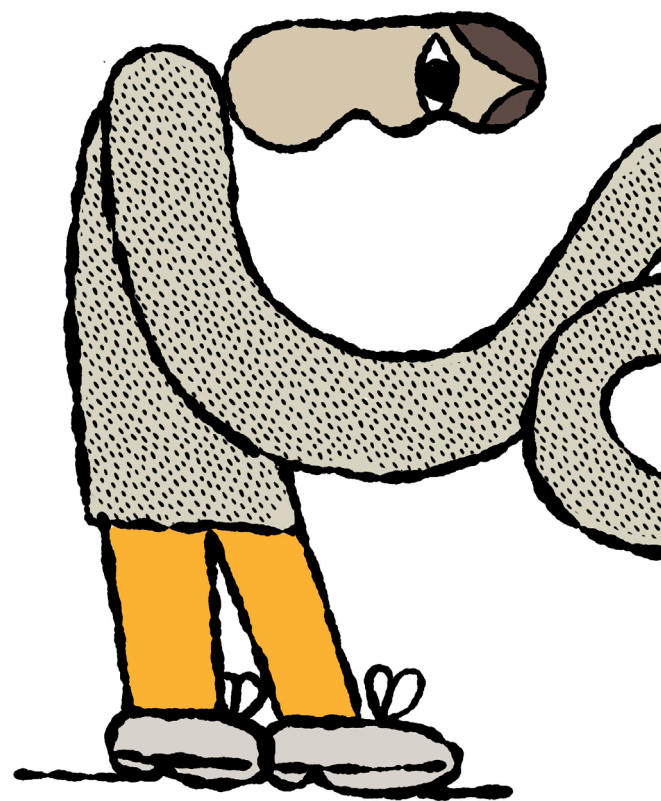
I'm curious to see where I'll find myself in the next several decades of my educational journey. I'm drawn to higher education administration and have delivered several workshops intended to upskill faculty and staff on the new wave of generative AI products and how to incorporate them in our work and pedagogies. I also find myself the father of three exuberant learners with their own strengths and challenges. Nurturing their love of learning and helping them find what sparks them is now my top priority. □

JOE REILLY, PH.D.'20, is an assistant teaching professor and program lead for the master's in analytics at Northeastern University in Boston

MISSED CLASSROOM

NATALIE BOWERS

The SAMI Family



As any alum can attest, the master's program at the Ed School is a whirlwind of a year. By the time most students have their feet under them, they're walking across the stage at graduation.

But a long-running program through the school's Alumni Engagement office has helped students get advice from people in the field who know the HGSE experience best.

The Student-Alumni Mentoring Initiative (SAMI) brings together current students and

alumni for a nine-month mentorship. Students meet one-on-one with their mentor at least once a month to get personal, professional, and academic advice.

Students from across all Ed School degree programs and concentrations and alums from across programs, decades, and geographic locations participate in SAMI. And the pairings have boomed over the last few years, growing from about 158 connections in 2018 to nearly 400 this year, with alums based around the world, including Taiwan, India, Denmark, and Argentina.

For most students, the biggest draw of the mentorship program is preparing for their future ca-

reers, says Emily Williams, director of career and alumni engagement. That includes getting advice from their mentors on courses that might help them down a certain career path or in making connections for future jobs or internships.

But another important draw is having a relationship with someone who knows firsthand what they are experiencing.

"The other thing is understanding," Williams says. "We hear from students that they are feeling overwhelmed because the residential master's programs are so quick, and sometimes it's just nice to hear from someone who has been through it and [can] validate their experience."

The partnerships are created based on a number of identifiers. Some students want a mentor who had a similar aca-

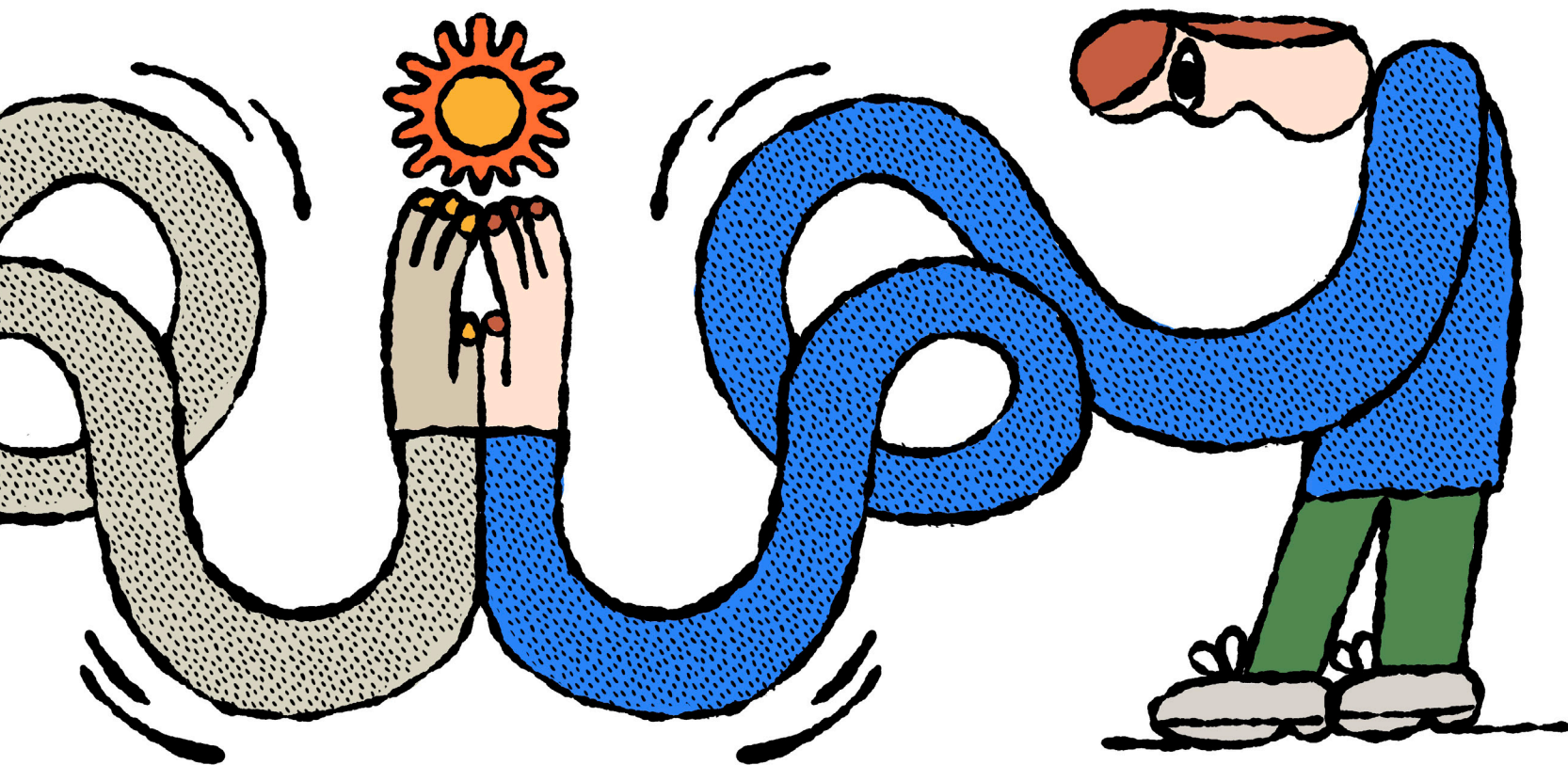
ademic track, while others look for shared career aspirations. Often BIPOC students seek mentorship from BIPOC alums, and a growing number of international students seek out those alums with lived experiences beyond Boston and Cambridge.

While **CHARLOTTE EVANS, ED.M.'19**, was a student in the International Education Policy master's program, she says her SAMI mentor, **CLAUDIA BACH, ED.D.'94**, became like a substitute mom for her during her time at HGSE.

"We'd go and have lunch, and I'd tell her about all the things I

Long-running mentor program lets students and alumni noodle over school and life, together

Story by **Andrew Bauld, Ed.M.'16**



was thinking, from courses I was signing up for or [feeling like I was] swimming in problem sets, and Claudia would keep me energized and focused and excited,” Evans says.

Bach, she says, even inspired her to become a mentor. This year, Evans has been working with **IRENE KOO, ED.M.’25**, from the Learning Design, Innovation, and Technology Program.

Evans says her role isn’t to come up with solutions but to serve as a sounding board for

Koo while also offering examples of her own experience.

“I think it’s helpful to have someone outside a close friend group or family to noodle over these questions and revisit what you’re hoping to accomplish in the program and what to do after,” Evans says.

Koo agrees.

“With peers, we’re all in this together, and faculty are a degree removed,” Koo says. “I turn to Charlotte a lot in terms of really sharing the things I’m thinking through and asking her of her own HGSE journey and blind spots or things I should be thinking about.”

Although Evans is based in San Francisco, where she works at Coursera, she and Koo meet regularly over Zoom. They even

had a chance to meet in person while Koo was home in the Bay Area over the winter.

Evans’ mentorship philosophy is guided by something her mentor, Bach, instilled in her.

“One of the things Claudia always said was that there are 800 ways to live out your 10 months at HGSE, but you can only choose one,” Evans recalls. “Having that nudging from Claudia as a student, I was able to maximize the year more as a mentee, and

I hope that’s the feeling my mentees have.”

Bach’s lesson most likely will continue on to another generation of Ed School students, as Koo says she plans to become a SAMI mentor after graduation.

“Something that really stuck with me from my early conversations with Charlotte — that she also had a SAMI mentor that inspired her to give back — and her sharing that experience and seeing what a wonderful mentor she has been has inspired me to become a mentor that’s as genuine and warm and helpful as she is,” Koo says. □

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Centers at the Center

A quick look at a few centers and programs working directly with the field

Story by **Lory Hough**

Next Level Lab

“Much of the research work that the Next Level Lab is conducting is done in collaboration with practitioners in the field,” says **TINA GROTZER, ED.M.’85, ED.D.’93**, a principal research scientist and the lab’s co-founder with senior research fellow Chris Dede. The lab uses research from the fields of cognitive science, neuroscience, and the learning sciences to better understand what it means to be an expert learner and to reimagine how learning happens in both K–12 and the work world. One recent project, led by doctoral researcher Tessa Forshaw, involves partnering with chief learning officers in two consulting firms to conduct research with employees as they learn the flow of work. Another project with eight workforce development nonprofits looks at the role “awe” plays at work, especially the “awe” moments that compel us to be more energized. Says project director **MEGAN CUZZOLINO, ED.M.’09, ED.D.’19**, “Workers in these organizations commonly report burnout and say they need to feel some sort of emotional engagement with their work in order to persist. Many of our partners have told us this work has completely transformed how they think about workplace culture and are starting to shift their internal metrics from a focus on ‘satisfaction’ to something that incorporates this notion of awe.”

Project Zero

When asked to highlight projects that Project Zero (PZ) is doing with practitioners in the field, co-director **LIZ DAWES DURASINGH, ED.D.’12**, couldn’t narrow it down. “There is so much field-facing work at PZ,” she says. “It’s hard to think of projects whose work is not in the field.” Founded in 1967 by philosopher Nelson Goodman, Project Zero’s focus on the arts has expanded to exploring questions of human potential. PZ offers professional development courses, workshops, and conferences for educators around the world. They recently worked with Massachusetts teachers, the Democratic Knowledge Project at Harvard, and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to create Civic Pathways — free, teacher-led sessions on civics instruction. Principal investigator **DANIEL WILSON, ED.D.’07**, is collaborating with Spain’s Universidad Camilo José Cela on ways that schools can support student well-being outside the classroom. Lecturer Louisa Penfold and **STEVE SEIDEL, ED.M.’89, ED.D.’95**, senior lecturer emeritus, started Art/Play, a project focused on integrating art practices into Boston Public Schools’ early childhood curriculum. Another field-focused project, *Aprendiendo a Aprender*, led by Duraisingh in collaboration with Panama’s Ministry of Education, is focused on changing teaching and learning practices in Panama’s public schools.

Data Wise

In 2001, Professor Richard Mur-

nane brought together researchers from HGSE and practitioners from Boston Public Schools to explore how data inquiry could bring measurable improvements to teaching and learning. The result, the Data Wise project, today offers courses at the Ed School, has published six books, and has trained more than 100 certified Data Wise coaches to work with schools and educational systems around the world to implement the Data Wise Improvement Process, an eight-step model that guides teams of educators as they work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning through the collaborative use of data. And the data isn’t limited to just “big data” collected from high-stakes tests, but also what they call “street data” collected through classroom observation and information about lived experiences gathered from students and their families. Says senior director and lecturer Kathy Boudett, “The new edition of the *Data Wise* book is a celebration of the project’s impact, featuring stories from 24 people in the field who have used the Data Wise Framework to improve learning and teaching in schools around the world.”

Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative

Launched in 2016, the Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative’s goal is to transform early childhood education in the United States by conducting research, but also to work directly with the early childhood field by offering high-quality professional learning. They realized that too often, efforts to improve early childhood often overlook the critical work of train-

ing adults to lead, so they started the Professional Learning Academy. Organized around the science of learning, the academy is geared toward policymakers, directors, administrators, and educators. Zaentz also partners locally with the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood to survey local early childhood educators to get a better sense of the makeup and perspective of these professionals. Online, they offer a user-friendly tool, the Zaentz Navigator, to help policymakers and educators learn how others across the country are tackling ways to improve early education and care. “Ultimately,” says Professor Stephanie Jones, Zaentz co-founder, “our partnerships with leaders result in more relevant research and higher-quality settings for educators, families, and young children.”

Center for Education Policy Research

Although “research” is prominent in this center’s name and in the work that they do, the Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) also works closely with the field. To inform their work, they consult with education leaders and their broad network of partners to make sure that they’re studying the most pressing issues. They offer trainings for teachers, coaches, and the next generation of data leaders. Their Proving Ground project works directly with school districts to help them identify challenges that impact their students’ achievement, and then test solutions using solid data. In 2008, they also created the Strategic Data Project, which sends data fellows into the field to work with districts,

charter school networks, state education agencies, and non-profits to transform the way they collect and use data to support their goals. On their website, they offer a free toolkit on how to use video to improve teaching.

EdRedesign

EdRedesign is all about supporting cradle-to-career partners in the field who are focused on creating equitable opportunities so that all children and young people can thrive in school and in life. Part of their work amplifies the work of government, social service agencies, school districts, community- and faith-based organizations, for-profit and nonprofit businesses, and philanthropies. “A core tenet of our work is walking alongside practitioners and their communities to reimagine what’s possible for generations of young people and families from cradle to career,” says executive director **ROB WATSON, ED.M.’18**. “This work is a two-way street: We provide resources and supports to help accelerate the impact of cross-sector collaborations and working with local leaders on the front lines informs our thinking about the ever-evolving challenges and opportunities of our field. Additionally, we believe that bringing practitioner perspectives to HGSE and Harvard is critical to amplify the impact of our partners on the ground, the priorities of our university community, and the career trajectories of our students. We’re working tirelessly to align the worlds of research, practice, and policy to catalyze educational attainment, economic mobility, and reclaim the American Dream.”

Reach Every Reader

When Reach Every Reader launched in 2018, their goal was big but simple: end the early literacy crisis and improve reading outcomes for children in the United States. Since then, Reach Every Reader has worked in 47 states reaching more than 58,000 children, 28,000 educators, and 7,000 parents and caregivers through research studies and offering public resources. One of the many practice-based tools they developed is an early literacy screener, *Interstellar Express Hotshot*, designed to preemptively identify risks for reading difficulties in young children. They also created three free apps to promote pre-literacy skills through dialogue and playful interactions between children and caregivers. Under the direction of Professor James Kim, the **READS Lab** partnered with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina to develop the *Model of Reading Engagement (MORE)*, a set of tools focused on improving students’ ability to read for understanding in science, social studies, and English. “One of the hardest things in academia is to have really rigorous research that actually gets into practice and makes a difference for learners,” says senior Lecturer **LIZ CITY, ED.D.’07**. “We were able to do incredibly rigorous research and also help people in real time. I think Jimmy’s team is our very best example of that.”

Public Education Leadership Project

Started in the fall of 2003 by faculty and staff from the Ed School

and the Harvard Business School, the **Public Education Leadership Project (PELP)** initiative set out to examine how the art and science of management could help public schools improve student performance. Since then, PELP has partnered with 58 urban school districts from across 27 states representing more than 5.6 million students. Each school district, at different times, worked closely with PELP to test and refine new management theories and practices aimed at improving teaching, learning, and student outcomes. Their Summer Institute brings together superintendents and other district personnel to focus on a strategic problem of practice, while their ABC Institute focuses on school board members and superintendents in member districts of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of large urban school systems.

Democratic Knowledge Project

In 2008, Professor Danielle Allen started the **Democratic Knowledge Project** at the Institute for Advanced Study, focused primarily on exploring the Declaration of Independence and American political thought. In 2015, Allen moved to Harvard and began to add resources for teachers. Since then, the project has partnered with nearly 60 K–16 educators from 19 local education agencies across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to co-develop and pilot curriculum and professional development. Last summer, with the Ed School’s *EdEthics* and Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery initiative, the project brought together 50 K–12 educators from 23 states

for a week-long summer institute on how to teach about the history and legacies of enslavement and lead classroom discussions on challenging contemporary topics. Recently, they created a full year eighth-grade civics curriculum, co-developed with Massachusetts educators and in alignment with state standards.

Making Caring Common

As Tricia Ross Anderson, the college admissions program director at **Making Caring Common (MCC)**, notes, “MCC’s mission is to support families and practitioners to promote caring, especially caring across difference, in children and young people. Everything we do is applied, from our Caring Schools Network to our character review in admissions workshops for admissions leaders to a series of research reports written for the general public, which explore barriers to caring.” The center’s *Turning the Tide* initiative, first launched in 2016 and since revisited, works directly with college admissions officers to collectively encourage high school students to focus on meaningful ethical and intellectual engagement. A related report includes concrete recommendations to reshape the college admissions process. For the past two years, MCC has also been working with 100 K–12 schools to implement the center’s *Relationship Mapping + Mental Health Initiative*. Using a detailed implementation plan and mapping tools, schools choose from one of four strategies to help students build positive, trusting relationships with peers and adults.

Why I'm an Educator: Dominik Dresel, Ed.M.'18

For as long as I can remember, I have been captivated, and somewhat unnerved, by the inevitable finiteness of my life. In 1985, the year I was born, the statistical life expectancy of infants in my native Germany hovered around 75 years, which is approximately 900 months, or 4,000 weeks, or 27,000 days, or 650,000 hours. As a child, these numbers seemed abstract and intangible, yet they hinted at a scarcity, a brevity that made any unit of time valuable, and any wasting it reckless.

I look back at this boyhood sensation with some regret — after all, could there be a better time to be idle, carefree, unrushed than childhood? — but I also remember fondly the productive urgency it instilled in me. If every hour could be spent just once, the question of what to spend it on became consequential, perhaps even existential. What, I remember asking myself, was worth spending my time on? What wasn't? And how could I tell the difference?

During my time at HGSE, I had the privilege of attending a lecture by the late Clayton Christensen whose book *How Will You Measure Your*

Life? has since become a nightstand staple. But even two decades before walking into his classroom, I sensed that while time is a precious, fleeting currency, there is a lot of agency in the dilemma that it presents us with. To no small extent, and notwithstanding the arbitrariness of life, it is our own volition that determines what we make of the short time we are given. And, as Christensen wrote, how we spend our time is, ultimately, who we are: "With every moment of your time ... you are making a statement about what really matters to you."

Much of what matters to me, it turns out, can be found in schools. At their best, schools are inclusive spaces in which curiosity is nurtured and where young people learn to navigate the complexities of the world with both the skills and the moral compass required to lead a good and ethical life. Schools often act as anchor points for entire communities. They are places where generations intersect, where the social fabric is woven together, where democratic norms are taught and practiced. They are where good people come together to do good work. And perhaps, most importantly, they are where many of us discover our calling in life. And all that matters deeply to me.

I wish I could point to a defining, pivotal moment, a grand anecdote, that made me decide to dedicate my life to education, first my own and later that of others. But the truth is that after thoroughly considering the question, I simply could not think of a better way to spend my precious time.

“WHERE
PEOPLE
TO DO
GOOD



I have always been driven by an insatiable curiosity about the world and drawn to books and teachers that could help me understand it better. I love helping others quench their own thirst for knowledge and accompany them on their path of discovery and learning. And working in education continues to strike me as a great way to make a contribution, however small, onto future generations and towards a better world. To put it simply, I got into education because I find meaning in it, because being an educator matters to me.

On my nightstand, next to Christensen's book, sits, idly, Andrew H. Miller's *On Not Being Someone Else: Tales of Our Unled Lives*. The truth is that there are many meaningful causes to spend your life pursuing. Instead of education, I may have studied theology, learned a skilled trade, practiced medicine, or farmed the land.

But life is short, and my time is finite. Statistically, I have less than half of it left: approximately 36 years, or 400 months, or 1,900 weeks, or 13,000 days, or 315,000 hours.

Why did I choose, and continue to choose, education? Because I'll measure my life by whether I used those years, months, weeks, and hours in ways that mattered to me. □

DOMINIK DRESEL, ED.M.'18, is a former Teach First Deutschland graduate, teacher, and public school administrator. He co-founded eduki, a Berlin-based edtech startup and is currently managing director at Klett Group, a European education publishing company

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From optimistic second-grade teacher Janine Teagues on *Abbott Elementary* to dedicated glee club director Will “Mr. Schue” Schuester on the groundbreaking *Glee*, what better way to learn about the field of education than by watching TV. Shows set in K–12 schools can be silly and sometimes unrealistic, but they can also be spot on about what it means to spend your day working with students in a classroom or arguing at the district office about budget cuts. They sometimes tackle tough topics that students are grappling with, and more often than not, they inspire all of us. Here are some of our favorite school-based American TV shows over the past few decades.

Think you're smart enough to ID all of these TV educators (and a few students)?





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(SEE PAGE 2)